How to Stimulate Motivation to Learn and Excel in Students and Residents
Adapted from: R. A. Kusurkar, G. Croiset, and Olle Th. J. Ten Cate, Twelve tips to stimulate intrinsic motivation in students through autonomy-supportive classroom teaching derived from Self-Determination Theory. Medical Teacher 2011; 33:978–982

Support Learner Autonomy
Tip 1: Identify and nurture what residents and students need and want
- Design the content and format of teaching around learners’ needs, in order to stimulate their intrinsic motivation and make their learning more relevant, intriguing and interesting.

Tip 2: Encourage learners’ intrinsic motivation to guide their study behaviors
- Rather than providing external incentives to learn, let learners’ internal drive to learn and excel guide their study behavior.

Tip 3: Encourage active participation
- Active learning encourages learner autonomy in choosing topics, promotes a sense of relatedness between learners and the teacher, and provides opportunities for positive, constructive feedback.

Tip 4: Give Choices
- Involve residents in planning teaching and learning activities to support autonomy and relatedness.
- Offer choices regarding the topics to be learned and teaching and evaluation methods.

Tip 5: Encourage residents and students to accept more responsibility for their learning
- Recommend topics for self-study.
- Communicate expectations clearly and early in the course.

Build Learners’ Sense of Competence
Tip 6: Provide structured guidance
- Allow learners to lead the discussions, but guide them by asking probing and meaningful questions.

Tip 7: Provide optimal challenges
- Create learning challenges that are tailored to the individual to prompt further exploration and foster a feeling of competence.
- Give learners topics for preparation and presentation and allow choice of content and timing.

Tip 8: Give positive and constructive feedback
- Give timely, non-threatening feedback to show the gap between a learners’ current and the desired understanding.
- Focus on learning issues and provide suggestions for improvement, rather than directives.

Foster Relatedness
Tip 9: Give emotional support
- Create a warm, positive and sharing learning environment where learners feel safe to express their feelings, doubts and questions.
- A sense of professional community and personal relatedness is a powerful incentive to learn.

Tip 10: Acknowledge residents’ and students’ expressions of negative affect
- Listen and refrain from being judgmental when learners express critical views of educational topics or processes.
- Validate their thoughts by using their feedback in improving teaching sessions.

Avoid Autonomy Thwarting
Tip 11: Communicate value in uninteresting activities
- Stimulate the interest of learners in educational topics by appealing to their own needs and career goals and explaining the rationale for the topic in terms of patient health.

Tip 12: Direct with “can, may, could” instead of “must, need, should”
- Avoid controlling phrases such as “you must learn this”, “you should do this”, “this is obligatory”, “if you want to succeed, you need to learn this,” and “every second year should have mastered this.”
- Use phrases like “you can learn this”, “maybe you could do it in this way”, “it is your choice”, “if you want to know this topic well, it would help to include this in your study”, or “if you study this, it will increase your understanding of related conditions.”