2026 Virtual Faculty Symposium | September 28



Easy Tips and Psychology for Engaging Students *As They Need*

Challenging Disinterest in Virtual Classrooms

Choice, Progress, and Meaning.

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The challenge of student disengagement

Patterns, familiar signs and their likely consequences



01 Early signals

Poor camera engagement

Less authenticity, relationship building, networking and mentorship

Slow or no replies

Weaker teacher ties; feeling less justified in asking for help

02 Withdrawal

No participation in breakouts

Uneven contribution creates group friction

Inconsistent logins and platform use

Guilt → helplessness → avoidance → repeat

03 Learning declines

Abrupt drop in time on page

Key concepts and principles do not sink in

Binge-then-quit effort

More mental exhaustion and burnout; less learning

04 Longer-term costs

Bare-minimum participation and text

Reinforced poor habits; weaker career preparation

Late or missing work

Falling grades, course withdrawal and failure



AUTONOMY

The DESIRE to direct your own life

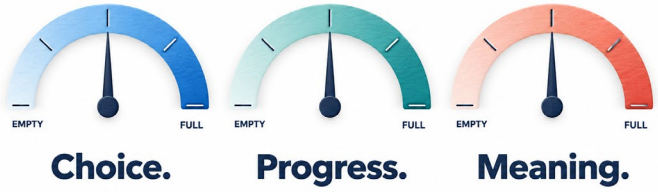
MASTERY

The URGE to make progress / improve

PURPOSE

Desire to be part of something bigger

RULE 1: Intentionally use all three motivational drivers

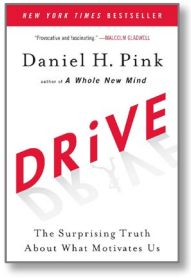


A learner may need different support at different moments.

Choice

Autonomy

Do I have a meaningful say in the work?

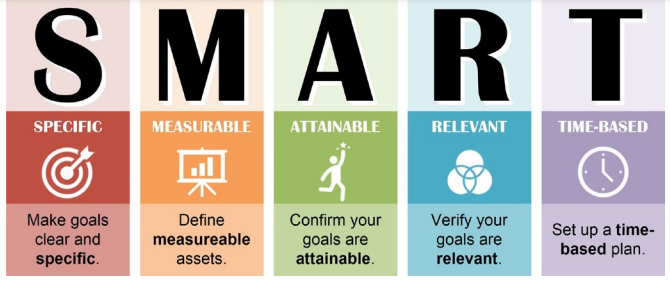


Concepts popularized by: Daniel Pink, in his book Drive

Progress

Mastery

Can I succeed and see myself improving?

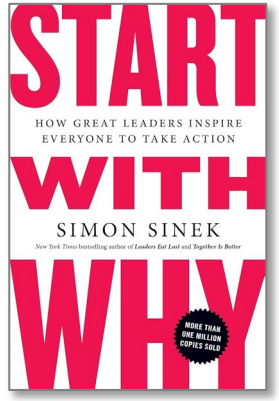


Driven home by Simon Sinek's book: Start with Why

Meaning

Purpose

How does this matter to my goals or to someone else?



Autonomy: add bounded choice



Keep the outcome clear

Offer options (two articles, methods).

Vary format when it fits the learning goal.

Let students choose the order.

Try this wording

"Choose one of these two cases. Show the same four outcomes in a written analysis or a narrated presentation."

Your turn: Make a habit of providing choices

Mastery: make progress visible



Make the next step clear

Show an annotated example.

Add an early milestone.

Allow a low-stakes attempt.

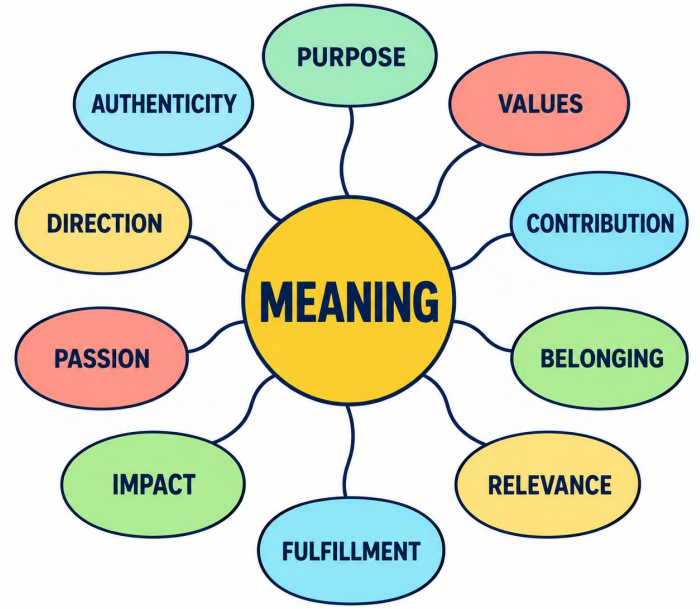
Give an actionable next step.

Try this feedback

"You identified the central problem. Next, connect each recommendation to evidence from the case. The annotated example shows how."

Your Part: Help students see progress sooner

Purpose: clarify the reason



Give the work a reason

A real decision.

A person who benefits.

A goal the learner values.

Put the reason beside the directions.

Try this discussion prompt

"Test your recommendation against perspectives you could encounter in a real team. Use peer replies to find one risk or assumption you missed."

Help This Way: Add one sentence that explains why the work matters.



DON'T KNOW what you DON'T KNOW

DO KNOW what you DON'T KNOW

DO KNOW what you DO KNOW

DON'T KNOW what you DO KNOW

CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE MODEL

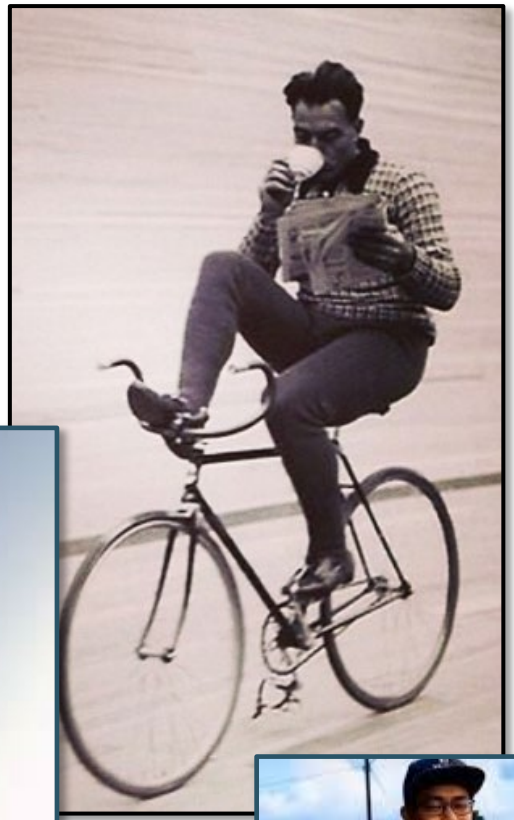
IGNORANT BLISS

PAINFUL AWARENESS

SMOOTH OPERATION

AUTOPILOT CHAMPION















First, always use all three



Second, check the conditional need before augmenting

Observe. Review the Three. Inquire.

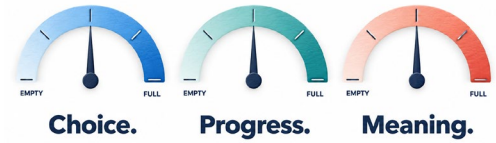
Conscious Competence Model	**Ignorant Bliss**	→	**Painful Awareness**	→	**Smooth Operation**	→	**Autopilot Champion**

Motivational Need

Progress **Choice** **Mastery**

Progress	Choice	Mastery
Is it clear what good work looks like and what to do next? Will steps help?	Does the learner have meaningful ownership? Where can they flex?	Can they explain why this activity matters? Is it relevant?

One change for tomorrow



"In my next course communication, interaction, assignment, or feedback,
I will add _____."

Offer one choice

Keep the learning outcome and expectations clear.

Show one next step

Help the learner recognize progress and continue.

State one real reason

Connect the work to a goal, decision, or person.

OR "For X student, I recognize they might be at this stage, and need more of _____."

Questions/Discussion?

Appendix

Supporting Studies and Citations



1. Robert House’s Path-Goal Theory

Path-Goal Theory looks at how a leader can clear roadblocks based on the worker’s characteristics *and* the nature of the task environment.

- **The Assessment:** The leader analyzes the employee's needs (e.g., locus of control, experience) and the environmental demands (e.g., task structure, formal authority system).
- **The Adjusted Inputs:** The leader chooses from four specific behaviors to optimize motivation and clear the "path" to the goal:
  - **Directive:** Telling the employee exactly what is expected (used when tasks are ambiguous or complex).
  - **Supportive:** Showing concern for the employee’s psychological well-being (used when tasks are stressful, repetitive, or hazardous).
  - **Participative:** Consulting with employees and integrating their suggestions before making a decision (used when employees are highly autonomous or expert).
  - **Achievement-Oriented:** Setting highly challenging goals and expecting high performance (used when dealing with high-capability achievers).

2. The Skill vs. Will Matrix (Max Landsberg)

Derived heavily from the core pillars of situational leadership, the **Skill vs. Will Matrix** is a simplified, highly actionable framework used widely in executive coaching. It breaks down an individual's readiness for a *specific task* into two raw dimensions: **Skill** (experience, training, capability) and **Will** (desire, confidence, motivation).

3. Daniel Goleman’s Six Leadership Styles (Leadership That Gets Results)

Emotional intelligence pioneer Daniel Goleman developed a framework that views leadership styles like golf clubs. An effective leader senses the "climate" and organizational life cycle stage to consciously swap styles.

- **The Adjusted Inputs:** Instead of measuring rigid development steps, the leader assesses the immediate organizational necessity and flips between six emotional inputs:
  - **Pacesetting:** Setting incredibly high standards; "Do as I do, now." *(Best for quick results from highly motivated, competent experts).*
  - **Authoritative (Visionary):** Mobilizing people toward a shared vision; "Come with me." *(Best when a new direction or clear guidance is needed).*
  - **Affiliative:** Creating emotional bonds and harmony; "People come first." *(Best for healing rifts in a team or motivating during stressful times).*
  - **Democratic:** Forging consensus through participation; "What do you think?" *(Best to get buy-in or valuable input from experienced staff).*
  - **Coaching:** Developing people for the future; "Try this." *(Best for helping employees build long-term strengths).*
  - **Coercive (Commanding):** Demanding immediate compliance; "Do what I tell you." *(Best in crisis situations or turnaround scenarios).*

4. Integrated Psychological Approach (James Scouller)

If you want a model that focuses heavily on *how you adjust your internal reactions* rather than just outward managerial checklists, Scouller's model is an excellent modern framework. It breaks leadership into three levels: **Public**, **Private** (1-on-1), and **Personal Leadership**.

- **The Assessment:** The leader must constantly self-reflect on their own inner state (fears, biases, ego) and the individual needs of their team member.
- **The Adjusted Inputs:** In the **Private Leadership** tier, the leader dynamically alters their 1-on-1 input across different tasks. They choose whether they need to provide a psychological response (building trust, active listening), a behavioral input (setting goals, course-correcting), or an intellectual input (problem-solving, ideating) depending on where the employee's development is blocked.

Autonomy, mastery, and purpose originate as a popular summary of intrinsic motivation popularized by Daniel Pink (*Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, 2009), which synthesizes decades of empirical research in psychology—most notably **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**.

Foundational Theoretical Research (Self-Determination Theory)

Pink's triad maps directly to SDT's core psychological needs (autonomy, competence/mastery, and relatedness/purpose-adjacent service).

Key academic anchors:

- **Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985).** *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. Plenum Press.
    - *Core contribution:* Establishes that human beings have innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- **Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000).** "Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being." *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
    - *Core contribution:* Landmark peer-reviewed paper showing how autonomous motivation drives persistence, performance, and psychological health compared to controlled (extrinsically rewarded) motivation.
- **Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (1999).** "A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation." *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(6), 627–668.
    - *Core contribution:* Proves tangible rewards frequently undermine intrinsic motivation for interesting or complex tasks.

Empirical/Applied Research on the Triad & Workplace/Clinical Contexts

- **Phipps-Taylor, M., & Shortell, S. M. (2020).** "A Novel Instrument for Integrated Measurement and Evaluation of Nonfinancial Motivators in Accountable Care Organizations." Published via PMC.
    - *Context:* Examines mastery and autonomy as nonfinancial drivers for clinician behavior change.
- **Harvard Business Review (HBR) / Applied Field Studies** (e.g., studies referenced in GrowthSpace Research on Autonomy).
    - *Finding:* Higher structural autonomy correlates with measurable performance gains (approx. 20% performance/engagement lift in knowledge work).
- **State Human Resources (Washington Office of Financial Management) (2018).** *RAMP: A Model of Intrinsic Motivation*.
    - *Context:* Institutional government framework adapting SDT, Maslow, and Pink (Relationships, Autonomy, Mastery, Purpose) into public-sector employee retention/engagement metrics.

Academic/Clinical Translation Papers

- **Clinical Legal Education Framework (2010/2016):** ResearchGate Publication on Autonomy-Mastery-Purpose in Legal Ed. Links Pink's Type I behavior tripod to curriculum design and student engagement.

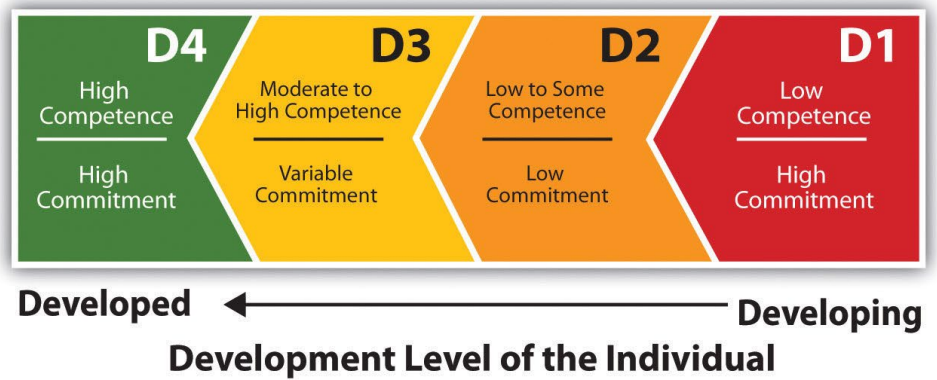
For **Any** Challenge or Opportunity



Situational Leadership

- Think and build for the long term
  - How will I feel about this in..
  - 2 weeks, 2 months, 2 years, 20 years
- Correct quickly but with kindness
- Act in line with principles and values
- Know your team – roles, skills, abilities, goals, needs, and varying situations
- Be CAREFUL mixing personal & business
- Study Blanchard's Situational Leadership





Situational Leadership

Kenneth Blanchard and Paul Hersey's **Situational Leadership (SLII)** model focuses heavily on the employee's internal psychological state (competence and commitment)

The concept of contingency leadership — that there is no single "best" way to lead, and that your behavior must pivot based on the development, maturity, or environment of the person you are managing.

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3. Daniel Goleman's Six Leadership Styles (Leadership That Gets Results) views leadership styles like golf clubs. An effective leader senses the "climate" and organizational life cycle stage to consciously swap styles
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