

Meaningful Work, Motivation and 'The Progress Principle': The Power of Doing What We Love and Loving What We Do

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"If I could make a living out of lovin' you I'd be a millionaire in a week or two I'd be doin' what I love and lovin' what I do If I could make a living out of lovin' you."

~ Roger Murrah, Alan Jackson, Keith Stegall

"What did you do this summer?" is a familiar question that I am sure you heard repeated by many in the first few days of school. I know I certainly did. So much so, that I decided to adapt it slightly as the inspiration for my first article for the 2019-2020 school year: "What did you learn this summer?" (After all, isn't it much more inclusive anyway? Even those of us who didn't do much of anything have as great a chance to provide an AWESOME answer to that one.)

As I may have mentioned before, some of my best summer learning comes as a result of my week spent with teacher leaders from across Atlantic Canada at our annual Developing Successful Schools (DSS) Conference at Mount Alison University. It was there that our facilitator, Kristin Anderson, introduced me to a little book called "The Progress Principle" by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer. This wee book fueled my summer learning from that point forward and was foundational in three of my four "first week of school" workshops for teachers in August.

First, let me share that the authors, Teresa and Steve, work together at Harvard. Teresa's background is in chemistry and business. Steve is a developmental psychologist. Together, their research (recognized and celebrated by Harvard Business Review and the New York Times) has focused on what motivates people to work. While there is no question that they are focusing on adults in work contexts, the more I read, the more I connected their findings to previous learning with students and formative assessment practices in my own studies and classroom. Here are a few highlights:

- The single biggest motivator for people is to 'work on meaningful work'. (We don't have to be finding a cure for cancer necessarily, but we do have to be able to connect for ourselves how what we do makes a difference.) If this is true, even really hard tasks can be motivating.
- The perception of making progress or 'forward

momentum' on that meaningful work is key. When we suffer setbacks or feel that we are 'stuck' we become frustrated and that impacts our perception of satisfaction and emotion surrounding the work.

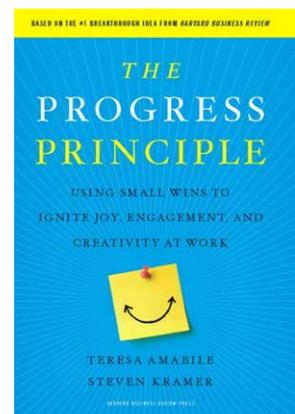
- The two most common distractions to creativity and perceptions of making 'progress' on our meaningful work are: meaningless tasks and toxic relationships.
- The two forces that can enable progress are defined by the authors as 'catalysts' (clear goals and autonomy) and 'nourishers' (interpersonal events that uplift workers such as encouragement and demonstrated respect and collegiality).

As I reflected on these four points, I realized that much of what was written certainly applies to my own experience and much of what I observe as I watch master teachers at work in their classrooms. What do you think? What lessons might the "Progress Principle" have to your work? Your student's work? I'd love to hear your thoughts!

Ardith

Book Giveaway

Tweak your interest? Drop me an email with the subject line: 'Book Giveaway' and I'll send you a copy of "The Progress Principle" for you to read more!



References:

<http://www.progressprinciple.com/>

Amabile, T.M. (1997). Motivating creativity in organizations: On doing what you love and loving what you do. *California Management Review*, 40, 39-58.