



TODAY'S FUEL

Parenting Resources from Kanakuk

Motivating the Unmotivated Child was written by Joe White President of Kanakuk Kamps and author of books for teens and parents including; *FUEL: 10-minute devotionals to ignite the faith of parents & teens*, *Wired by God*, *Pure Excitement*, and many others.

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Motivating the Unmotivated Child

Joe White

The story goes of a four year old boy who was normal in every way – that is except for one thing. He never talked. I mean, he had never said one word. He had very attentive parents who served him night and day and met his every need. The GREATLY PERPLEXED parents had a physician check out his vocal faculties. The examination revealed no physiological abnormalities. The parents prayed and they worried some more.

One cold morning the boy took a bite of oatmeal and immediately protested loudly, "Too hot!"

The parents were shocked. "Did you hear that?" the mom said to the dad. "Did you hear that? He talked! He talked!!!!"

The dad looked at the child in disbelief. "What did you say?"

"Too hot! I said the oatmeal is too hot!"

"Wow! He can talk! He can talk!" his mom exclaimed.

"Why have you waited so long to talk?" the dad asked.

"Well, up 'til now everything's been OK," the child replied casually, "but the oatmeal's too hot."

No doubt it's just a made-up story, but the truths in the story fit most of us like the glass slipper fit Cinderella's foot.

Kanakuk land has really, really super kids because Kanakuk kids have really super parents. We all take really good care of our kids and work hard to meet their needs.

Unfortunately, a by-product of the generally well-taken care of child in the 21st century is an occasional (or a season of) lack of motivation.

"Studying just isn't that important to me right now."

"School is boring."

"I'd rather watch television."

"What's wrong with computer games all day long on Saturday?"



TODAY'S FUEL

"Chores? Why do I need to do chores?"

"I think I'm going to quit _____. It's just not interesting to me any more."

Does any of this sound familiar? What's a parent supposed to do? How do you light a fire inside your child's heart that ignites the passion to achieve and approach the potential that God has placed in your child's genes?

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

"Sit down," the frustrated mom commands.

"No" the defiant eight year old screams.

"Sit down, I said."

"NO!"

The mom places hands firmly on the child's shoulders and shoves him to the chair. "I said sit down now!"

The child protests from his seat, "I may be sitting on the outside, but I am standing on the inside!"

The goal of parental motivation is to rev up the engine that's 'under your child's hood' - not the engine that is 'under your hood'. In other words, my anger, my scoldings, my threats may get results for a day or two, but a more carefully crafted motivational plan that lights my child's fire on the inside of his or her heart will motivate for a lifetime.

Realistic Expectations

It is A-OK, healthy and a good thing to have expectations for your child. Indeed, it is any good parent's responsibility to help a child discover and uncover his/her potential. A good parent will work to come alongside and encourage a child's abilities. Yes, indeed!

But, every child is not going to make straight A's. Every child is not going to start on his/her 7th grade sports team. Every child is not going to make a 30 on

his/her A.C.T. college entrance exam. Every child is not going to be the leading scorer!

There are studies that even show that B-C students or second team players who have to fight for their grades and fight for their position on the team are far more successful in life than the 'naturally and exceptionally gifted child.'

Overly-driven children are often frustrated, anorexic, bulimic, confused and rebellious. "Type A" driven moms and dads need to be very careful not to expect too much, too quickly, or they may be creating a very disillusioned child. P.B.P.G.I.F.W.M.Y. - (Please be patient, God isn't finished with me yet) is the appropriate motto of the Bill Got hard Basic Youth Conflicts lecture series, and the cry of every child with driven, over-achieving parents. We can't figure our kids out? They can't figure themselves out! Remember how disillusioned you felt as a young pup and multiply it times ten for today's most perplexing youth culture.

Growing up is hard! Expectations are good when they're balanced, practical, achievable and well communicated. Expectations are counter productive that are impossible, impractical or self-serving.

Heat Up the Oatmeal!

That said, remember that as long as everything is taken care of for your child, he/she has no need to achieve. Far too many parents think it's our duty to over-protect our children, over-provide for our children, come to the rescue of our children, and frankly, in the broad scope of the totality of kids in all parts of the world, spoil our children.

Why break a sweat when the housekeeper does the chores and a weekly allowance meets a child's needs and desires? A well-developed child needs to contribute to the household with daily chores, needs to develop good study habits, contribute to the school by participating in some school activities, needs to be polite, respectful, needs to help pay for accessories and needs to be generally obedient.



TODAY'S FUEL

Use of the television, the car keys, the computer, the video game, the telephone and allowance should be the result of basic character and basic growth habits demonstrated! Don't be afraid to be in charge. If you don't 'heat up the oatmeal', nobody's going to waste their breath to say, "Too hot!" When life gets tough, relax! Allow life to toughen, teach and stretch your kids.

An Atmosphere of Motivation

Building a 'motivational environment' is tedious work for any parent. Personal example is always unavoidable and a 'boiler plate' for success in motivating kids. Your children need to see balance in your life! They need to see you loving your work, valuing your financial resources, reaching out to those less fortunate, celebrating goals achieved and encouraging their successes. If my work makes me irritable, rude and unhappy, I can't expect my child to pursue the education needed to prepare him/her for his/her professional life! If I'm a couch potato, I can't expect my child to be motivated. Our children also need to experience us encouraging achievement in our spouses, our close friends, and most importantly in our kids every day! We've GOT to notice their small achievements and compliment them!! Some parents are intrinsically sarcastic and demeaning when others succeed. If you are – make drastic steps to stop it!!! One demeaning, sarcastic remark toward a spouse or a child creates an avalanche that takes weeks, months or years to uncover.

Child Psychology According to "The Hare and the Carrot"

One successful dad commented recently that his daughter, though 'slightly lazy' in the waking hours, responds to challenges. When she is unmotivated to get up in the morning, he says, "I bet you can't make it to the breakfast table in the world record time of eight minutes and 38 seconds." When she breaks the "world record" his excitement would make you think the Guinness Book of World Records was being rewritten!

Another successful parent with an unmotivated student gives "tips" for A's, and withdraws "tips" for C's and D's. Allowance, if used wisely, is a carrot. Spending money is a great way to motivate responsibility. A nice vacation can be a great carrot if used in concert for a job well done or a difficult mission accomplished. Personal minutes on a cell phone is a great carrot. "Going out" at night can be a great carrot. When 'all the goodies' are given freely, they are usually taken for granted and highly unmotivated kids become the by-product.

I told my kids when they were young that I'd find them a car (definitely used!) when they turned 16 if they memorized two books (four or five chapter books like James, Philippians or II Timothy) in the Bible and lived like it! (I definitely didn't expect perfection and had fun memorizing Scripture together at night over the next six to eight years to help them achieve the challenge.)

By the way, keep the strings on the car keys and other accessories! The "golden handcuffs" are earned by continual obedience and the maturing of reasonable expectations.

Motivating is Better than Dictating

At Kamp we urge, we encourage, we admonish our counselors to stay close to the kids. We teach our staff to speak softly and coach within the range of touch. Encourage constantly. At this range, in this tone, you motivate a child's heart. A coach who sits on the sidelines and swears and yells and dictates and criticizes (we've all had our fill of 'em) may get a few wins, but his main harvest is disdain, disgust and destroyed self-image. Ditto with parenting! Kids' #1 need from parents is validation. (In retrospect, I wish I would have been better at this!)

A little girl needs to know that her mom and dad are nuts about her. A young boy needs to look into his parents' eyes and see a river of approval flowing from them. When correction and redirection and 'spurring' are necessary, they go down smoother and much



TODAY'S FUEL

more effectively in the context of relationship – not dictatorship.

Motivational Coaching

Dreaming with kids is highly motivational! Aspiring, setting goals, pursuing dreams together is the most fun thing a parent can do, and if done properly, can keep a child on his “tippy toes” for a lifetime! But to be effective, you’ve got to be super aware of the tediousness of the parent/child relationship (especially dads!) When a parent is critical in his coaching he breaks the child’s spirit. When a parent owns the dream it breaks the child’s motivational heart. The relationship is everything – not the task! Let a private tutor or coach do the lion’s share of the teaching. (Hear me now on this!) As you come alongside (this includes music, math, art, writing and sports) critique only when asked, but always be the “Atta Boy!” coach in your child’s life. When the mouth of a truly effective parent opens a child always smiles at the context. “I’m proud of you. Good shot! Awesome! Super! That’s it! Nice follow through! Great performance!” Moms and dads, this is the fun of parenting!

Motivational Core Values:

Some things in a home just are: core values are non-negotiable. It’s a parent’s job (and a good one at that!) to establish and practice and insist on core values in a home. As children mature, their participation in the establishment of the core values will help motivate them to participate with enthusiasm. The following are some of ours. Setting them required God’s grace. Failing to always keep them required God’s mercy!

1. We will always sit together at church on Sunday.
2. We will always speak with respect to Mom, or I will become your biggest enemy! (That was my #1 soapbox.)

3. Each season we will either be participating in a sport or extra-curricular school activity or we will have a job.
4. Everyone serves in the home every day.
5. Daily devotionals are like oxygen. We can’t make it without them.
6. Disrespectful words are like sharp knives and have no place in the home at any level.
7. All grudges cease before we say goodnight. The only ‘lists’ we’ll keep are the things we appreciate about each other.
8. “Conduct” grades at school are the most important grades of all. Bad ones are unacceptable and will result in disciplinary action.
9. TV in our home will be very selective. Illicit, degrading, sexually oriented material will not happen. (MTV, ‘adult’ sitcoms, etc. – no way!)
10. Five positives for every negative. Encouragement will rule this home.

As I’ve said many, many times before, we failed and fought and cried and apologized more than our share. It wasn’t always pretty around our home! FAR from it! But some things are like gravity in a good home. The sooner you establish them the happier and more motivated everyone will be.

If you want to have an awesome, fruitful, productive, motivational core value meeting, get your Bible, pen and paper and write a family constitution that will be a watershed you’ll take great delight in forever.

The following are some great Bible verses you can study that will help immensely in your family’s successful establishment of your motivational core values.

1. “I’m third” attitude (God first, others second and I’m third) – Phil. 2:3-5



TODAY'S FUEL

2. Obedience – Eph. 6:1-3
3. Media –TV, movies, computer, etc. – Ps. 101:3, Job 31:1, Matt. 5:8
4. Mutual respect – I Pet. 3:8, Eph. 5:25, 33
5. Forgiveness – Eph. 4:26,27, 32
6. Authority – Rom. 13:1-2
7. Encouragement – Heb. 10:24-25
8. Complaining – Phil. 2:14-15
9. Giving – Prov. 22:9 and 28:27
10. Scriptural authority – Heb. 4:12, IITim. 3:16-17, Is. 55:10-11

Goal Plus Ownership Equals Success

There's a little trick that our most successful managers, coaches and parents know how to apply with skill and effectiveness. If my child owns his goal, he is much, much, much more likely to complete it than if I ask him/her to pursue my goal for him.

A trip to a great college football or basketball game to ignite a dream for an exciting college experience, followed by a meeting with an Admissions Dean describing the tedious requirements for admission will go a whole lot further than me telling my kid, "You had better get in the top 10% of the class or nobody's going to let you enroll in their university."

When a child picks out a toy (from Mattel to Toyota), letting the child talk to the sales person, determine the price, put together a financial plan and participate in that purchase goes much, much further than letting Santa Claus have all the fun (and destroy the initiative in the process).

Visit the high school band or a great orchestra in concert with your musically-inclined child. Visit the art museum and sit with an artist at work with your artistically-inclined child. With an athletically-inclined child, visit a locker room, a college or high school

practice session (on the field), watch sports highlight films together, shoot baskets together, meet with an effective and motivational coach. Take a mission trip together and then save together to meet an apparent need you witnessed. When curiosity turns into a dream, help your child identify his/her own goals. Be careful not to smother or push and the young sprout is likely to pop its head out of the soil of maturity right before your eyes.

A successful goal must be:

Believable – Does your child and his favorite adult mentor believe it can be done?

Achievable – Is the goal realistic?

Measurable – Can we measure the success of the goal?

Scriptural – Will this goal honor God in its fulfillment?

Helping your child learn to set, pursue, own and finish personal goals is one of the greatest accomplishments of effective parenting.

They may not always 'wag their tails' like windshield wipers in a thunderstorm, but the rewards are countless nevertheless and your tireless labor becomes evident indeed when you get to enjoy a "fifty yard line" seat as they bring up your grandkids . . . referencing the library of faith, hopes and dreams you placed in their heart at every turn in the road.