

# ***TREACHING***® **Teaching and Reaching Each Child**™

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a publication with concise and in-depth guidance  
for educators who *parent* their students  
and for parents who *educate* their children

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## **“Would you like a Ferrari?”**

### **Choosing Motivating Incentives**

What will it take to motivate your child to do something he is unenthusiastic about? Let's say that he truly wants to do the task at hand, but he needs a little push to get himself going. They say that every person has his price. Does that mean that our challenge as parents and educators is to figure out what will buy each child's cooperation? How extravagant should we be? Are there any limits?

Of course there are limits. Everything has limits, but even more important than wondering about what gadget will buy a child's cooperation, consider the use of incentives in general. From our experience *TReaching* hundreds of kids over dozens of years, there are good ways to motivate children and there are better ways to motivate children. Let's see if we can shift your preference toward the better ways.

Let's begin with the

understanding that every activity has an incentive naturally attached to it. There are two categories of incentives: intrinsic and extrinsic, otherwise known as internal and external. “Internal” and “external” tell us whether the incentive comes from source located within or from outside the person who performs the task. For example, if you weed your garden, you enjoy the intrinsic incentive that your plants will grow better. You also feel proud of your accomplishment. That's an inside feeling that motivates you to weed your garden as often as needed. You may also receive an extrinsic motivator. Perhaps your neighbor comments, “My, your garden is gorgeous. It really dresses up your property.”

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**Every action has an  
incentive attached to it.**

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The best incentives cause change within the person. Upon completion of the assigned task, the person feels like a different person. That positive feeling is internal and goes wherever he goes. It stays with him forever. Intrinsic feelings of success outperform extrinsic rewards which get used up or become obsolete. An internal feeling of success never becomes obsolete. Here's how to initiate high-quality internal incentives.

**Step One: Detect measurable completion of a goal or sub-goal, and notice it.** "I see that you've completed your math homework in less time than you thought you would. You may be done with all of your homework very soon." In this case, the parent isolated the math portion of her daughter's homework, and is applying the incentive to complete the rest by noticing and complimenting her daughter's efforts. The completed task needs to draw praise and a sense of satisfaction toward itself. We feel good when we succeed. We feel good when our success pleases others and is noticed by them. They tell us so. We tell ourselves so. We all have a natural drive for success and self-satisfaction. We like to be proud of our work. We enjoy it when others feel the same. A successful individual feels like a changed person. What seemed insurmountable has become doable, so now the person aims higher. He is motivated to do more and to do better. All

of this comes from someone else noticing and admiring what we did well.

**Step Two: Be a mirror.** Reflect the individual's sense of pride. Just as the successful child feels proud about the change in himself, show the same. Use words and gestures. "I feel really proud of you as you went right to work on your homework tonight instead of getting on the phone and chatting with friends. That took determination because I know how tempting that phone is. I can see that you also feel the difference. Your smile tells me that you are also proud of yourself. You know, you've just shown how you can take control and follow through on your responsibilities. There is no reason why you can't get this same wonderful feeling of success every day. Think about it."

**Step Three: Model self-satisfaction via intrinsic motivation.** There is no greater way to teach a skill than by demonstrating it. Show your child that you also appreciate success and feel good about your own accomplishments. Find opportunities every once in a while to express your own self-satisfaction. "My, this is a good month. I tried really hard to save money, and I was able to take control and cut down on my credit card use this month. Boy, does that feel good. Now I know that I can do this again in the future if I need to."

Keep TReaching your child by

**This publication is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in education.  
We hope that you find this issue to be most helpful.  
We welcome comments and questions.**

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