Any child can be motivated to learn. If he only would apply himself... She can do it if she puts her mind to it. He just doesn’t seem to care. She’s just not trying. Motivation is the key to learning. But very few parents and teachers have an effective arsenal of techniques at their disposal. Enter educator and acclaimed author Rick Lavoie, who arms all those who deal with children with proven, effective tools and strategies they can use to encourage any child to learn and achieve success. Lavoie’s practical, innovative approach begins with a quiz that helps a parent or teacher identify -- using six different possible models -- a child’s motivational style. Is she motivated by power? Does he need prestige? Does praise mean a lot to this child? Does contact with other people inspire this child? Does he like to do projects? Does she enjoy receiving prizes? He then explores each motivational style in depth, presenting proven techniques, strategies, and...
scripts that can be used in the classroom and at home to break through a child's apathy and discouragement and inspire him to succeed and achieve. Along the way, Lavoie explodes some common myths about motivation: for instance, he demonstrates that rewards, punishment, and competition are not effective motivational tools. He gives specific advice throughout for parents and teachers of children with learning disabilities and provides detailed instructions for how to create a motivated classroom. He outlines the parents' role, the teachers' role, and suggests ways in which they can work together to encourage children to reach their potential. The book's final chapter, What Does Madison Avenue Know... That Maple Street Elementary School Doesn't, reveals what parents and teachers can learn from some of the most powerful motivators in our children's world: advertisers. With empathy and understanding, backed by decades of experience in the classroom, Rick Lavoie gives parents and teachers the key to unlock any child's enthusiasm and responsiveness. The Motivation Breakthrough will revolutionize the way parents, teachers, and professionals reach out to and motivate all children.


Lavoie is a skilled writer who has over thirty years experience working with children in schools and with children with learning disabilities. His depth of caring and his compassion for all children is clear throughout the book as he seeks parents and teachers to do the right thing for children even if it means being less convenient or abandoning a philosophy they thought was "one right way of doing things".

It seemed to me that Lavoie wanted to condense all that he's learned in his career into one volume which led me to feel "information overload" more than once. The book is nearly 400 pages, is not large font and does not have much white space on the page, this is information dense (which can be a good thing, it certainly is a good value for the money but on the other hand it may overwhelm some readers). I read the book cover to cover, slowly, carefully and thoughtfully and it took me two months to get through it. My volume is filled with margin notes and underlines, it's that type of book!

Reviewing this is not an easy task to say the least. I say these things not to complain but to give you an indication that this book is a valuable compilation of LOTS of information to digest. It has many ideas and even overlapping into parenting realms of adult/child relations, respect, communication, rules, behavior, discipline and punishment. It also has a few systems and approaches the likes of which other authors have similarly put into smaller individual books with just one system. Again this one volume provides a lot of information to process and put into action and it requires an open-minded reader who might have to admit they've been doing a wrong thing or two and to hear Lavoie's ideas for how they should change (to get the child motivated about learning). The book is overarching
and is a work that some other authors might have chosen to chop up to create at least four different books!

The book is intended for two main parties: parents of schooled children and school teachers and it has a special interest to parents of children with learning disabilities. I feel that some information provided for parents should be read by the teachers and some provided with practical information only for teachers to use in their classrooms should be read by the parents. In other words I advise that both parents and teachers should read the whole book cover to cover. If you skip some chapters you will miss important nuggets of information.

Lavoie provides insight into the minds of children with various learning disabilities and also ADD/ADHD and tells why most suffer with learned helplessness that leads to a lack of motivation. Why children with learning disabilities will not perform well with popular behavioral modification classroom tactics or with rewards programs is fully explained. He often refers to the writings and ideas of MEL LEVINE such as in the book A MIND AT A TIME.

In short to create an ideal environment all negative influences should be removed and then more ideal and better practices should be put into place. If the environment is right then the formerly unmotivated child may switch gears to be motivated and have success in school (and in life).

The book provides lots of information for parents to understand their children, whether they have a learning disability or not. It tells some inside information usually only known to teachers that may help the parent advocate for their child. It provides information on how to help a child with homework and how to be an active partner with the school but not cross the line to be a problem in the child's school.

Another topic touched upon is parenting or dealing with a student who is strong-willed and who is "motivated by power". Some information about those types of children overlaps with and some provides contradictory advice from what some parenting books on the market about those types of children say. Lavoie is in the camp of a kinder, gentler parenting style. Although he never mentions him I recognized some of the same parenting strategies and communication and praise recommendations as being in line with WILLIAM SEARS M.D., author or THE DISCIPLINE BOOK and THE SUCCESSFUL CHILD (to name just two). Some similarities about teaching, learning, schools and respect are in line with the ideas and books of JOHN HOLT such as in his book HOW CHILDREN FAIL.

Teachers may be surprised to learn Lavoie's opinions on some common classroom learning strategies and discipline strategies because he feels they often will produce the opposite effect than they intend to (a shocking notion for some to accept). Lots of discussion about rewards systems is included along with research citations to back up the opinions. The book
PUNISHED BY REWARDS is frequently referred to and Lavoie is on the same page as author ALFIE KOHN. Lavoie provides a ton of information to school teachers about topics such as behavior expectations, class rules, punishment methods such as punishing by taking away recess, and the really sick policies some teachers have for restricting use of the restroom. (Much of that information about praise, rewards and behavioral mod systems also applies to parents and systems used in the home.)

This book is also very much in line with the issue of learning styles and that each child is unique. Thinking that every child is made from the same mold and that all can be treated in a cookie cutter fashion is something that Lavoie rallies against. It is clear that Lavoie realizes the damage that children can suffer from when treated in a `one size fits all'' education model (so often used in public school systems).

The bulk of the book focuses on a motivation system for children to get them to like learning, to actually do the school work, to develop an internal motivation, and have them learn the information also. A short checklist of personality traits is given and a parent and teacher can try to figure out where each child fits on the spectrum of what motivates them. This information is useful also to parents and can apply to home life and daily interactions with children having nothing to do with school or doing homework.

After figuring out the "eight forces of motivation" Lavoie maps out six types of learning experiences that match up with the eight different motivator forces. The gist is the teacher will provide flexibility in learning experiences within the classroom (while all students work toward the same learning goal) and that the teacher will change the work done in the class to provide each unique child with a unique learning experience that touches upon their main internal motivators. By providing each child with work that `moves them'' and by removing other negative influences addressed elsewhere in the book, the student will be internally motivated to do their schoolwork, will enjoy learning and will actually learn what they are supposed to learn (and some in spite of their learning disabilities). I love the idea and as a homeschooling mother I can say this does work but frankly how it can work for a class of twenty or so children, some with learning disabilities and all while trying to jump through hoops of standardized testing for NCLB with good scores I don't know how one teacher can make this happen in real life (the realist in me is talking here, sorry for my cynicism).

One criticism I have is regarding the chapter for "the people oriented child". I felt the information in this chapter was weak as it had little to do with teaching the child academics (like all the other sections had) Oddly the chapter had buried within it, mostly information that I feel is foundational and deserves to be its own chapter in and of itself as it applies to ALL children. I am referring to the teacher having respect for children and how all adults should treat
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