

Motivating Kids: A Simple, Powerful Approach

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Someone once said, "You can't motivate anyone, you can only connect with what motivates them." In his book, The Color Code, Taylor Hartman, psychologist, trainer, and leadership coach, gives us a simple tool that's so powerful that it will change how you think about motivating kids to get the results you want.

Hartman's theory is that each person, from birth, is blessed with a core motive---an intense desire to operate from a certain perspective. Using the colors Red, Blue, White, and Yellow to represent four distinct personality types, here's how He describes each personality*:

- **Reds have a drive for power and productivity.** From a very early age, they know how to take charge and make things happen. Red strengths include that they tend to be confident, determined, logical, and visionary individuals. However, they can also be bossy, impatient, arrogant, argumentative, and focused on themselves.
- **Blues are driven to achieve intimacy and closeness.** They really want to get to know people, have strong feelings, and enjoy talking about the daily details of life. Blue are creative, caring, reliable, loyal, sincere, and committed to serving others. On the flip side, they tend to be judgmental, worry prone, doubtful, and moody, and they often have unrealistic expectations.
- **Whites strive for peace and harmony.** They're independent, contented

individuals who ask little of those around them. Whites are insightful, flexible, tolerant, easy-going, patient, and kind. But whites tend to avoid conflict at all costs, and are indecisive and silently stubborn. They may also "explode" because their need for peace causes them to hold things in until there are so many things bothering them that just one more problem pushes them over the edge.

- **Yellows are driven to have fun and enjoy life in the present moment.** They wake up happy and are simply fun to be around. Yellows are outgoing, enthusiastic, optimistic, popular, and trusting. However, they tend to avoid facing facts and can be impulsive, undisciplined, disorganized, and uncommitted.

The Color Code, an engaging book with memorable anecdotes, has a 45-question profile you can take to determine true color (you can take the online test at <http://www.thecolorcode.com>). While some find that they're a blend of two or more of the above colors, Hartman stresses that you're dominant in only one. He also points out that since each person is born a particular personality type, it's useless to wish for something different (it would be like wishing for different eyes). Rather, he suggests that we each must learn do three things:

1. Embrace our own color, valuing our strengths and facing limitations.
2. Work to acquire some of the other colors' strengths.
3. Learn how to connect with colors different from our own.

So what does all this mean from a teaching perspective? Teachers can make a significant impact on helping children to value the gifts of their personality, to face their limitations, and to acquire new strengths. They can also teach their students how to reach out to peers that are different from themselves.

Applying color code principles helps you connect with kids' instincts --- inner drives that, once addressed, can be the key to

* Summarized with permission from: Hartman, T. (1998). The Color Code. New York, New York: Scribner.

success. For example, in his parenting tapes, Hartman gives a striking example of the beauty of applying Color Code principles. He speaks about the trials of a Red parent with a Blue child. Red parents, he explains, tend to lecture impatiently on how to be efficient and get things done quickly. On the other hand, Blue children tend to be obedient, want nothing more than to please, and can be very hard on themselves. Red parents who continue to lecture Blue children are not only wasting their time, they may be hurting self esteem. Blue children need only simple correction, and they will work hard to improve because of their innate desire for perfection.

Think about the above example in the context of a Red teacher with a Blue child. The same principles apply.

Perhaps my favorite example that Hartman gives is that of dealing with the Yellow, fun-oriented child. He suggests that if you see a Yellow child do something well, you say, "I love how you do this!" rather than, "You have such potential!". Yellow children thrive on being adored, but may balk at the thought of, "More potential?..... sounds like WORK to me!".

It makes sense that what motivates one personality doesn't necessarily work for another. Ponder on your own personality's color and that of some of the other people and children in your life. Can you see how

having this type of insight helps you realize why some relationships are easier for you than others? And how you might be tough for some other personalities to understand?

There are numerous personality profiles out there (e.g.; Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, DiSC®, etc). Each is designed to help us deal with diverse personalities. But Hartman's Color Code is the only one based on motive and the only one that's easy to introduce and learn. Unlike these other tools that use abstract terms like "sensing, perceiving, judging" and "dominance, influence, steadiness", Hartman keeps it simple. Using colors like Red, Blue, White, and Yellow makes it easy for the brain to grasp and remember. The result is that both adults and children can readily learn key concepts and begin to apply Color Code principles to identify strengths and limitations, to connect with diverse personalities, and to develop character.

If you find this article to be at all intriguing, I encourage you to learn more by reading the book, visiting the web page, or attending a seminar. I have described the framework for Hartman's theory. However, there are many helpful insights and strategies that are essential to using Color Code principles successfully. Once you've mastered these, you will see the rewards of replacing anger and frustration due to personality differences with understanding, progress, and achievement.

For more on the *Color Code*®, and to take the personality test go to www.hartmancommunications.com

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