

Modifying Motivation Encouraging Difficult Learners

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Summary

Workplace learning and performance professionals need new strategies and techniques to not only encourage difficult learners to overcome reluctance or resistance to learning, but also to avoid discouragement themselves. This article presents a highly successful methodology based on research and practical applications to do just that. Following a discussion of motivation and the concept of encouragement, twelve skills of encouragement are presented and applied to four specific learning styles or types to illustrate how to motivate difficult learners to become enthusiastic learners. The key to motivating difficult learners depends on the ability to focus on the individual learner's style and to motivate from *within* that style.

Imagine a workplace in which all employees can contribute in a meaningful way and feel valued as human beings—a place where people have a real sense of belonging and high self-esteem. A workplace where employees not only have the ability to do their jobs, but also a *willingness* to do the work. In today's world of intense global competition, we have no choice but to create such a place. Our careers, our companies, and our economic future depend on it. Those of us in the workplace learning and performance profession have an exciting yet challenging opportunity to make sure all learners have both the ability and *willingness* to do their jobs. Both ability and willingness depend on learners having a high level of independence, self-reliance, self-trust, and the capacity to exercise initiative—in a word, self-esteem.

Most learning problems are not due to lack of competence or lack of skill, but to discouragement (Ferguson, 2000). Enthusiastic, encouraged learners have high self-esteem, feel good about their relationships with others, and see the world as a positive place. Difficult, discouraged learners have low self-esteem and see little hope for

the future. Every learner has the innate capacity to be encouraged, to be self-reliant and ready to take on whatever lies ahead. Learners simply need encouragement that is targeted to their needs. Encouragement is the single most important factor in motivating people to learn (Carlson & Thorpe, 1984).

The Fundamental Law of Movement

All learners are motivated—to be “more than,” “better than” they are at the moment. Alfred Adler, the first social and humanistic psychologist, called this motivation the innate striving for significance or belonging; this striving for significance, to belong, to be recognized, is the primary goal of all humans (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964). Abraham Maslow called it the drive toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1987). People are not static—they are in constant movement to better themselves, to contribute, and to have a place in the work group.

Motivation: Movement Along a Continuum

There are basically two ways that we can strive for significance and belonging: in a positive direction or in a negative direction. Of course, we actually fall somewhere in between these two extremes; we all have both positive and negative aspects of our behavior. Exactly where we lie on the continuum in any given moment depends on how encouraged or discouraged we are. Learning problems occur when discouragement sets in. Difficult learners are operating on the negative end of the continuum. (Otherwise, they wouldn't be “difficult.”) Trainers, mentors, and coaches have a unique opportunity to make significant contributions to workplace learning by encouraging those who really need it—to steer them in a different, more cooperative and useful direction, the positive end of the continuum. Encouragement is so crucial that the effect of any training effort is actually determined by the extent to which the learner is or is not encouraged (Dreikurs, 1968).

The Concept of Encouragement

The psychological concept of encouragement originated with Alfred Adler, whose work has greatly impacted just about every contemporary psychological theory. Encouragement is the stimulus for helping others find that sense of belonging that is so vital to their well-being. It is the process of modifying a person's motivation. En-

couraging trainers and mentors facilitate the development of a learner's inner resources and courage toward positive movement. Encouragement builds a person's self-esteem, self-concept, and feelings of self-worth. The goal of encouragement is to aid the individual to move from a philosophy that suggests "I can't" to the more productive "I will." Encouragement is both a condition and a process, and it applies both to the person who becomes courageous and confident and to the process that facilitates that outcome.

Social learning theorists have found that learners who are encouraged, who believe that they can actually learn and apply the knowledge and skill, learn much better, retain more, and perform better on the job than will learners who are not encouraged (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Encouragement is the single most important job skill for anyone who trains, mentors, or coaches others. The tremendous success of encouragement has been proven by decades of research and practical applications in all types of businesses, with organizational leaders, parents, educators, and professionals (Dinkmeyer & Eckstein, 1993; Dreikurs, 1968; Kopp, 1985; Nelson, 1999).

The Skills of Encouragement

The psychiatrist Rudolph Dreikurs (1968) said that we are constantly encouraging or discouraging those around us and thereby contribute to their greater or lesser ability to function. He believed that humans need encouragement, like plants need water.

On the surface, encouragement seems simple enough; in fact, the whole idea of encouragement might sound so simplistic that it borders on the absurd. However, the complexity of the process is little understood and often applied incorrectly. Unfortunately, many otherwise well-intentioned trainers and supervisors who try to encourage fail miserably because they have a misconception about the process; they have not been trained in the concept or skills of encouragement; and unaware of their lack of skill and ability to encourage, they may actually be discouraging.

It is not enough to wish to encourage learners. You need the technical skills to do so. Below are the twelve skills of encouragement that can be learned, practiced, and successfully applied, not only with learners, but also with everyone you come in contact with.

Skill 1: Show Complete Acceptance

A good relationship is the foundation of all learning. An encouraging relationship must be built on an attitude of complete acceptance—what Carl Rogers called "unconditional positive regard" (Rogers, 1961, p. 62). In an unconditional environment,

the learner is accepted as is, without any strings attached. Conditional environments only create discouragement. We all have our own values, beliefs, interests, and abilities and, in order to succeed as trainers, these differences must be accepted. At no time should the trainer assume a “superior” position to the learner’s “inferior” position. This vertical relationship doesn’t allow trainers to encourage or strengthen others, because this would seem to threaten the trainer’s own position. In a training situation, both trainer and learner should behave as equals. Equality implies mutual respect, shared responsibility, and interdependence, but not leaning on someone else.

Skill 2: Express Empathy

One of the most important ingredients in an encouraging learning environment is an open mindedness, a willingness to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, and to feel with the heart of another. Daniel Goleman (1995, p. 43) called empathy, “the fundamental ‘people skill.’” He said, “People who are more empathic are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want” (Goleman, 1995, p. 43). Empathy allows trainers and coaches to temporarily walk in the learner’s shoes. When this happens, the learner’s behavior, thoughts, and feelings make sense. The ability to be sensitive to the learner’s perceptions is one of the premises of encouragement that are so seldom met. Letting learners know you understand them is one of the most encouraging things you can do.

Skill 3: Show Confidence

Encouragement implies an unshakeable faith in the power of all human beings to solve their own problems, to be competent, and to direct their own lives. To be encouraging, trainers must have confidence in the trainee’s abilities, especially the ability to learn. Having the confidence to allow learners to make decisions related to their learning can greatly increase their sense of being actively involved in their training and motivate them to further involvement with the material. As a teacher, W. Edwards Deming, total quality management guru, demonstrated his personal confidence in his students by giving each of them an “A” at the start of the term. In all his years of teaching, he claimed that only one student failed to complete the required course work (Braughton, 1999). Studies have shown repeatedly that trainees’ learning improves considerably if the trainer expresses confidence in their abilities—whether or not the learner has great abilities (McClelland, 1990). Without faith in each learner, trainers have little hope of being encouraging. This is another hard-to-meet prerequisite of encouragement.

Skill 4: Focus on Strengths and Assets

Encouragement involves focusing on any resource that can be turned into a strength or asset. Think of yourself as a talent scout. The ability to identify resources and to see a “diamond in the rough” is essential in the encouragement process (Dinkmeyer & Eckstein, 1993). In the book, *Now Discover Your Strengths*, Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton (2001, p. 26) say, “You will excel only by maximizing your strengths, never by fixing your weaknesses.”

Strengths and assets must be recognized and acknowledged by the trainer and learner. You need to find out all you can about the learner’s prior experiences, skills, knowledge, and interests, give recognition to them, and build on the strengths. Turn any liabilities into assets. Any negative quality can be seen positively. For example, the arrogant learner might also be self-confident; the overly demanding person could be energetic; and the stubborn learner can be steadfast and independent.

Skill 5: Focus on Effort and Improvement

Encouragement also means recognizing effort (not outcome) and improvement (not comparison to prior performance). It’s easy to give recognition for successful task completion. However, it is even more important to systematically encourage learners’ efforts, rather than only the achievements. Encouraging trainers and mentors accept the learners’ level of accomplishment without pressuring them to do more. Too often, expectations are grandiose, unrealistic, and fuel for discouragement. Some trainers believe that by driving and forcing trainees to always do more and do it better, they will learn better and faster. This type of authoritarianism might work in emergencies, but not in the long term. It only sends the message that “You are not enough. You don’t live up to my expectations.” A constant message of dissatisfaction with the learner’s performance only discourages, reduces productivity, and increases resistance.

Skill 6: Facilitate Decision “Doing”

We all engage in decision “making,” even though we don’t always follow through and “do” whatever it is we decide to do. We need extra motivation. Unless we recognize the learners’ basic styles and align with *their* goals, it will be outside their decision “doing” capability and they will not follow through. For example, for people who want to be in control, order is what gives them a sense of belonging and importance. So whatever approach you take, it must help them gain or achieve a sense of order. In other words, allow them a measure of control. If they can experience themselves moving in the direction toward achieving *their* goals (not *our* goals), they will be more likely to experience success and thereby feel encouraged. When you are encouraging

learners, don't do *for* them. Doing for learners (regardless of their style) only results in discouraging them. By doing for them, you are implying that they are not competent to do it themselves.

Also critical for facilitating "doing" is to avoid further discouragement. As you will see when the four learner styles are presented, there are specific areas to avoid when working with each one.

Skill 7: Set Learning Goals

Help learners set goals for the future. Setting goals fosters motivation to learn and results in higher learning achievement (Clarke, 1999). Clarke cites decades of research that shows learning goals that motivate best:

- Incorporate specific standards of performance;
- Are relatively short-term; and
- Are difficult but within the learner's perceived ability level.

It's important that the goals be realistic so that the learner has the ability to perform well. Learning goals perceived as unrealistic will be outside learners' decision "doing" capability, and they will not carry them out. Knowing the prior skills, knowledge, and experience of the trainees will make goal setting fairly easy.

Skill 8: Coach by Encouragement

The purpose of coaching is to redirect behavior and mentally challenge the trainee. Coaching is *not* intended to "do for" the learner or point out mistakes, blame, or criticize—all of which are discouraging. Coaching focuses on effort and improvement. As a trainer, you can coach the learner to change any incorrect actions or redirect the behavior by asking questions or making encouraging statements that offer alternatives, such as these:

- "How else might you do it?"
- "See if this works better for you." (Be specific, explain, and demonstrate.)
- "Why don't you try a different approach?"
- "Let me offer a suggestion."
- "What happens if you don't do that step?"

Skill 9: Give Encouraging Feedback

The purpose of feedback is to build self-esteem through encouragement. Feedback should be specific, positive, and focused on the strengths and assets of the trainee; it should demonstrate acceptance of and confidence in the trainee; and it should recognize effort and improvement. Here are a few examples of encouraging statements to use when giving feedback:

- “It usually takes a couple of practice sessions to master that step. You’ll make it!”
- “Look how much better it went this time.”
- “You’re making progress. Hang in there!”
- “You’re really skilled in. . . .” [something specific]
- “You must feel good about the improvement you’ve made.”
- “You have put a lot of effort into mastering that task.”

Positive statements are appropriate no matter how well or poorly the trainee performed. Always avoid direct criticism. Learners can be very sensitive to it, and you may do more harm than good and end up discouraging.

Giving encouraging feedback also means that you must be aware of the *difference between praise and encouragement*. There is a widespread misconception that praise and encouragement are the same thing. Praise often undermines the intrinsic motivation that leads people to do their best. It increases competition between the successful and unsuccessful learners. Examples of praise would be, “I am so proud of you!” and “I think that performance was great.” Praise is a reward given by an *external* source for success. Notice the difference between the last two examples and the encouraging statements above. Praise tends to develop in the better learners the belief that they are only worthwhile when they are succeeding, so that their successes are never really owned by them and integrated into a positive self-concept. In the discouraged learners, hearing others praised reminds them of their own failures and further discourages them. Using encouraging statements like those listed earlier helps learners internalize the good feelings that come naturally with success. It emphasizes their own responses to success or putting forth a good effort and helps build a positive self-concept. Research shows that individuals who rely on intrinsic motivation are more likely to persist in the face of challenge (Clarke, 1999).

The differences between praise and encouragement can sometimes be difficult to grasp. It may help to keep the following questions in mind when wondering whether the statements you make to learners are praise or encouragement:

1. Am I inspiring self-evaluation or dependence on the evaluation of someone else?
2. Am I focusing on effort and improvement and expressing confidence, or am I focusing on the final outcome?
3. Is my comment promoting perfection or the courage to be imperfect?

Skill 10: Give Encouraging Performance Evaluations

The manner in which learners are evaluated is one of the most powerful factors that can affect motivation. It is essential that criticism and blame not be a part of the trainer/mentor/coach-learner relationship. It is a mistake to think that the best way to help employees learn is to criticize what they do wrong. It does not change behavior. Setting reasonable standards and not demanding perfection helps create a relationship in which learners can feel free to learn to the best of their abilities. The attitude that it is OK to make a mistake—that mistakes are learning experiences, not disasters—helps encourage learners to make a good effort. Emphasize what learners do well and how they are progressing. You can only build on strengths. Encouragement emphasizes what we do right. Learning theorists emphasize that, for training to be successful, learners must achieve success and not be discouraged by failure (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Using encouragement, tests could be graded using C's for "correct" and leaving unmarked the items that are wrong.

Skill 11: Encourage Self-Evaluation

Encouraging trainers try to move from an evaluative position to one in which the learners become more evaluative of themselves. Ideally, learners should be encouraged to assess their own performance *before* the trainer provides any feedback. Simply ask the trainee questions like the following:

- "How do you think it went?"
- "What did you accomplish?"
- "What went well and what did not?"
- "What needs improvement?"

There's a very important reason for self-evaluation: adults tend to take errors personally and to let them affect their self-esteem. Encouraging trainers should give learners a chance to say what went wrong or what needs improvement. Learners are more likely to change their performance if they identify the problem areas themselves. Having learners assess their performance first allows the trainer to focus the feedback on what went right. Learners' growth is stimulated when they learn to trust their own internal evaluation and be less dependent on external evaluation.

Skill 12: Encourage Self-Encouragement

Before you can encourage others, you need to be able to identify your own assets and strengths. You can only encourage others if you are sure of your own value and position, when you are confident of your own ability. The more discouraged you are, the less you can encourage others. Trainers must constantly work on self-encouragement. This requires the *courage to be imperfect*, which means the gracious acceptance of your own inevitable imperfections and failures. Having the courage to be imperfect provides a built-in protection against discouragement. Self-encouragement requires the realization that, in the end, learners are responsible for their own training.

To be self-encouraging, you must be aware of behavior that difficult learners might use that will end up discouraging you. Only if you recognize these behaviors for what they are—signs of discouragement—will you avoid falling into the trap of discouraging yourself.

The Importance of Learner Styles

The twelve encouragement skills can be applied in either a general or specific sense. The fundamental skills are applicable to any situation and to any person. However, difficult learners require an understanding and evaluation of the specific behavioral style of the learner. To modify their motivation (move them to the positive end of the continuum), the encouragement needs to be targeted to the individual. It must be consistent with his or her style.

Learners fall into one or more of four styles or personality priorities (Kefir & Corsini, 1974): (1) the Avoider/Facilitator, (2) the Pleaser/Diplomat, (3) the Controller/Organizer, and (4) the Driver/Achiever. (Readers familiar with David Kolb's Learning Model will recognize these as Diverger, Accomodator, Assimilator, and Converger, respectively.) Two names have been given for each style to represent both ends of the continuum—the discouraged end and the encouraged end (Kopp, 1985). For example, the Controller represents the role played by the discouraged or difficult

learner and the Organizer represents the role played by the same learner when encouraged. They are both striving for belonging and significance by achieving order; “a place for everything, everything in its place” is what motivates them. They just use different strategies and tactics. In striving for order, the Controller will likely try to engage you in a power struggle to exert control over you or the training situation. Behind this behavior lies a learner who has given up on work and sees little use for training. The Controller is motivated and trying to belong, but in a useless and ineffective, self-defeating way. When discouraged, the “kinks in the armor” really stand out. Controllers not only *want* order, they demand it. The Organizer, however, tries to fit in and belong, not by *demanding* to control you or the training situation, but perhaps by using power to positively influence other learners. The striving is not directed toward self-interests, but to help others.

Applying Encouragement Skills to Difficult Learners

The most important thing to keep in mind as you apply encouragement skills to difficult learners is to *always go with their styles*. Don't fight the behavior that you don't like, because you will only intensify it. For example, with Controllers, don't try to take away their control. Encourage Controllers to have some degree of control; help them achieve order in their surroundings and their work, since that is what gives them a feeling of significance and belonging. Encourage them to take on the role of an Organizer.

In the following section the problem behavior is described for each of the four styles. In Tables 1 through 4 you will find each style and the strategy and tactics used by both the discouraged and encouraged roles. For example, Table 1 describes the strategy and tactics of the Avoider/Facilitator style. The left-hand column outlines the strategy and tactics used by the Avoider; the right-hand column lists the strategy and tactics of the Facilitator. For each style, read the description of the problem behavior, the strategy and tactics, and think about how you could encourage the learner to adopt the strategy and tactics of the “encouraged” side. I have provided an encouraging solution for each style, illustrating the application of all twelve encouragement skills. I'm sure you will find other possibilities, so feel free to add your own. An important rule of thumb: *If you don't know what to do, do the unexpected!*

The Avoiders

The Problem

The Avoiders are learners whose motto is, “It is sweet to do nothing.” Comfort is what gives them a feeling of belonging. People who are into comfort love all types of gadgets—anything that will make life easier. These discouraged learners believe two things:

Table 1. Learner Style: Avoider/Facilitator*

Goal: Comfort	
Role: Avoider (<i>Discouraged learner</i>)	Role: Facilitator (<i>Encouraged learner</i>)
Strategy: I must get instant gratification and avoid stress and strain in order to feel belonging and significance.	Strategy: Helping to make life easier and more pleasant for others is my preferred method of gaining a feeling of belonging and significance.
Tactics: I will manipulate, charm, exploit, and flatter in order to sidestep problems and avoid stress.	Tactics: I will be spontaneous, creative, and responsive in order to help others get what they need.

*Adapted from handouts (Kopp, 1985).

"In the long run, nothing good will happen anyway, so I might as well take the easy way," and "If I do what you expect, you will expect more, and that will cause me stress." Stress is to be avoided at all costs. It will be difficult to get Avoiders to "do" because they don't want to take responsibility for their training or job performance. They pay the price of reduced productivity. They will say, "You're the trainer" and will look to you to do for them. You have to make them do. In training or coaching sessions, they might try to manipulate, charm, procrastinate, and flatter you in order to avoid learning or doing. They will claim to be bored, which really means they want you to entertain them. If the training involves task performance, look for them to try to extend the length of the training session and have you do the task for them instead of doing it themselves.

An Encouraging Solution

- Skill 1 Show acceptance by emphasizing a shared responsibility in the learning process, a relationship based on equality, and by assuring them that you will go at *their* pace.
- Skill 2 Empathize by showing you understand the "strain" they're under.
- Skill 3 Express confidence in their ability to master the task. Let them know they can "do" it.
- Skill 4 Since their strengths include good social skills and excelling at putting people at ease, have them help other learners do things. And since Avoiders are good at "taking the easiest course," encourage them to find easier, simpler ways to do something.
- Skill 5 Every time they "do," no matter how small, appreciate the effort. Never tell them they can or should do more.
- Skill 6 Align with *their* goal of comfort. Avoid further discouragement by not doing or saying anything that would stress them. Couch things

in terms of how easy it will be (but only if it is easy), and give them plenty of time to accomplish tasks. Whatever you do, don't do anything *for* them. You may have to point out how they will benefit from "doing."

- Skill 7 Set short-term learning goals. Long-term goals might cause stress. Make sure they agree with the goals, but don't push.
- Skill 8 Be patient when coaching; keep emphasizing that it may take time and there is no hurry.
- Skill 9 When giving feedback, (1) express appreciation for what they do and (2) avoid feedback that inspires dependence on you.
- Skill 10 During performance evaluations, emphasize things they've done. Appreciate progress. Give homework to get them to do.
- Skill 11 For self-evaluations, ask what progress they made; don't ask what they accomplished, as it might cause stress.
- Skill 12 For self-encouragement and to avoid discouraging yourself, do not succumb to flattery and charm, and "do" for them. Realize that you will feel impatient, as you want them to "get on with it," but don't be frustrated by it.

The Pleasers

The Problem

You really have to be alert to Pleasers. Their motto is, "What you want is what you get." They will watch you like a hawk to determine exactly what you want. And they will do anything to see that you get it. For example, they will not admit that they do not understand something, because that would displease you. They desperately want to please and will indulge, please, and gratify you if they can. Pleasers simply have to be liked by others. They find significance by keeping the peace. They may follow the Willie Loman complex (from *Death of a Salesman*). Willie keeps on telling anybody who will listen that the most important thing in life is to be popular. In a training or coaching situation they will go to great lengths to please you and will feel pain if they don't succeed. Pleasers run into all kinds of problems in training. If given two choices, they retreat. How could they possibly risk displeasing you by making the "wrong" choice? They have super god-like goals and accept nothing short of perfection. They will underrate the value of their work and abilities and, unless pushed, will work beneath their abilities. These learners are extremely sensitive to criticism. By giving them good words or bad, you can influence their behavior at any time. Some are so sensitive that they just curl up and wither if criticized. A typical attitude is, "I am embarrassed or humiliated easily. I blush easily. Therefore, the less you know about me, the less you can

Table 2. Learner Style: Pleaser/Diplomat*

Goal: Peace	
Role: Pleaser (<i>Discouraged learner</i>)	Role: Diplomat (<i>Encouraged learner</i>)
Strategy: I must please others in order to feel belonging and security.	Strategy: Helping to keep the peace and solve problems in the world gives me a feeling of significance.
Tactics: I will be over-vigilant to determine what others want and then do it in order to please them. If they don't approve, I will feel totally rejected.	Tactics: I will be receptive, negotiate, facilitate, and seek understanding and agreement in order to keep the peace.

*Adapted from handouts (Kopp, 1985).

criticize me." Many maintain a great façade. When discouragement really sets in, they will assume a disability and avoid the training or task if possible.

They generally have no feeling of, "I am," "I like," or "I want," because they are too focused on what everyone else wants.

An Encouraging Solution

- Skill 1 Show complete acceptance at *all* times by not rejecting anything they say or do.
- Skill 2 Empathize by understanding that they are so focused on what *you* want that they will deny what *they* really need. Ask what *they* like.
- Skill 3 Show confidence by pointing out their capabilities.
- Skill 4 Build on strong points. Pleasers are energetic and have excellent observation skills. When encouraged, they are great advocates and work extremely well in the entertainment and service industries. They're terrific listening posts. Suggest they help other learners with a task. Get them involved.
- Skill 5 Frequently let them know you appreciate their effort and improvement, especially when the outcome isn't particularly good.
- Skill 6 Align with their goal of peace. Let them know what you would like from them so they don't have to guess. To avoid further discouragement, never show that you are displeased. Find something specific they can do for you to allow them to please.
- Skill 7 Set realistic learning goals. Be careful that they do not set super God-like goals. Work to find out what *they* want out of training. Make sure they do not work beneath their abilities.
- Skill 8 When coaching, be specific. Challenge them to think, but don't give choices; suggest alternatives instead. When they say, "Yes, I

- understand," check it out by asking open-ended questions that start with "What," "Why," "When," "Where," or "How."
- Skill 9 Feedback should be very specific and positive. Be energetic yourself.
- Skill 10 When evaluating performance, never indicate you want perfection. Remember the super God-like goals!
- Skill 11 When they conduct a self-evaluation, help them focus on *their performance*—not on what pleases you.
- Skill 12 To avoid discouraging yourself, don't give in to their demands for approval. Be kind but firm, and encourage yourself!

The Controller

The Problem

Controllers can be particularly frustrating. Their primary goal in life is order. Unlike Pleasers, who have super god-like goals, Controllers have only god-like goals. These learners come in two types: those who actively control and those who passively control.

For *active* Controllers, control is a friend. Their motto is, "Everything in its place and a place for everything." They value routine and schedule. In a training situation, they may also try any of these three strategies: controlling through *intellect*; controlling by *being right*; and controlling by *ruling*.

Difficult learners who try to control through *intellect* believe that "The more you know, the more you are." Their motto is, "Knowledge is power." They will tend to lead discussions with you by engaging in intellectualism. You will hear them use words you never heard of. Or they may talk beside the point by being literal about everything.

Learners who control by *being right* have as their motto: "Right is might." These learners believe they are never wrong; their worth depends on being right. In training they like to have guides to tell them what is right. They have difficulty when there are two rights. They often have the "chocolate bar conflict"—damned if they do and damned if they don't—a double bind. And if they have to choose between two evils, they are paralyzed; neither would be right. If you catch them being wrong, they will be devastated. They like to sit in judgment and tend to see everything as right or wrong. They will enjoy doing an evaluation of the training, and of course you, and can be very critical. Often they come to training, not to learn anything, but to prove you are wrong at whatever you try to teach them. They may even use tactics to trap you into making a mistake. They may make a confusing statement and when you say "huh?" they say, "Oh, you weren't listening again." If you're late to the training session, expect to be told exactly how late you are because punctuality is exalted. In training, if there is not an assurance of being right, they will be very cautious and take no risks. Controllers

Table 3. Learner Style: Controller/Organizer*

Goal: Order	
Role: Controller (<i>Discouraged</i> learner)	Role: Organizer (<i>Encouraged</i> learner)
Strategy: I must be in control at all times, or make sure you don't control me, to feel significant, secure, and powerful.	Strategy: Helping the world be an organized and orderly place is my preferred method of gaining a feeling of significance and belonging.
Tactics: I will be cautious, intellectualize, insist on order, predictability, being right, bossing, or simply being against whatever you are for in order to have control.	Tactics: I will be orderly, efficient, knowledgeable, and lead others in solving problems in order to help the world be more organized.

*Adapted from handouts (Kopp, 1985)

fear above all else humiliation or embarrassment. They may keep asking for more and more information so that they don't make a wrong decision.

Those who control by *ruling* have to be the boss. They try to dominate the training or coaching sessions. If pushed, they may be ruthless and resort to intimidation and threats in order to rule.

The second type of Controller tries to control *passively*. Instead of actively controlling, they try to make sure that you do not control them. Control is the enemy. Their motto is, "What you want is what you *won't* get." They are the "aginnners"; whatever you are for, they are against. To avoid being controlled, they often use shyness, sensitivity, weakness, or sickness to get out of situations in which they feel controlled.

An Encouraging Solution

- Skill 1 Showing acceptance requires a relationship built on mutual respect and equality. Otherwise, you could easily get into a power struggle with Controllers. If things get tense, let go your end of the rope and be kind but firm.
- Skill 2 To empathize, understand their need to control, to be right, to rule, to go against whatever you're for.
- Skill 3 Show confidence by letting them be in charge of something; when encouraged, they make good leaders.
- Skill 4 Build on their strengths—sense of order, punctuality, and efficiency.
- Skill 5 Show you appreciate effort and improvement, especially when they make mistakes. Point out the value of learning from mistakes, that perfection is not always a good thing.

- Skill 6 Align with *their* goal of order. Make sure the training is organized and complete. Don't have loose ends. To avoid further discouragement, never surprise, humiliate, or embarrass them.
- Skill 7 Set realistic goals that challenge. Let them take the lead in coming up with goals.
- Skill 8 When coaching, redirect incorrect actions, not by pointing out mistakes, but by asking for alternative ways to do something.
- Skill 9 For feedback, point out some specific skill or ability first. Then appreciate effort and progress.
- Skill 10 For performance evaluations, emphasize what went right and avoid a power struggle over who's right or what's right, who's the boss or who knows the most.
- Skill 11 During their self-evaluations, ask what went well, not what went wrong. Ask them whether they are ready to take a few risks; you might need to encourage risk taking.
- Skill 12 For self-encouragement, expect that they might want a duel, and be alert! Realize *their* need for control and do not be intimidated by their behavior. Realize they may be stubborn and resist your attempt to train them, but don't be frustrated by it. Expect to feel some tension around Controllers.

The Driver

The Problem

Discouraged learners with the style of Driver are super-strivers. They try to fit in and find a sense of belonging through achievement. They have two mottoes: "The difficult I do right away; the impossible a little later" and "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today." They pay the price of feeling overwhelmed, yet their biggest fear is inactivity, leisure, and meaninglessness. As hard as they work, they never complete all of their tasks or assignments. After all, they would have nothing to do tomorrow. Training is a common proving ground—the perfect chance to show their superiority. Training is regarded as something to be conquered, and probably you too. During training they feel entitled to boundless recognition and believe there is no obstacle that they can't overcome through willpower or superior faculties. No task will be too difficult. Any criticism is felt as a hostile attack. They will evaluate their own performance and totally disregard your evaluation of them unless it coincides with their own evaluation. They strive to be number one—best or worst, but always first. If they can't succeed at being number one, they will try to be superior by being the worst. Drivers seek areas where no one challenges. Many adopt asocial ways of being superior because they believe there's room

Table 4. Learner Style: Driver/Achiever*

Goal: Achievement	
Role: Driver (<i>Discouraged learner</i>)	Role: Achiever (<i>Encouraged learner</i>)
Strategy: I must be Number One ("best or worst, but always first") in order to feel significance and belonging.	Strategy: Helping the world and others by taking initiative and being productive gives me a feeling of significance and security.
Tactics: I must be a compulsive workaholic, competitive, ambitious, and aggressive in order to be the best.	Tactics: I will be self-reliant, work hard, and seek to perform my best in order to be productive and contribute to the welfare of others.

*Adapted from handouts (Kopp, 1985).

for only one at the top. They try to be superior in whatever way works. Juvenile delinquents and gang leaders are examples of people trying to be superior in a negative direction. They work hard at being rotten. Organized crime is filled with Drivers.

Since their worth depends on achievement, they believe, "The more I do, the more I'm worth." They are like pole-vaulters in that, when they get over the bar, they say "Raise the bar." They are jugglers with ten balls in motion at one time. They can never relax because they may drop a ball. Drivers may incur the wrath of less productive peers.

An Encouraging Solution

- Skill 1 To show acceptance, establish a sense of equality; never assume a "superior" position or attitude, especially with Drivers. They will try to be *more* superior.
- Skill 2 Empathize with them by understanding that they feel they carry the "weight of the world" on their shoulders.
- Skill 3 To show confidence, recognize their skills and abilities; remind them that they don't have to accomplish everything in one day.
- Skill 4 Build on strengths by recognizing their many accomplishments and the importance of what they've done; they are most concerned about being perceived as successful by others. When encouraged, they can achieve great things.
- Skill 5 Recognize improvement; don't compare to prior performance. They are very competitive, even with themselves, always trying for a new record.
- Skill 6 Align with their goal of achievement; encourage them to meet *their* expectations, but also help them be realistic. Prevent further discouragement by not asking them to do meaningless tasks or to

- learn anything that they can't use immediately; instead, point out the importance of what they are doing and learning.
- Skill 7 Set realistic learning goals. Make sure they don't try to take on too much. Never say that they could accomplish more. Avoid pointing out how well a peer does something. They will try to do it better!
- Skill 8 When coaching, offer alternatives such as, "Why don't you try this approach?" Look for ways to help them feel less burdened. Don't challenge their "superiority."
- Skill 9 When giving feedback, recognize their hard work and effort because they feel entitled to the recognition. Never attempt to debate with them. Under stress, they will hold out no matter what.
- Skill 10 Your evaluation of their performance should only point out what they did well. Make sure nothing comes across as critical. You will be in for a battle.
- Skill 11 For their self-evaluation, allow lots of time for Drivers. They might insist on it anyway.
- Skill 12 For your own encouragement, don't give in to their attempts to conquer you or show their superiority. Be kind but firm. Realize that around Drivers you may feel "inadequate," but don't agree with them!

Conclusion

The theory and practice of encouragement provides a fruitful and systematic approach with which to deal successfully with difficult learners. The possibilities for encouragement are boundless if you follow the basic concepts.

When faced with a difficult learner, nearly every trainer, mentor, or coach can feel abysmally inadequate. Even though people are complex and varied in their behavior, the encouragement approach provides recommendations and solutions that can help bring order and relative simplicity to a complex and otherwise seemingly overwhelming task. If you're wondering whether you can make a difference, the answer is yes. Research shows that learners who have trainers and mentors who encourage them do better than other learners and that, even if you encourage "wrong" or do it just a little, it often helps.

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