

## Praise and Motivation

When Maria Montessori discovered the secret of childhood, one of the secrets that surprised her was the children's intrinsic desire to learn. She thought that our adult praise interfered with the children's natural drive to discover for their own internal growth and sense of well being. Here are some of her thoughts on the topic:

### **Maria Montessori on Rewards and Punishments**

from *Discovery of the Child* by Maria Montessori:

No one who has ever done anything really great or successful has ever done it simply because he was attracted by what we call a "reward" or by the fear of what we call a "punishment." If an army of giants were to wage a war for no other reason than to win promotions, stripes, or medals, or simply to avoid being shot against a band of pygmies inflamed with a love for their country, the latter would certainly obtain the victory. When an army has lost the spirit of heroism, rewards and punishments can do no more than complete the work of its destruction by leading to its corruption.

Every victory and every advance in human progress comes from some inner compulsion. A young student can become a great teacher or doctor if he is driven on by an interest in his vocation; but if he is motivated solely by the hope of a legacy or a good marriage or some other external advantage, he will never become a real teacher or doctor, and he will not make any great contribution to the world through his work. If a young man must be punished or rewarded by his school or family to make him study for his degree, it would be better for him not to receive it at all. Everyone has a special inclination or special secret, hidden vocation. It may be modest but it is certainly useful. An award can divert such a calling and turn one's head to the loss of his true vocation.

We keep repeating that the world is making progress and that men must constantly be urged to pursue it. But true progress consists in the discovery of something hidden. Frequently it may be something that simply needs to be improved or perfected. No reward is offered for the discovery of something not foreseen; and, in fact, one who tries to bring it to light is frequently persecuted. It would be a disaster if poems were written solely with the hope of winning a state award. It would be better for a poet's vision to remain concealed within him and for the poetic Muse to disappear. A poem should flow from a poet's mind when he is not thinking of a reward or of himself; and even if he wins a prize, it should never make him proud.

But there is also an external award worthy of a man. When an orator, for example, sees the faces of his listeners light up with emotion, he experiences a thrill that can only be compared with the intense joy of one who discovers that he is loved. It is in touching and conquering the minds of others that we enjoy the only reward worthy of our efforts.

This happens to us at certain joyous moments given to us so that we may continue to live in peace. It may happen when we fall in love, or when a child has been conceived, or a book published, or a great discovery has been made, and we deceive ourselves with the thought that we are the happiest person in the world. And yet, if at that moment someone who is in authority, or who is over us like a teacher should come up and offer us a medal or some other prize, he would rob us of our true reward. Disillusioned we would cry out: “Who are you to remind me of the fact that I am not supreme, that there is another so far above me that he can give me a reward?”

There are some wonderful resources on praise and motivation available to you both in print and on the web. Here are a few:

This article offers some wonderful alternatives to “Good Job!”:

<http://picklebums.com/25-alternatives-good-job/>

Daniel Pink ‘s very entertaining TED talk about motivation:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_pink\\_on\\_motivation?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation?language=en)

His book, Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us is about adults but offers a perspective on education too.

Teach Your Children Well: Parenting for Authentic Success by Madeline Levine is a resource that focuses on children of all ages but offers a look at reward and achievement.

Carol Dweck is the scientist who has been studying motivation in children. Her book is called, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. You can see her recent TED talk here:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/carol\\_dweck\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_believing\\_that\\_you\\_can\\_improve?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_dweck_the_power_of_believing_that_you_can_improve?language=en)