

# Secrets from Successful Teachers

## 12 Ways to Transform a Teaching Nightmare into an Educator's Dream

*by Aurora Lipper, Supercharged Science*

Did you ever have a teacher that made a real impact on you? They took a subject you previously thought was dull and boring and somehow made it jump alive? Special teachers can touch our lives in small ways that make big changes later in life by phrasing a topic into just the right words so it really clicks for you, or simply just believing in you when no one else around you did. These types of teachers are pretty amazing when it comes to inspiring children. If you've ever wondered how some of them 'work their magic', you're not alone. Most amazing teachers really couldn't tell you how they do what they do – they just know how to reach kids effectively in a way that really makes an impact.

One of the main differences between an outstanding teacher and a dud is their ability to enter the student's world and find out not only where they are, but also where they are coming from. In this way, teachers can structure lessons in a way that not only motivates the child to learn, but instills a deep curiosity that will continue this love of learning for the long-term.

When you truly learn how to motivate people using *their* preferences (not

yours), you open the vault because you hit all the right access codes and can enter into their world to really make an impact on them. Think of it this way: it's equally important *how* you deliver the message as well as the message itself. And when you truly understand your child's motivational programming, you can enter their world and guide them on their path in a meaningful and impactful way.

Note that you don't need to do *all* of these. Simply focus on one or two until see a change in the way your child learns. Then come back for more. Are you ready?

**Paint a vivid future.** Some people get really excited about moving toward a goal when you paint a picture about how great it can be. A boss at work talks about all the great projects this month, your spouse talks about next year's vacation, or maybe you have a picture of your dream house on the wall that really inspires you to take action. For some, this is enough to inspire them to move into action. But not others.



**Emphasize consequences.** Other people need to really understand the consequences if they don't move into action. These folks turn in the report at deadlines, wait until the last minute to make hotel reservations, and respond better when the worst-case scenario is painted before them.

*Which one is better?* Neither. One type of motivation is not right or wrong – they just *are*. And while we all have both, most people have a stronger preference for one. Can you see how you'd use different words with one type of child than another? *“Feel free to keep the toys you clean up”* may work better than *“You may join us for ice cream when you're finished cleaning your room”*. Either way, it'll be fun to figure out.



**Noticing sameness.** Toss three quarters on the table and ask your child

to describe what landed on the table. We call these types of kids 'matchers'. Matchers talk about how they are all the same, all round, all silver. Matchers are a teacher's dream to work with – they often are associated with positive attitude or optimism, and are easy to motivate into action by drawing parallel examples.

**Pointing out the difference.** On the other end of the spectrum is the teacher's nightmare: the kid who contradicts everything, points out every

little difference in detail, appears defiant, and is often associated with the term 'devil's advocate'. Mismatchers playing the quarters game mentioned above will notice the one that is tails-side up, a different year, or cleaner than the rest. To motivate a mismatcher, simply use 'reverse psychology', but you need to do this with *complete* congruence if it's going to work. This means there is no twinkle in your eye when you work with them – you are honestly entering their world and using their own motivation and doing it with integrity and caring for who they are and where they're at.

In short: make sure they don't know what you're doing. It sounds so simple. And it is, as long as you are doing it from a place of honest caring and seriousness.

**“I just know.”** How do you know when you're really good at something, or when you've really done a good job? Kids that 'just know' are internally motivated, meaning that they don't ask around to see what other people think... the sense of certainty comes from within themselves. You can't pressure an internally motivated person into doing something with peer pressure – it's just not motivating to them. However, you can tap into their internal judgment system to guide them along.

Imagine what happens when a car salesman wraps up the conversation with an internally motivated person and says: *“I can't convince you whether this car is right for you or not. Only you can*

*do that. I do know that you're not going to be happy with a car that you know to be second-best."*

**"What would they think about this?"**

Externally motivated people rely on the opinion of others to see what they should do. This one needs special care, as you don't want to send the message to your child that you'd love them less if they don't do something. Be sure to separate the child from the behavior when motivating an externally-motivated kid. *"Hmmm... how do you think your friends are going to like being around you when you don't bathe for a week?"*

**Go with the flow.** Kids that enjoy the process, especially if a creative one, truly have fulfillment in the act of writing, researching, figuring out life's problems, whether math, science, or how to fix the toilet. They really *like* the process and really aren't motivated by someone telling them about what they can do when they're finished. Kinesthetic kids are often in this class of motivation, as they like to fully associate with the process, feelings, and everything that goes with it. *"Want to help fix the car after your math is done?"*



**Finished!** Other kids simply want it to be done and are motivated by the feeling of completion. These

types of kids are compelled to complete the worksheet, put a word on every line in a notebook, or fill out a form entirely.

They will often stick with a project just to feel the gold that comes at completion.

**Paint the big picture.** Some kids are happy to simply skim over and just get the main idea. Big picture kids get excited when you sketch out the framework, so painting a bold, bright picture of what they're aiming for is essential before they feel comfortable moving into action.

**Give me the**

**details!** Sometimes, people *want* to know all the little details of the process, and only get excited when they hear the intricacies of the



event. It's easy to motivate these types of kids – just take them through what it will be like, keeping in mind whether they are more receptive to visual, auditory, or kinetic communication. (For visual communicators, talk faster and paint a bright picture; for auditory, slow it down a notch and use words like 'hear' and 'listen'; slow things way down for kinesthetic communicators and include feeling and touch sensory words.)

**Past performance.** Some people are impressed by a how long a company has been in business (*"Serving you since 1932..."*). Some kids relate past performance to equal the future (*"Math never makes sense..."*) so finding their top three greatest moments of their life (according to them, not you) is a great anchoring technique. When they get

stuck, simply reference these and draw parallel examples of how *now* is like it was *then*.

**Future possibilities.** Others are more interested in what the company can do for them in the future (*"I could tell you how long we've been around, but let's focus instead on what we can build together..."*). Some kids forget the past and see only future possibilities (*"I wonder what I'll get to try out this week in math..."*). Kids that picture themselves as firemen, train engineers, doctors, etc. and use it to do something are all using future possibilities as a motivational technique in that moment.

**In conclusion...**Whew! We've covered a lot of ground here. Remember, you don't have to use *all* of these, or even half of them. The point here is to really understand motivation and the fuel behind it so you can enter your child's world elegantly and with true caring for where they are at so you can provide the most effective guidance along their path.

One of the most important jobs you have as a parent is to empower your child so they can do well in the world. While we've given you the tools for motivation, you also need to remember to stand back and let your kids 'take on' their own education, with you cheering for them on the sidelines. Enjoy the adventure and don't forget to play with your kids along the way!



**About the Author** Since 1996, Aurora Lipper has been helping families learn science. As a pilot, astronomer, mechanical engineer and university instructor, Aurora forms the bridge between the scientific and educational worlds. All through grade school, she was frustrated that she couldn't ask a book a question, and now spends her time answering as many as possible for kids worldwide. She specializes in getting kids crazy-wild about science and helping parents launch their kids into their full potential.

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