



The Secret to SUCCESS

by Mary Garner Ganske

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve the problem of the human race." Calvin Coolidge

Kids who know how to get the work done not only do better in school, they also have happier lives. Here's what it takes to get them motivated.

Unleash a natural love of learning.

There are two types of motivation: *extrinsic* (I'm going to study so I can get an A on my English test), and *intrinsic* (I love French literature and can't wait to study). "There's nothing wrong with being motivated by external rewards - straight As, getting into a good college, even the promise of a new iPod. After all, adults work, at least in part, for the money," says Mel Levin, M.D., author of *The Myth of Laziness*. "But kids should also have one or two subjects that really resonate with them. This builds 'motivation muscle.' Ideally their enthusiasm will spill over into other areas". Feed your child's passions: If she's fascinated by fashion, subscribe to fashion magazines, sign her up for a design class. If he loves to cook, help him look up recipes and prepare dishes for the family.

Be a cheerleader.

Set an upbeat tone. "If parents are eager about learning, children are more likely to be," says Ron Clark, author of *The Essential 55: An Award Winning Educator's Rules for Discovering the Successful Student in Every Child*. "Too many parents give off negative signals. They say, "Fifth grade is going to be really hard" or "I hated math when I was your age." Try to maintain a positive attitude toward your child's teacher. Yes, there are so-so educators, but belittling them in front of your child sends the message that she can slack off in that class. Instead, meet with the teacher. If you're still not satisfied, see a school administrator.

Set realistic expectations.

Focus on effort rather than grades. If your child studies hard for a test and gets three answers wrong, that's fine because he tried. But if he doesn't prepare and gets three wrong, explain that you expect him to put more energy into studying. Insist that he do his homework or read a book for a minimum amount of time each night. (Ask the school what it recommends.)

Empower a diehard procrastinator.

Encourage a foot-dragger to develop her own study routine. "I have children draw lines with the times of day next to them, then fill in what they're going to do each half-hour from the time school lets out until bedtime." says Myrna Shure, author of *Thinking Parent, Thinking Child*. "They're much more likely to comply if it's their own idea". A schedule also takes nagging out of the picture. If your daughter is slotted to do math from 4 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., you don't have to get on her case at 3 p.m., when she's decompressing with a copy of *Us Weekly*.

Don't force kids in over their heads.

Urging your child to overachieve isn't always the best approach. "Children are more motivated when they can accomplish a task without superhuman effort," says Dr. Levine. "Teachers tell me, 'This student will do better in math when he's motivated.' But I say, 'No, he'll get motivated when he starts doing better.'" In other words, the more success you have, the more you want to have. This doesn't mean your child should opt for easy classes or assignments. Just don't push so hard that he gets frustrated and gives up. The same goes for homework. If your son can't complete his science assignment without monumental help from you, either it's too challenging and needs to be altered, or he needs extra instruction from his teacher or tutor.

Help, but not too much.

If your child is having trouble with his homework, it's fine to act as a sounding board or point out which chapters he might reread to find the answer. But don't do the work for him. That undermines motivation ("Why bother working hard when Mom will do it for me?") and chips away at self-confidence ("I can't do it as well as she can, so I'm not going to try".)

Prod - don't push.

Ask an underachiever to come up with ways he can be more diligent. Could he improve a sub par report by proofreading again or adding two more sentences? Rather than saying, "You obviously didn't study enough," when he comes home with a poor grade, say, in a neutral or compassionate voice, "How did you feel when you got that C?" Then ask him to plan a way to be more successful next time. "Most kids don't want negative consequences. They don't want to fail." says Shure.

Demonstrate your own studious side.

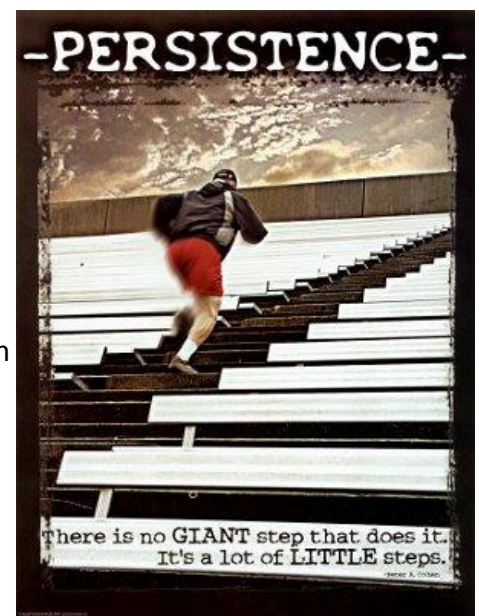
"It's awfully difficult for kids to do their homework while their parents are watching TV," says Dr. Levine. There should be one hour every night, maybe after dinner, when everyone in the family is engaged in something brainy - reading a book, finishing a sudoku puzzle, playing chess. If you've brought work home, or have a volunteer project to complete, be open with your kids about it. "If they see you exhibiting a strong work ethic, they're more likely to develop one as well," says Dr. Levine.

Learn as a family.

Collaborate on activities that require your children to delay gratification and build their stick-to-it-iveness. For example, if you're planning to buy a new car, let your kids check safety records and investigate extras. Last spring, I encouraged my girls to plant a vegetable garden. They spent hours determining what plants do well in our area, poring over seed catalogs, revising garden layouts, then digging, weeding and watering. The final product - a charming and abundant garden - has been a source of delight and pride. That kind of success builds motivation.

Praise instead of punishing.

If your daughter misses half the problems on a math test, you can still celebrate her progress. "What inspires kids is knowing that their parents are proud of them," says Dr. Levine. So display an A+ paper on the fridge or brag about your kids when they're in earshot. Just don't over praise, advised Walsh. Saying "good job" for every worksheet completed dilutes the effect.



If you decide to use monetary rewards, do so sparingly, so the focus stays on accomplishment rather than on material gratification. An occasional surprise - a trip to a batting cage, a new pair of earrings - is enough to underscore your enthusiasm. In my house, I make sure rewards aren't too splashy and are at least a little bit educational - a book of Mad Libs, a knitting kit, a jigsaw puzzle. Whatever you decide, the hope is that success eventually becomes its own reward, that a job well done will give your child the confidence and desire to reach ever higher.