

Tapping into Adult Motivation to Learn

Let's chat a bit about powerful factors for intrinsic adult motivation to learn.

Research points to at least four key factors that release inner adult motivation to learn. These four inspire adults to become lifelong life-learners. The dynamic interconnection of all four accelerates learning in adults (adapted from “*Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*” by Wlodkoski, Chapter Three). This chapter alone is worth the price of the book for teachers.

1. Relevance: *Demonstrating value by relating learning to life:* A desire to find meaning is fundamental to humanity. Adult learners in particular dislike busywork. Motivation to learn for adults soars when we know the reason for learning something and it impacts our lives. We must see change, either in lives or skills in doing what is before us.

A Christian, who is now a great friend, came to me in his late 50's. He had known Jesus since his young adult years. This friend ministered effectively with the power of the Holy Spirit and had numerous God-experiences. He said, “*Jim, I don't know the Bible. Could you help me?*” We spent weekly time for 8-12 months around God's Love-Letter. Later he told me, “*The greatest motivation for me to begin to love Scripture came when I saw how God's truth in the Word as the foundation for my experience with God.*”

*When we major on **doing** God's Word, **relevance** soars because we experience LifeChange.*

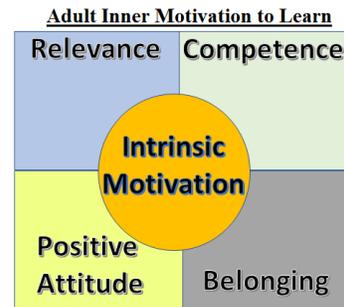
Do all we can to relate learning to life. When I meet with people around God's Word, I ask them each week. “*What did you do this week based on the truth you saw in Scripture?*” Incremental “*ant-steps*” are fine but please do respond to God's invitation for more life. Fifty-two very small steps in the right direction each year end up in large changes by year-end. God's image-bearers are active beings who desire to shape the course of our lives in *relevant* ways.

First, create thoughtful and challenging learning experiences *within the group*. These tap into the rich perspectives, exquisite variety, and deep-seated values of adult learners.

Second, this fluid learning community stimulates personal, relevant responses. These propel learning *out of* the formal classroom into significant arenas of our real-life experiences. *Choose to encounter life with God's truth*. God's people possess a strong need to apply what we have learned to our concrete and real-world situations. We cannot respond to life and remain unchanged. As we bring these experiences back to the group, this releases more life and learning in us and also in others.

2. Competence: *Experiencing growing competence in skills, values, &/or character:* As image-bearers, God created us to rule. Therefore, we explore, perceive, evaluate, think about and change our surroundings to promote positive effects. We want to matter! Growing competence taps into our God-given yearning to count, to experience significance.

Many Christians have been encouraged by well-meaning peers to read through the whole Bible from cover to cover, like any other literature. In my experience, this leads to much of the failure felt by followers of Jesus in engaging God's Word. There's a crucial place for this, but not up front. Our minds hate bits and pieces without a framework. All sixty-nine books of the Bible are too large to gain an adequate framework. Instead, “*flip*” learning so we prepare beforehand and engage in **BIG-small-BIG** learning that incorporates natural ways to learn. Rapidly read **one** book of the Bible, say Philippians, several times (**BIG**). Then blend this with focusing on **one** chapter after another, reading it repeatedly each day for one week before the meeting to “*flip*” learning (**small**). Then put the book back together by reading it rapidly again (the second **BIG**). Blending *rapid* and *repeated* reading aligns with how God designed us to learn naturally.



Success begets more success. Success cultivates expectancy for continued success to improve skills, values and character. So, early-on in the process, encourage incremental, easy-to-learn, “*quick-hits*” success in crucial leverage points. Yes, success leads to more success, although remember that God defines “*success*” as *faithfulness*, not certain results compared to others (1 Corinthians 4:2).

When we discover a simple, yet powerful way to engage God’s Love-Letter, this growing competence makes the process pleasurable and desirable...and fun! Everyone is then inspired to learn when information is not just accumulated and hoarded by individuals. It’s willingly shared. *Each one teach one* as one learner in community shares a positive experience.

3. *Belonging*: *Connecting with each other accelerates growth:* Create a learning environment in community where each feels respected and connected to one another. Develop a relaxed, stimulating place to learn. Regardless of what each might add as imperfect learners, every member in a learning community is vital. We function like a body with different members. Cooperation is the norm for learning since we are social beings. As a community of learners, we are mutually accepting, encircling partners. Each cares as much about the learning of our peers as we do about our own learning so we come as servants.

Perhaps on the horizontal plane, nothing is quite as powerful in community as a high-learning, no-shame, no-blame culture. Search out our full range of capacities as we respond with authenticity from the center of who we really are. This desire to make sense of things grows and frees us to tell our first-person story. Telling our story enhances retention, opens up rich possibilities for relevant action, and maximizes growth as we become influence-able influencers.

4. *Positive Attitude*: *Nurturing positive attitudes towards learning:* Our attitude predisposes us in a certain direction, positively or negatively. This seems to be true in all of life. Particularly since many western Christians have negative past experiences with learning, positive and realistic expectations are essential at the beginning. **Joy** is the hallmark of God’s design for learning, so make room for joy and fun to naturally bubble up. Levity is part of learning.

Catch them doing something good, anything. then encourage it. Affirm in one another a favorable outlook towards learning. Provide a basis for hope. Laugh and enjoy ourselves as we would in any good friendship. The source of surprising new births is an environment where meaning-making roams about promiscuously.

This fluid, playful, inclusive collaboration with one another develops a different relationship with discovery. Communicate unqualified acceptance and a strong belief in their capacity as lifelong life-learners. The relational Trinity designed each of us for this. Teachers release inward motivation to learn when learners begin to experience such freedom. This taps into the joy of our Creator. Without this expectation, their will to take ownership and to learn rusts shut. These indispensable choices release high-level motivation to learn and to put out full effort. These then lead to active buy-in and ownership. Adults need to take responsibility for their learning.

What if **your** reading and learning experience has been a negative? **Change your attitude!** God would not have given us this Bible if it were not crucial to nourishing spiritual growth and relationship with Him. As an example, I dislike exercise. I recently chose to **change** my attitude to focus on: **“I like the results of exercise?”** *Can you do this with learning?*

Stop now, please. Ask yourself,...

“Why are these four key ingredients so important to recapture healthy learning?”

How do these four key motivational elements interact?

Solid learning theory is behind how Jesus taught and what we are attempting to reproduce in sowing a new culture like Jesus.