

Dan Pink and Ryan & Deci are quoted a lot when we talk about [motivation](#) - I include myself in that and this is good - they have a lot of research to back up everything they say.

The basic quote usually revolves around. Money is not a good motivator. Mastery, Purpose, Autonomy and in some quoted cases Relatedness are what we need. They are intrinsic motivators, money is not.

True.

There are a few things most fail to mention. One is the fact that this is most true for creative tasks. The other, much more significant bit they don't mention is this. When basic needs, such as money, are no longer a concern - what's left is intrinsic motivation.

Taken from his book Drive

“The best use of money is to take the issue of money off the table . . . Effective organizations compensate people in amounts and in ways that allow individuals to mostly forget about compensation and instead focus on the work itself.”

It is amazing how often people miss this little nugget out. I recently heard of one chap who's boss quoted the idea that money is not a motivator at him. Told him there was no pay rise, but research proves money is not a true motivator so it should be OK. What he failed to understand was that this guy still needed to pay rent, pay for food, pay to keep his family secure.

If we look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs (I had to go there eventually), we see that security (where money comes in) is a very basic need. It is one of the foundations to our happiness. This makes sense. How can we be happy if we and our loved ones are not safe and secure.



When we have security covered, then the other levels of motivation can play a greater role for us. In the case of working and jobs, this is when we are secure in our role and money is no longer a concern. We have enough to be comfortable. I am not talking about millions, but enough to not have to think twice about buying cloths and food for your family, with maybe enough left over for a few luxuries. If we have that, then we begin to look for the next level of motivation.

The issue is, for many, this is not the real world they live in. So how can we expect them to be engaged by Gamified systems that try to work using virtual rewards and intrinsic motivation that does not cover these basic needs?

My thoughts are this. If the possibility for more money is not realistic, virtual goods are likely to be insulting - if they do not add to the security of your employees. However, using virtual rewards and the like to recognise employees, with the understanding that it all goes towards improving their working situation and security - then you may be on to something.

Failing that, using Gamification to make the day to day lives of your employees more bearable - even enjoyable, can't be a bad thing. However, if you spend serious money on a new Gamified system, instead of making sure your employees are in a situation that makes them feel secure, you are going to face serious backlash. It is like being in a small company and being told that there is no money for pay rises, then your goes and buys a yacht.

Where am I going with this then?

Glad you asked.

Motivation theories are great, Deci, Ryan, Pink and others are worth reading and understanding. They are absolutely right, if you take what they say in the context within which they are talking. They all talk about intrinsic motivation based on your basic needs being fulfilled, one of which is security. If this is not the case, whilst using motivational methods such as Gamification can be of use, they must be handled with sensitivity and care.

The other thing to consider, if you know more money is not on the [cards](#), would you not at least like your job to be engaging?

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