

## Mike MacKay – Manager Coach Education and Development



### Cool Hand Luke

One of my favourite movies is Cool Hand Luke. In the movie Paul Newman plays Luke, a young man who just can't stay out of trouble. He ends up in a prison in the southern, USA. During one scene the prisoners are out on the highway doing roadwork. It is hot dirty work. A truck lays down a layer of tar and then the prisoners throw sand on top of the tar. The guards continually try to motivate the prisoner by threatening them. This does not work. Luke, for some unknown reason, takes it upon himself to motivate the other inmates to work harder. He encourages and cajoles them into giving their all. The inmates work so hard that they eventually run out of road. The guards don't know what to do with men for the rest of the day. They have no more work for them to do. How did Luke convince these men to work hard? He didn't threaten them and he had no way to reward them. It was totally intrinsic. They did it for the pure joy of doing the job well.

My wise friend Sefu Bernard keeps me up to date with sites off the internet that he knows may spark my interest. One that I do enjoy is the Ted Talks. Sefu recently sent me the link for a talk by Dan Pink on motivation. ([http://www.ted.com/talks/dan\\_pink\\_on\\_motivation.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation.html))

The essence of the talk is that the old idea of motivating with the carrot or the stick does not work as well today as it did in the past. The carrot and stick comes from the idea of how a farmer would motivate his mule to work. Sometimes he would coax the animal forward by dangling a carrot in front of the animal. This is a reward for doing your job right. Other times the farmer needed to beat the mule on the rump with a stick in order to make the animal move. This was punishment. If he only used the carrot, reward, the animal would become use to it and no longer be thrilled by another carrot. If he only used the stick eventually the mule would get stubborn and not move. The art was to blend the carrot and stick in just the right amounts. This method of motivation has been used in business, school and sports for years. It was also the prime motivator used by the guards in the prison in Cool Hand Luke. Put them in the hot box when they messed up. Give them a drink of water if they worked hard. The problem is that research shows that reward and punishment do not work in many of the task that we find ourselves doing today. This is not an example of one independent study. In study after study the results are the same. Rewards and punishments reduce productivity in certain types of tasks and enhance it in others.

When a job is simply to dig a ditch, 12 feet long by 3 feet wide; reward and punishment works. If you complete the task you get rewarded, usually by getting paid. If you don't you risk being punished, fired or less pay. To get people to dig faster you offer more pay or threaten them with being fired. People that do tasks that have a narrow focus, a clearly defined way of doing the task and only one possible outcome can be motivated by rewards and punishments. There are not many of these jobs left. Most of the tasks that we must perform today are more of a creative nature. They involve many possible solutions and working with other people. By adding a reward or punishment to these tasks it narrows the focus. This is counter productive to the method needed to solve the problem.

From a young age children are still being motivated with reward and punishment. School is a great example. During my fourth year of university I took my Bachelor of Education degree. By the second semester we had already been out practice teaching. In fact some of us already had job offers. In one

of our courses the professor told us he would mark us by using a contract system. If you did this much work you got a D, do a little bit extra you got a C... all the way up to where you could get an A+. This was clear example of reward/punishment at its finest. We were being motivated to do well in the course with a mark. Needless to say the majority of the class opted for the lowest mark that got the credit. There was no reason to go for the top mark because that class was not important at that point in our new careers. Not once did the professor try to motivate us intrinsically by showing how this material would impact our lives or the students we would teach.

Some of the rewards/punishments that we use as coaches are subtle in nature:

- If you play on this team you will get rewarded with this pair of sneakers.
- If you come to my school I promise you...
- If you try out for that other team I will not work with you any more
- If you miss this practice to go to your family reunion you will not get to play the next game
- If you don't complete this run by a certain time you are off the team

By the time many of our players reach the Train to Compete stage they are no longer impressed by the promises, gear and trips. They have also heard the threats so many times or they have so many options that the fear of punishment does not motivate them. Now! Remember, reward and punishment does work for simple narrow focused task with one outcome and at certain stages and times it has its place. It is when it is used constantly as the method for motivation. One trend that came into coaching during the 1980's was peer pressure punishment. If one player messed up the whole team was punished. I found that it worked in the short term, but over the long season it created fearful players who had no sense of autonomy. They were not willing to take risks.

We need to think like Cool Hand Luke. He got a group of prisoner to work harder than they ever did before without and reward or punishment. He relied on **intrinsic motivation**. The prisoners were in control of what they did, they got better and better and they had a purpose They felt like they were part of something special.

Dan Pink claims that the three biggest intrinsic motivators are:

- Autonomy – the urge to direct our own lives
- Mastery – the desire to get better and better at something that matters to you
- Purpose – the yearning to do what you do in service of something larger than ourselves

What do we do as coaches to develop intrinsic motivation?

**Autonomy** – I was once asked by a parent how I could get his son to stop spending all of his time skate boarding. My quick response was that I would coach him in skating boarding. I would tell him what time to practice and which moves he could practice. I think one of the main attractions of skateboarding is intrinsic. The skateboarder is in control. In a coach centred team the athletes have little or no say in what happens. The coach makes all of the decisions. The more we as coaches start to empower our athletes the more they will feel like they have some control.

- **Give them simple choices** - Would you rather do the chasing lay up drill or the speed lay up drill. In either one they are doing lay ups, but they feel as if they have had some control. The same can be true for which restaurant they eat

- at or the time for practice.
- **Ask Questions** – ask the players how they feel, what they see and what they think they should do.
  - **Build in decision making** – players need to learn to read the defence. This gives them control.
  - **Build in free gym time** – Whenever I knew I was going to be at the gym, and it was open, I would let my players know. If they wished, they could come in and work on their game. It was not mandatory and I did not hold it against them if they did not come in. They had control.

**Mastery** – I have had a number of coaches ask me this summer about how they can get better. My response has been; the same way a player gets good at shooting the ball. You need to do your reps. There are no exceptions to this rule. Players and coaches alike must spend the time in deliberate practice. It is usually done on your own. You put your time in because you enjoy the thrill of learning more and being able to do more. A coach helps players learn that there is always something else to learn or mastery about the game. This is not a bad thing it is what motivates the great ones to continue to improve. As coaches we can also help by making it fun. There are many ways to take the drudgery out of drills work.

**Purpose** – In a team sport like basketball playing with purpose is crucial to the success of the team. Being part of a group and contributing to something bigger than I could ever achieve on my own is a special attraction of team sports. The same holds true in an aligned developmental system. Being part of something bigger than my own team gives me a greater sense of purpose. The success of our age National group teams, cadet, junior, this summer is a direct result of many individuals who have given the players the idea of playing with a purpose. Our Centres for Performance have had an impact in preparing the players, but a lot of the credit needs to go to the club/high school coaches who have spent time in the gym working with these players. These coaches and parents have understood the **purpose** of CP's; the yearning to be part of something bigger than ourselves. When people try to isolate players, put them away in a castle and lock them up so no one can see them or work with them they are taking away one of the strongest intrinsic motivators, the sense of purpose. No one player will play his/her entire career for one coach, unless that coach does such a terrible job and the child quits the sport for life. Coaches at all levels need to build dreams and a sense of purpose in their athletes.