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Motivation is one of the most important factors in successful language and culture learning. Most newcomers say they are highly motivated to be effective learners, yet many find it difficult to sustain strong—or even sufficient—motivation over the long haul. Coaches often lament the lack of motivation of some of their learners, yet few know how to take an active role in fostering strong long-term motivation. This short article offers some definitions of motivation, discusses the role motivation plays in successful language learning, and offers specific suggestions for developing a motivation plan—a set of procedures for helping learners maintain and even increase the type of motivation they need in order to be successful lifelong learners.

### What is motivation? Some Definitions by Language Learning Specialists

“an inner drive, impulse, emotions or desire that moves one to a particular action” (Brown, 1994, p. 152)

“the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect” (Keller, 1983, cited in Brown, 1994, p. 152)

“Ability refers to what a person can do; motivation to what a person will do.” (Keller, 1983, cited in Oxford, 1996, p. 11)

“what makes students want to learn languages and what causes them to put forth the effort to persist in this difficult adventure” (Oxford, 1996, p. 1)

“the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language” (Nunan, 1999, pp. 232-233)

“...the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity. Effort alone does not signify motivation. The motivated individual expends effort toward the goal, but the individual expending effort is not necessarily motivated.” (Nunan, 1999, p. 233)

“Motivation...involves a three-part conceptualization...reflecting a desire to learn the language, effort expended toward learning the language, and favorable attitudes toward learning the language. Each element of motivation, in and of itself, is not viewed as sufficient to characterize a motivated individual, whereas the totality of the three would seem to do so.” (Gardner, in Parry and Stansfield, 1990, pp. 194-196)

“...motivation consists of seven elements: (1) interest, (2) relevance, (3) expectancy of success or failure, (4) belief in forthcoming rewards, (5) decision to be involved, (6) persistence, and (7) high activity level.” (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, cited in Oxford, 1996, p. 106)

### How important is motivation for successful language and culture learning?

“Is motivation important to second or foreign language (L2) learning? What does motivation contribute to L2 success, over and above that which is contributed by a talent or aptitude for foreign languages? The answer is that motivation is one of the main determining factors in success in developing a second or foreign language...Motivation determines the extent of active, personal involvement in foreign or second language learning. Conversely, unmotivated students are insufficiently involved and therefore unable to develop their potential L2 skills.

“Motivation is important because it directly influences how often students use L2 learning strategies, how much students interact with native speakers, how much input they receive in the language being learned (the target language), how well they do on curriculum-related achievement tests, how high their general proficiency level becomes, and how long they persevere and maintain L2 skills after language study is over....Therefore, motivation is crucial for L2 learning, and it is essential to understand what our students' motivations are.” (Oxford and Shearin, 1996, in Oxford, 1996, pp. 121-122)

### Fifteen Suggestions for Fostering Strong Motivation in Your Learners

1. Know your learners' background, previous learning experiences, preferred learning styles, etc.
2. Keep in close touch with your learners; allow them to voice their concerns, needs, etc.
3. Provide a supportive environment with encouragement and feedback appropriate for learners' needs.
4. Show faith in learners' capacity to learn and help them to believe in themselves.
5. Allow learners to make as many of their own choices as possible (e.g., goals, learning activities)
6. Accommodate different learning styles and individual differences and needs as appropriate.
7. Promote use of effective strategies, helping learners to become increasingly self-directed.
8. Offer guidance as needed, especially in the areas of planing overall program and staying on track.
9. Ensure successful learning, as much as possible, especially in the early stages.
10. Encourage learners to interact frequently and meaningfully with speakers of the target language.
11. Emphasize learning from mistakes, so that learners come to view mistakes as a necessary ingredient in learning and not an evil to be avoided at all costs.
12. Give special attention and challenges to the quicker, more able learners while making sure the slower, less able learners are not overwhelmed.
13. Provide frequent feedback regarding learners' (a) progress in specific skill and content areas (focusing on what they have learned), (b) progress in overall proficiency (focusing on what they can do with what they have learned, and (c) progress in learning how to self-manage their own learning process.
14. Be especially careful with learner assessment, making sure it is fair, focuses on the content and range of learning experiences, and that major decisions are based on multiple types of evaluation spread over a period of time.
15. Evaluate your program to see if changes are needed (e.g., policies are appropriate, goals are reasonable, assessment is useful and appropriate) and make changes where warranted.

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