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# 24 KARAT SUCCESS



GOLDEN RULES FOR A  
FULFILLED AND SUCCESSFUL  
LIFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## Karat 4: Legal doping for life

### The power of motivation

William Ewart Gladstone was prime minister four times. During his last term of office, he was 84 years old, the oldest prime minister in the history of Britain. His total working life of 61 years would please anyone in charge of pensions. Like any hard-working politician, Gladstone had to keep fit and motivated. He had a wide variety of role models to choose from in British politics. Pitt the Younger drank up to three bottles of port a day (some feat, despite alcohol content of less than ten percent in those days). Benjamin Disraeli wrote 15 novels, eight non-fiction books, one drama and a batch of poems. And Winston Churchill managed both – he drank huge quantities and wrote 20 books. This won him the Nobel Prize in Literature – and he would have been a strong contender for the Nobel Prize in Drinking, had such a thing existed.

Gladstone might not have been terribly motivated by having a travel bag named after him during his lifetime. Neither was he motivated by writing or drinking. So where did he get his inspiration to perform his demanding job? Curiously, it was from felling trees. He felled hundreds of them! According to his diary, he cut down 300 'real giants' with a normal axe, mostly alone, sometimes with his sons. Once he told a group of 500 Liberals, who were watching him in action, why he did it. He pointed to an oak and a birch and explained that these were particular favorites in his family. So why was he felling them, someone shouted. Gladstone explained that he cut down only the trees that had rotted, in order to give the healthy trees more air and light – an approach he used in politics too.<sup>76</sup>

This simple story seems to clarify what held Gladstone together at his core: organizing, clearing, giving meaning – in his private and professional life.

What *is* motivation? It is everything that leads people to dedicate themselves to a task, a role or a topic, or to work towards a goal.

Let's start with external, or 'extrinsic', motivation. Current studies on motivation in the workplace yield frightening results: one finds that

only 15–25 percent of employees feel motivated at work.<sup>77</sup> Another suggests that up to 75 percent have disengaged completely or just 'go through the motions'. What external conditions would be needed to motivate them? Recognition of their performance would be one – and this certainly doesn't *sound* too difficult to do. But are managers up to the task? Apparently not. One study shows that more than 70 percent of employees feel unappreciated.<sup>78</sup> Other studies paint a slightly less negative picture – but still estimate that around 40–60 percent of workers feel undervalued.<sup>79</sup> This may be due to leadership styles that equates lack of blame with crystal-clear praise!

Money also plays a role in motivation, but not as big a role as many might think. Indeed, the percentage of motivated employees is the same in lower salary bands as in higher ones.<sup>80</sup> More important than the absolute amount of money someone receives is the perception of fairness. If people feel they are being paid too little for the work they do, or, crucially, that others in the company get too much for what they do, their motivation goes out of the window. In Germany, for example, 37 percent of employees say that their salaries are unfair.<sup>81</sup> This plays out in employees' health and wellbeing: The stress associated with a perceived lack of fairness leads to cardiovascular disease.<sup>82</sup>

But fairness at work goes beyond monetary reward. Are employees treated equally in the company, or are there favorites? Are necessary cost-cutting measures distributed fairly? Are terminations handled with due process? Is there a climate of trust or excessive control? If unfair behavior occurs in these areas, not only does motivation decrease, but the workers begin channeling their energy into revenge.<sup>83</sup> A resentful employee at a confectionery factory, for example, was so angry after his unfair dismissal that he reprogrammed the production computer. As a result, a few months later sweets were produced and distributed bearing savage insults against the company. Other employees have taken out subscriptions to pornographic magazines in their bosses' name, or sent indecent emails to customers. A former IKEA employee was even suspected of photoshopping male genitalia onto a dog on the cover of the new annual catalogue.<sup>84</sup>

Clearly, recognition and fairness at work are crucial for motivation.

And what about extrinsic motivation in our private life? What does someone need from their partner in order to remain favorably

disposed towards them for a long time? It is worth taking a look at the work of the American psychologist John Gottman here.<sup>85</sup> For years he invited couples to his laboratory, measured their heart rate and blood pressure and filmed them talking. He then evaluated the data and encoded the feelings expressed on people's faces as 'negative' and 'positive'. Over subsequent decades he observed which couples separated and which remained together. On the basis of growing numbers of data points, he began to predict which couples would separate and which wouldn't. When more than 90 percent of his predictions came true, he had confidence in his analysis. What he had found was a kind of magic formula for a happy marriage – 5:1, whereby there are five positive interactions for every negative one. That means five times smiling, caring, curious listening for every one irritating, scolding, criticizing interaction. This might be a challenge during a busy week when you come home exhausted and feel your partner hasn't done one iota of what you agreed they would. My advice? Say something nice to yourself five times before engaging with them.

So, for a happy private life, heed the 5:1 rule!

The last important element of extrinsic motivation – whether at home or work – is the expectations of other people. Consider the story of a teacher confronted with a class of unruly pupils with below-average results.<sup>86</sup> At first, she felt sorry for the children because she thought they were intellectually and socially disadvantaged. A few weeks later, however, she found a list of the children's IQs and was amazed: they were all intelligent, some very intelligent. As a result, she increased her demands on them, treated them according to their intelligence, and by the end of the year their behavior and results were exemplary. When the head praised the teacher, she deflected the praise and said the children's performance was mainly due to their high IQs. The head was dumbfounded, and explained that the list she had found had nothing to do with intelligence; rather, it was the numbers for the school lockers (120, 135, 146 etc.). So, it was the teacher's assumption about the children's intelligence that led to objectively better results.

Research underpins this anecdote with hard facts. Children whom teachers believe to be clever improve *objectively* during the course of a year.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, soldiers perform better in tests, think more

positively and demonstrate higher management ability if their training officers expect more from them.<sup>88</sup>

This is the so-called 'expectation effect', also called the 'Pygmalion effect'. According to Greek mythology, the artist Pygmalion created such a wonderful female statue that he fell in love with it and caressed it regularly, finally bringing it to life.

Believing strongly in someone else kindles self-belief, drive and fire in that person. Four factors are decisive here. First, someone who is convinced that their teachings/thoughts/ideas fall on fertile ground because the recipient is so clever, interested, good/great, creates a 'warm' interpersonal climate. Second, they entrust the other person with increasingly difficult material. Third, they demand feedback about how the learning is going. And fourth, they give helpful feedback.

A large part of our motivation is based on how others see us: the more positively they perceive us, the better we really are. The following excerpt from *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens sums this up nicely. "In all things they appealed to the sense of honor and goodwill of the boys and reckoned with the existence of such qualities as long as it did not turn out otherwise. And that worked wonders."

At the other end of the spectrum is the so-called 'Golem effect'. The Hebrew word 'Golem' means stupid, uneducated, unfinished. The word also conjures up stories from the Middle Ages, in which clever rabbis created mute human figures from clay (golems), who carried out robot-like missions without the divine spark of life. The Golem effect occurs when a teacher, employer or parent expects almost nothing of their pupils, staff or children, who subsequently grow objectively worse.<sup>89</sup> Due to ethical concerns, there is less research on the Golem effect than there is on the Pygmalion effect. But we will all know from observation, and anecdotally, about situations where negative bosses prompt employees to commit mistakes out of sheer nervousness, plunging them into a vortex of continuing underperformance.<sup>90</sup>

Here is another famous example from 1968. The day after the murder of Martin Luther King, teacher Jane Elliott decided to make her white students aware of the effects of racism.<sup>91</sup> She explained that the pigment melanin not only determines eye-color, but also intelligence: the darker the eyes, the smarter the human being. (She was using artistic license, of course!) Within a week, the brown-eyed children

became better and more courageous in class, while the self-confidence and performance of the blue-eyed children deteriorated. The children realized what racism felt like, and also became aware of the Pygmalion and Golem effects.

Nowadays, we can even detect these effects in the brain. In people who think they are stupid, a part of the brain (the anterior paracingulate cortex) responds less to their own mistakes than it does in people who think they are clever.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the brain only uses resources to perceive an error and learn from it if it considers itself fundamentally capable of learning. Ergo, if you *think* you are capable of learning, then you *are* capable of learning!

So, in a nutshell, extrinsic motivation depends on recognition, fairness, warmth (5:1) and positive expectations.

But what does a person need for inner, 'intrinsic', motivation? It is primarily about curiosity, a desire to understand something and to grasp it more firmly. A body of research shows that intrinsic motivation has a powerful influence on performance, stamina and creativity. In an ideal world extrinsic motivation supports intrinsic motivation, in the worst it destroys it.<sup>93</sup> In other words, no one works for anybody as well as they work for themselves.

How can we build this intrinsic motivation, and how can we avoid damaging it? It can evaporate quickly without sufficient freedom. Take note, parents: Tighter parental control of homework goes hand in hand with a deterioration in grades in less able children.<sup>94</sup> It makes much more sense to give the child more autonomy, which signals your confidence in them and therefore feeds their self-confidence (and intrinsic motivation). In high-performing children, parental intervention has neither a positive nor a negative effect. It just bounces off the already strong shell.

When someone feels they have lost control of their life, the consequences can be fatal. The famous 'Whitehall study' of more than 28,000 British civil servants shows that the lower the grade of civil servant the higher the mortality rate. People in the lowest grade (messengers, doorkeepers, etc.) had a mortality rate three times as high than that of people in the highest grade (administrators).<sup>95</sup> The decisive factor was the level of autonomy people had over their own

work. At the higher levels, the sense of personal ownership was much stronger than at the lower levels.

Cutting down trees was the perfect intrinsic motivation for Gladstone, since he was free to decide which tree he brought down, when and how – an approach that he saw as akin to his political work. No wonder he was able to give Britain's longest ever budget speech (four hours and 45 minutes) with just a bit of egg and sherry to support him.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> golden rule

##### To activate, motivate!

Internal motivation has a stronger effect than external motivation and is fed by autonomy and self-determination. If people are recognized from the outside and treated fairly, their performance improves. And positive interactions (5:1) lead to happy togetherness.



The 5:1 principle  
misunderstood!

## **Brief story to delve more deeply into golden rule number 4**

For years scientists including Carol Dweck and Dave Paunesku from Stanford University in the US have been investigating how people can correct unconscious assumptions about their own intelligence.<sup>96</sup> There is a widespread view that intelligence is innate and that, therefore, some children simply have no chance in certain school subjects. This explains the oft-heard complaint: "I can't do mathematics. I'm not clever enough.

"In one study, researchers divided 1,594 young people into two groups. They gave one group reading material about the brain, explaining in particular the 'plasticity' of the brain and the fact that it is malleable and can be trained like a muscle. They asked the young people to summarize what they read and then advise a pupil with learning difficulties. The researchers also gave the second group reading material on the functionality of the brain, but it didn't go into plasticity or the possibility of training the brain. This group also had to summarize what they had read and advise a student in their learning. At the end of the semester, the researchers compared the school grades of the two groups. In the 'growth-mindset' group ("My brain is only a silly old muscle I have to train") ten percent more students than the peer group reached the class goal, and in mathematics the differential rose to 20 percent.

Once they realized that it is possible to stretch the brain, the children didn't judge themselves for 'failing', but instead saw their performance as proof that their brain muscle was still too weak. After all, who feels deeply wounded that they can lift a few kilos less than their friend in the gym? Instead, they are likely to be spurred on to more intensive training. And this applies in many fields – painting, cooking, car repair, writing or learning languages. The saying 'practice makes perfect' doesn't carry any qualifier along the lines of 'except when doing arithmetic, writing poetry or shoeing a horse'.

By the way, this helps to explain why you should not praise anyone for being smart, great or quick to think. The danger is, they might fear that at some point they will be exposed as being not smart, great or quick at all, and as a consequence they start to shirk challenges. Instead you should praise practice, effort or perseverance – "I could tell you'd really



prepared for that presentation; well done. It was great.” If someone does fail then, it is due not to a character flaw but to lack of preparation.

## **Lessons for you personally**

### *At work*

- You are dissatisfied with your recent bonus, and feel demotivated, unappreciated. But this is your opportunity to clarify with your boss how much your work *is* appreciated. Recognition takes different forms – and perhaps a new project, a new task or even concrete praise will motivate you more than a bigger bonus would have done.
- You wonder whether giving public recognition to one or more employees will have a stronger motivational effect than simply praising them in private. Research shows that open praise for the best performers (the best three out of eight in the experiment) has the greatest motivational effect.<sup>97</sup> Recognition is transparently linked to measurable performance, and because the top three (instead of just the top one) are praised, other employees see that the same praise is within their reach, which motivates them to exert themselves more.
- You have different nationalities in your team and are wondering to what extent they might be motivated by different things. There are considerable statistical differences between nations<sup>98</sup>: For example, Americans and Germans tend to be motivated by having a choice, whereas Asians more so by having the majority of their tasks determined by top management. Unfortunately, such generalizations may not help you much, because your employees are individuals. However, simply being aware of the differences between cultures should help you to find the right approach for your multinational employees.

### *At home*

- Does your child lack stamina? Then make use of the following research.<sup>99</sup> Before an election, some randomly selected citizens were told the following after answering some questions. “That is interesting – your response profile indicates that you show more civic behavior than the average. And our research has shown that

people like you are very likely to vote.” Many more people from this group than from the peer group were motivated to go to the polls. The interviewers had, so to speak, given the respondents the motivational stamp of the committed voter – and they acted accordingly. That should work for your child too. First, you need to remind them of a situation where they showed a lot of stamina – maybe during a treasure hunt, for example. “I couldn't believe how you worked your way through it, observed it all and didn't give up until your team won. That really shows perseverance!” With this tactic you stamp them as persevering and that will help them stick to their spellings or piano practice. And remember the Pygmalion effect: have relaxed, not urgent, expectations of them.

- You can achieve something similar with your partner by 'labeling' as follows. “Really ingenious, the way you configured the router and then fitted it into the shelf. I don't know anyone who can plan and execute something as accurately and perfectly as you.” This should guarantee the success of the next technical project!

### *For yourself*

- Are you motivated, but notice that your plans keep failing? In the long run this will of course be demotivating. What can you do? Set goals for yourself supported by detailed plans. In the past you may have downplayed or ignored negative scenarios.<sup>100</sup> But here is an example of what happens when you factor in those negative scenarios.<sup>101</sup> After a knee or hip operation, 60 patients received a booklet in which to enter their goals for the next week during the rehabilitation phase. The doctor's instructions were: “Write down exactly what you will do. For example, if you are going for a walk, make a note of when and where you are going.” The astonishing result was that patients who made detailed notes of what they planned for each day recovered twice as quickly as people who wrote down nothing. By writing down their plans, they had automatically considered the obstacles, which made them more motivated to follow through on their plans. Why? Because they had already planned for any difficulty arising. For example, a knee patient wrote to himself about wanting to go to the bus stop to pick up his wife. He had consciously prepared for the accompanying pain

in his knee and took the appropriate pills as a precaution. Had he not done that, he might have collapsed back on the bed, swearing at the onset of pain.

So, next time you plan something, write it down in as much detail as possible in order to identify and consider possible hurdles and traps. Perhaps counter-intuitively, this sustains motivation, despite making you conscious of the obstacles along the way.

- You are afraid of a new task. Strengthen yourself with the Pygmalion effect. Simply assume that you will succeed in something for which you have prepared thoroughly. “I have now gone over this talk five times in my head, three times in front of the mirror, twice with my colleague. Of course, it will work!”

### **Five questions for reflection**

1. How strong is your inner motivation in the areas that are important to you (work, relationships, sport)? What could you do to strengthen it? What keeps you from staying focused on certain topics?
2. Do you spend enough time motivating others with recognition, fairness and positive expectations?
3. Do you follow the 5:1 rule in your private life? Or have you already accumulated so much inner anger that you prefer living according to a 1:5 rule instead (that is, only one positive interaction for every five negative ones)? Is that a good idea?
4. Have you imposed internal boundaries such as “I can't remember birthdays” and “I just don't understand bridge”? Do you still want to indulge in the luxury of *not* training your brain muscles?
5. Which people around you can you help to escape their self-imposed limits?