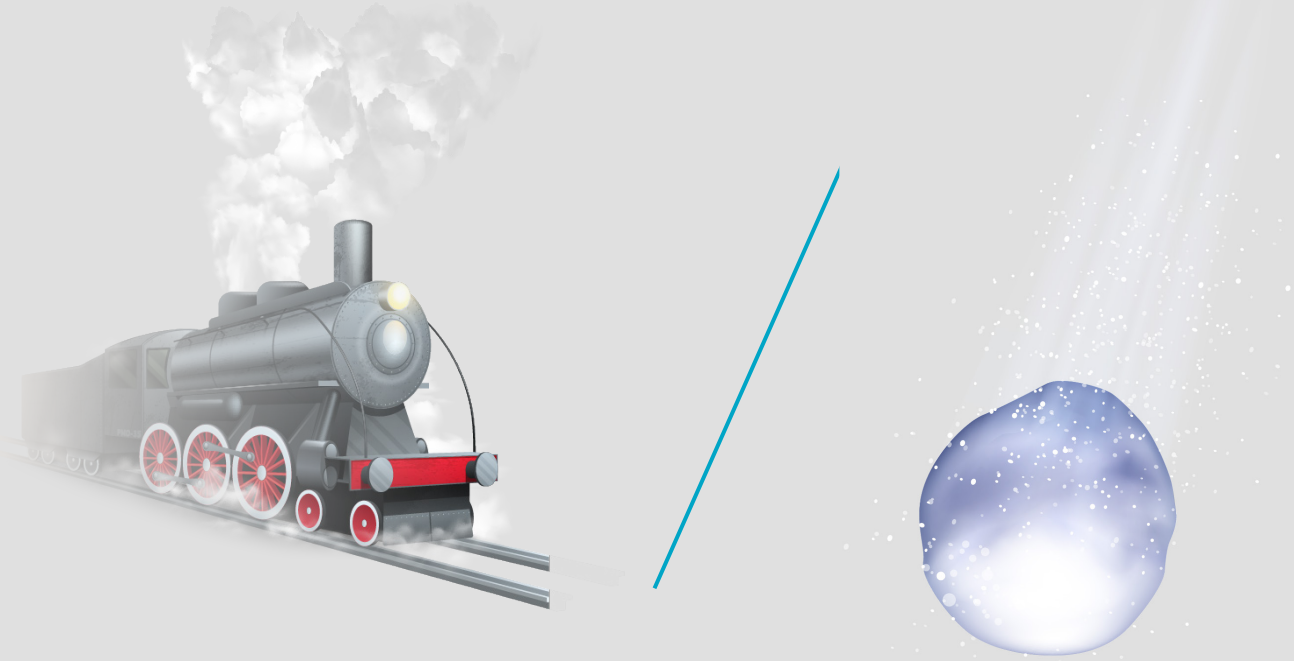
THE Ultimate GUIDE TO to Motivating Students

SAOTG
STAYING AHEAD OF THE GAME

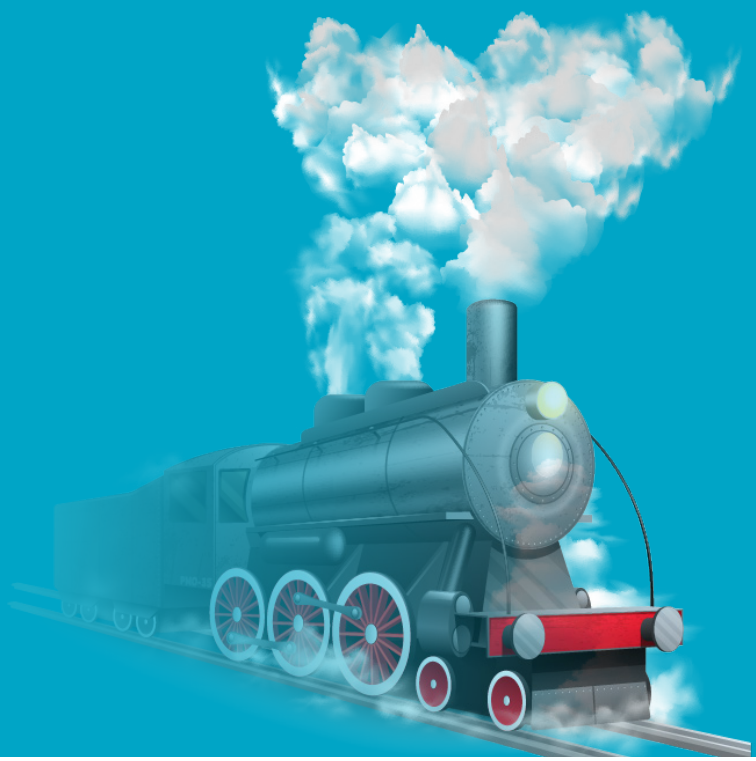
The Motivation Train:
Steam Engine vs. Snowb



One of the most common complaints we hear from parents is "my child just doesn't want to succeed," coupled with complaints of irrational laziness and self-sabotaging behaviors. We, as parents and professionals supporting students in different ways, know the potential for success exists in every child. Nonetheless, for some reason, potential doesn't translate to the student's study habits or to the grades on the report card. After employing a wide range of incentives to motivate their students, many parents simply give up the fight to motivate, flabbergasted by their child's noted casualness regarding school. Why don't students care about their success as much as we do?

The key to getting and keeping students motivated is focusing on internal motivation rather than external motivation. In other words, we want students to succeed without parental hovering or the dangerous incentive/disincentive game. The best way to explain it is through the analogy of a steam engine and a snowball.

More than the obvious fire and ice metaphor, a steam engine and a snowball portray two different modes of movement. The steam engine, ala the old Popeye cartoons, requires a monumental amount of upkeep. The operator, representing the parent or support professional, must shovel more and more coal into the furnace to produce enough heat. The heat then produces steam, which moves the locomotive forward. But what happens when the operator gets tired or frustrated by the constant upkeep? The movement stops, and perhaps worse, it takes even more energy to get the engine running again. The engine cools off, and the shoveling begins again.



Now, let's talk about a snowball, ala the movie Ice Age. Once a snowball starts rolling down a hill, there's no stopping it. The momentum carries it forward as it adds mass and bursts through anything in its way. The beauty of this frozen momentum machine is its enigmatic starting point. No one can point to a single moment, a single push where it began. The snowball emerges out of the placid landscape and bears downhill, and therein lies the key to its power: downhill. Unlike the steam engine, the snowball's driving force is related to its environment without being dependent on it. No one needs to shovel in more snow; rather, the snowball picks up momentum on its own, without the need for an external helper.

We want students to be snowballs, not steam engines.

By setting up the right environment and instilling the right habits, parents and support professionals can help their students develop internal motivation, finally solving the nagging motivation crises all too common these days.

Let's dive in. How can we cultivate this trait in our students? How can we help the bored students become engaged, and how can we urge the extrinsically motivated to operate independently of rewards?

Internal Motivation:

An Elusive Yet Achievable Goal

Gifted, intelligent students have the world at their feet. They have the ability to breeze through classes, earn impressive grades, and build a successful life for themselves. But raw intelligence is only part of the equation for student success. Every year, parents and support professionals are stunned by the number of highly capable students who perform below their potential.

So, why does this happen?

Why do brilliant students struggle to perform under their academic demands?

And what can we do as parents and support professionals to get them back on track?

Study after study reveals that raw IQ has little to no correlation with academic success. In fact, according to the Harvard Center for the Developing Child, IQ pales in comparison to the power of executive functioning skills (which has ties to EQ) on student success. Organization, time management, learning skills, social competencies, and other 'soft skills' are a much better determinant of success than natural ability. Self-management is the key to helping capable students be successful.

And that's our goal here at SAOTG because we know that even the most brilliant students can struggle with today's academic demands if they lack the tools and strategies necessary to cope with the multi-faceted responsibilities of being a student.

Of course, every student is unique. However, there are some tell-tale signs of a smart student who lacks the executive functioning skills to succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. Learn to identify the following signals and guide your student in the right direction.

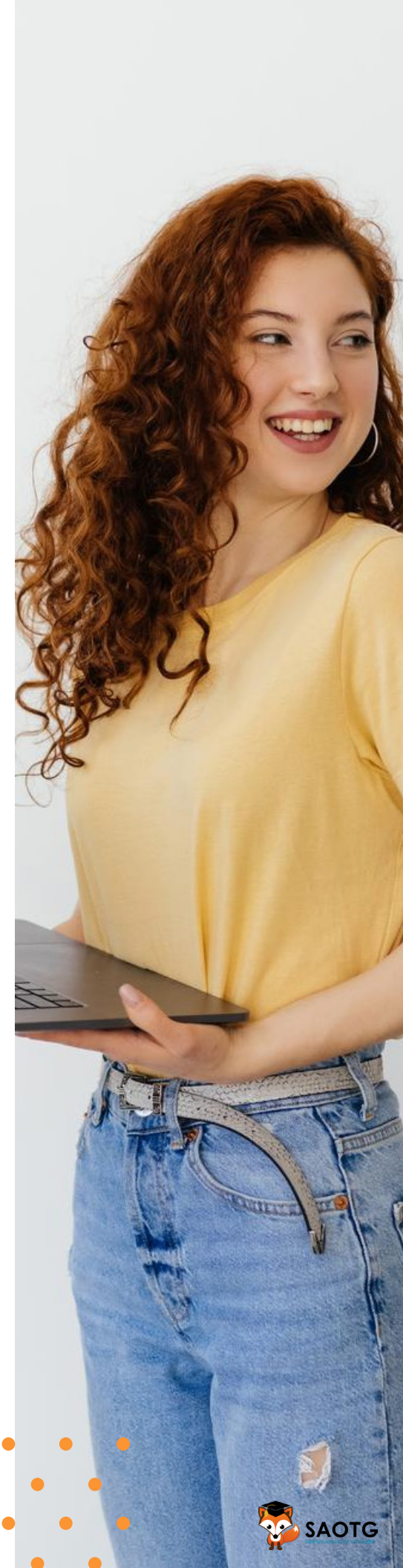
Tactics to Help Students Find Their Why

HELP STUDENTS TRUST THEMSELVES

Help students trust themselves to succeed. When students trust themselves to succeed at a task, they are more likely to challenge themselves in other situations. Be sure to recognize student effort as opposed to results or outcomes. This reinforces that the power lies in the process, which will foster a growth mindset (rather than a fixed mindset) and will encourage the student to carry that confidence into other learning situations.

Make every student feel capable (i.e., self-efficacious). This may be a simple point, but it's surely one of the most important. Some students feel incapable of completing a task before they even try it. The power of phrases like "you can do it" have perhaps been diluted over the years. Try phrases like "you are capable," which speaks to the student's sense of self-worth rather than merely the task at hand.

Control is important in motivating students to engage. Autonomy provides students the opportunity to lead their learning. Adding autonomy gives students the ability to fit what's being learned with their understanding of the world. Increasing autonomy involves looking at the amount of voice and choice provided in a lesson. Voice is giving students a say in their learning and acknowledging the backgrounds, perspectives, opinions, and beliefs of students. Lessons can be tailor-made based on student interests or suggestions. Teachers could poll student interest in given subjects and apply the information to lessons. Another quick way to add voice is by adding discussions or tailoring lessons based on student feedback. Simply asking for student input shows students they are valued, and it boosts intrinsic motivation in the classroom. Instead of limiting students to one learning path, consider providing choices on how they learn the material. Choice boards allow students options to acquire knowledge. Just making sure that students have options in a given lesson increases engagement. Students can pose ideas and explore a topic independently to gain a deeper understanding of a concept.

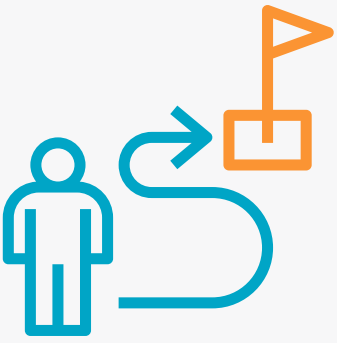


HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP MASTERY ORIENTATION

Students who have high mastery orientation focus on learning, improving, and growing as opposed to grades, competition or appearances. They believe intelligence can be developed. Even if they get poor feedback, they keep on working to achieve their goals and overcome the challenges.

So, unlike performance orientation, mastery orientation boosts intrinsic motivation because it can help students of all grade levels work through failures or setbacks and grow. Encouraging mastery orientation can help teachers and members of students' support teams promote intrinsic motivation in learning.

SETTING GOALS THE RIGHT WAY



People often begin goal discussions by focusing on the question: what do you want? There's a flaw there. It's externally focused, making these goals extremely fragile to changing circumstances. Instead, goal-setting should begin with an inside-out approach. Finding meaning is half the battle for student engagement, and meaning comes from identity.

The word 'identity' in Latin translates to repeated beingness, meaning our actions shape our identity. As Aristotle said, "we are what we repeatedly do." Writing goals and following through on them shapes who we are both internally and externally. Creating a plan for who we wish to become guides our focus, influences our behavior, and builds character. For goal setting to take effect, students must start with why rather than what.

Begin with the question "who do I want to be" rather than "what do I want to achieve." This simple tweak is essential to writing meaningful, sustainable goals. By tying goals to a person's root identity, motivation and persistence are mere byproducts. For example, a student could start with the identity statement, "I am a student who always tries my best." Then, write goals that match that core identity, focusing on the inputs (e.g., maximizing effort, simple systems to increase success) that create the intended output (academic success).

FROM GOALS TO GRIT

Coined by Angela Duckworth in her excellent book Grit, the term has become synonymous with a growth mindset, persistence, and a strong work ethic. In short, grit is the shared trait of the successful, the one key element that allows people to find their path and crush it. In the sections below, we outline the four ways we can encourage students to cultivate grit by honing in on passion, practice, purpose, and hope.

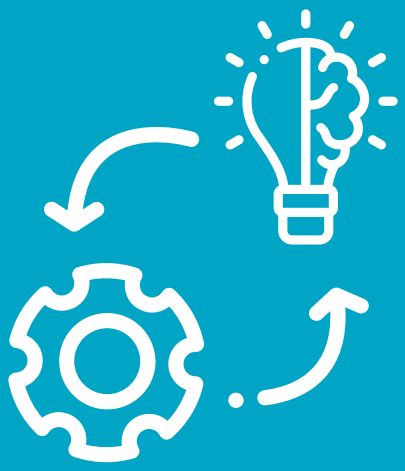
PASSION

Students need to be intrinsically drawn to something to develop grit. Like all motivation, internalization is the most crucial step for students. Year after year, parents call us because their student "just isn't motivated." Inevitably, I remind them that students (and human beings in general) are motivated by their reasons, not yours. It's challenging to watch this process unfold. However, the first step to honing students' grit is to help them develop a passion for something on their own terms. Very few students will be intrinsically motivated by grades alone. Therefore, we must help them develop a more substantial why for succeeding in school.

Our unique focus on solving long-term problems allows us to cultivate passion by developing goals WITH students instead of FOR students. Goals are the foundation for success and the foundation for our unique executive function curriculum. Our goal isn't what Duckworth calls fireworks passion — the kind that comes and goes. We're talking about compass passion — the kind that guides a student through the ups and downs of education. Writing goals at the outset is critical to building passion so we can have sustained practice. The S.M.A.R.T. goals system one widely accepted template for writing goals.

PRACTICE

The science of grit is the science of action. Helping students find a strong why is critical, but only effective if it leads to sustainable action. Once students write meaningful goals, we help them design sustainable systems to achieve them. For example, we focus on organizational and planning strategies that help students get ahead and stay ahead. We design learning strategies to take advantage of a student's unique learning style as we move toward the goal together. Passion is great, but consistent practice is better. The science of grit makes this fact abundantly clear: intrinsic motivation plus consistent practice creates an unbreakable spirit. This works incredibly well on a micro-level (i.e. one school year at a time), but how do we cultivate grit that transcends the grade level or the classroom?



PURPOSE

The key to purpose is to make the goal social, enhancing grit as a by-product. Studies demonstrate the importance of making goals social. We encourage students to develop grit by making goals bigger than themselves.

For example, an athlete can work harder individually during the off-season, knowing that he/she works in service to his/her team's larger goal. Likewise, a student is more likely to show higher, more mature levels of grit if his/her academic goals are aligned with something larger, like a desire to make one's family proud or a larger mission outside of academics.

HOPE

Lastly, a key component in the science of grit is sustained hope, a belief that the future will be better than the present. While we have written plenty about and believe fully in gratitude for one's present circumstances, hope is necessary to develop high levels of grit. How a student responds in moments of adversity or failure is incredibly important as these are the best growth opportunities. Teaching students that failure and frustration are part of the process and encouraging them to view setbacks through a lens of hope is the best way to cultivate grit.

The Last and Most Crucial Step:

Built-in Accountability

An accountability partner is someone who is committed to helping a person achieve his or her goals. This accountability partner plays with the fine line between encouragement and brutal honesty. However, there's one crucial thing to note: having an accountability buddy only works if he/she is reliable and genuinely committed. The accountability partner needs to provide sound guidance throughout each stage of the goal process: writing, planning, tweaking, and achieving. This is why our unique one-on-one academic coaching system works so well. We provide students with the tools they need to succeed, as well as the iterative feedback to adapt to changing circumstances.

Looking for someone to help your students build internal motivation, so they can unleash the potential within and finally have their GPA reflect their potential?

We're here to help.

ENROLL TODAY! →

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