

# 1 First Key

## Arouse an eager want

From Dale Carnegie's  
*How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936)

*The rest of us are just like you: we are interested in what we want.*

~ Dale Carnegie, author

## First Key: Arouse an eager want

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I begin my motivation seminars with this question: why are you here? The typical responses range from “I want more tools” to “motivate kids” to “my administrator made me come” to “there’s free food.” My reply to the responses is simply this: you are here because you choose to be here. People only do what they want. Now, you may say if I do not do what my principal tells me to do, then I will get fired or demoted. That may be true, but you still have a choice. You can do what your principal has told you to do or you can choose not to do it. Either way, you have chosen. If you are robbed, you gave the robber your money because you chose to do so – the other option was getting hurt, something you wisely chose not to do. Students choose to do the work because if they do not, they might be scolded. Other kids choose not to do the work because not doing it is better than the scolding. Dale Carnegie, in his groundbreaking book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) said it like this:

I often went fishing up in Maine during the summer. Personally I am very fond of strawberries and cream, but I have found that for some strange reason, fish prefer worms. So when I went fishing, I didn’t think about what I wanted. I thought about

what they wanted. I didn't bait the hook with strawberries and cream. Rather, I dangled a worm or a grasshopper in front of the fish and said: "Wouldn't you like to have this?" . . . Why talk about what we want? That is childish. Absurd. Of course, you are interested in what you want. You are eternally interested in it. But no one else is. The rest of us are just like you: we are interested in what we want. So the only way on earth to influence other people is to talk about what they want and show them how to get it.

The reason participants attend motivation seminars is the same reason you are reading this book: you want to. You can choose to read or not to read (sounds very Hamlet-ish, doesn't it!). Just like the students in your room, they either choose to engage in the learning or put their heads down on the desk. The important thing to remember is that people do things because they want to. Whether they admit it or not, the reality is that kids listen because they want to and they zone out because they want to. This is so empowering. It reminds me of a metaphor my pastor often uses in speaking about getting people to change behaviors and thought patterns. He says that it is difficult to move a parked car. What he means is that it takes so much more energy and strength to move a parked vehicle than to move a car that is already in motion. People who are excited about church, my pastor continues, and willing to serve in the community are easier to work with in terms of changing attitudes and mindsets than those people who would rather just sit in church on Sundays. Believing people are unmotivated, which is analogous to the parked car, makes it difficult to move them, but knowing that people are always motivated, which is analogous to the moving car, means that you simply need to redirect that movement. All you have to do, using Carnegie's words, is arouse an eager want.

Easier said than done. How do you arouse an eager desire to learn in a student?

## **Suggestions**

**1. Know why you are teaching what you are teaching.** I know, it sounds so elementary, but it is often so obvious, it is overlooked. Educators are often asked by their students, "Why do I have to learn this?" A typical answer is: "because it's on the \_\_\_\_\_" (you get 10 points if you said 'test'). An equally poor response is: "because it's part of the curriculum."

*Some Ways to Learn Student Interests*

1. *Ask them. Most obvious answers are often overlooked. Simply asking the students, either alone or as a whole group, what they like to do yields great results.*
2. *Index Cards. Have each child write his name, address, and email info on one side of an index card, and on the other side his interests, hobbies, strengths, etc.*
3. *Four Corners. One activity is a theme in each corner of your room represented by a picture or word, things like sports, music, art, and outdoors. Each child chooses where she wants to go. Finish with them talking about why they chose that corner.*
4. *Use Team Building activities. There are too many to list here, so I suggest searching the Internet for specific ideas. Type "team building" into Google or Yahoo! for activities.*

Do you know why you taught yesterday's lesson? Can you explain why you are teaching the dinosaur unit or the Gary Paulsen unit, or the causes of World War II? I remember teaching prepositions to my seventh grade class. After a brief whole group lesson and practice, each student was given a worksheet (I know, how horrible!) to practice independently. As they were working, one struggling student raised his hand and said, "Mr. Fenn, why do I have to know prepositions? I'm going to be a mechanic like my dad." I replied, "As a mechanic, you are going to have to read and write contracts, service agreements, requisitions, and auto reports. With the misuse or incorrect usage of a preposition, like this part goes **on** the dealy or this part goes **under** the dealy, you could create a huge, expensive mess." He looked at me, smiled

and nodded, and said, "Good point." Then he continued to understand the prepositions. Regardless of the response, I was clear why teaching parts of speech was important. One of the most powerful influences on a student is a caring adult. Put these two together and you get something like this: Because Mrs. Soto cares about me and she thinks that learning about the properties of light is important, then I think it's important, too. The end result is that the student's want has been aroused.

**2. Tap into the student's interest.** Find out what your students are interested in and use that as a pathway to the learning objective. Keep in mind that we are specifically concerned with a few students who are not engaged in the

lesson, so we're not talking about creating multiple lessons. This is simply differentiating by interest. At the end of a school year, I was training high school teachers in a district about flexible grouping and using interest as a way to group students. I asked the teachers to write each student's name from one class onto index cards. Then I asked each teacher to group the students by interest. One teacher asked, "Do you mean what they are interested in as far as academics?" I replied, "No. In general, what does each kid like to do? Does he like cars, movies, sports, a certain style of music?" The teacher looked at me puzzled, "I don't know what they're interested in." I smiled, thinking she didn't understand what I was asking, so I repeated, "You know, what do the kids like to do in their spare time? Do they listen to a music group, play guitar, skateboard, play basketball, work on their cars? What are they interested in?" She shrugged and said she didn't know. I was aghast. It was May. She had been with those same students for eight months and did not know what they liked to do outside of the classroom. Another teacher said she didn't want to know what they did outside of class, specifically at parties. I agree, I don't either, but I do want to know what they do when they go home. Another teacher stated that she didn't care what her students were interested in. That is an example of a teacher teaching a subject rather than students, and does not tap into the student's interest.

I remember having a few students who were not at all interested in reading *The Outsiders*, but they would spend hours practicing "grinds" on their skateboards, falling off and getting back on. Hours. Every day, they'd leave school and find a parking lot and skate on the curb or down steps. The point is, they were motivated; they just weren't motivated to do what I wanted them to do. So, I used their sport as a way to hook them into the lessons, and thereby redirect their motivation to the learning instead of doodling or sleeping. The examples I used in class involved skateboarding or famous skateboarders. I even had one of the students bring his board into school, which I had to get permission for, and have him show me a trick. The lesson on *The Outsiders* suddenly was interesting because they connected themselves as skateboarders perceived by adults as "untrustworthy," "unmotivated," and "lazy" to Ponyboy and the Greasers, characters in *The Outsiders*.

Kids who go to church are no different in terms of motivation from kids who do not, as Pastor Joseph Jones has found. In his book *Dreams 2 Destiny* (2006), Jones, in an effort to keep kids passionate for church, uses a very simple method: find out what kids like to do and throw God in the mix.

**3. Make tasks inherently engaging.** Marzano (2001) states that creating activities that are inherently engaging motivates students to want to do them. The point is to make an ordinary activity, lesson, or task fun. An example of this is when I began conducting motivation seminars I had an activity near the end of the day where participants determined which keys addressed which behaviors. The activity was bland. It was a straight-forward form in which participants would work together on the activity. After reading my own notes, I realized that this activity needed to be engaging. So, I developed a game and a game board, which was simply an oversized worksheet. There were game cards and a 20-sided die. The result: participants suddenly perked up and focused more intently. The only change was that the bland activity was morphed into an engaging task.

There are countless examples of mundane lessons turned into engaging activities. A suggestion is to do an Internet search of your grade level, subject, and lesson. Don't forget about the wealth of the people in your own building. Ask your colleagues how they have taught a particular lesson. I have often asked teachers who do not teach language arts how they might teach a certain concept. Physical education and unified art teachers (music, art, tech ed, etc.), I have found, have a treasure trove of engaging tasks. For example, I was talking to a colleague of mine, a P.E. teacher, about a lesson on vocabulary I was trying to do. I explained that it seemed pretty boring. He began telling me of an idea he recently used in his health class where he put answers into inflated balloons and made the lesson into detective-type tasks. I can't remember at all what his lesson was, but I took his idea and used it in my lesson. I put the students in groups, each with five of the vocabulary words. The words and definitions I rolled up and put into inflated balloons. Each group received a folder with Mission: Vocabulary printed on it while I played the "Mission Impossible" theme song. The groups were to use all of their vocab words correctly in sentences and find pictures from magazines (old magazines from the library) that portrayed the word. They had to get to the words and their definitions by quietly getting them from the balloon (I gave the group who popped the balloon the quietest 50 points; they never asked "50 points for what?" – I made that part up and they didn't ask!). I didn't hear one loud pop as they quietly "opened" their balloons and began working on the task. All of this came from a colleague who gave me a great idea.

**4. Raise curiosity.** Jensen (1996) states that our brains want to know things; therefore, using curiosity to engage students is very powerful. Highly curious people will initiate and follow through on mastering a concept or skill

in which they are interested with more satisfaction and with a higher standard of excellence than people indifferent about a concept or skill (Appleton, 2005). Why do you think that tabloids are so popular? Why is Elvis still being seen at local gas stations and why are the conspiracy theories running rampant? Because our brains seek novelty. In short, we are curious creatures who follow our own curiosity. A few ideas in piquing curiosity are listed below:

**a. Ask a question.** Questions require answers. Many great teachers I have observed begin with a question just to hook the kids into the upcoming lesson. Questions like, “Why are plants green?”, “How does the author know about the old West when she’s never been there?”, “Was slavery really the cause of the Civil War?”, and “In what ways do we use math every day?”

**b. Make an untrue statement.** Starting the class with some “new” information about an established truth works wonders in arousing interest. I once began a class by stating that writing was a useless activity and we shouldn’t be teaching it in school. Many kids were excited and thought of this as a way not to do any writing. Others were incredulous at the idea while others knew what I was up to and played along. The outcome I was looking for in that untrue statement was to get the students to see it as untrue. It got them talking about a subject that some rarely talk about. The caution is to remain neutral in what is regarded as established truth and what is personal conviction (i.e., politics and religion, primarily).

**c. Make true statements about “established” truths.** Kids learn on a continuum from kindergarten to high school. Although many of the same concepts are taught in all grade levels, they are taught in varying degrees of depth, understanding, applicability, and generalization. For instance, in younger grades we teach that all plants need sunlight to grow, which is kind of true. There are plants on the bottom of the ocean where there is no sunlight and they grow just fine. So, the teacher might begin with a statement like: Not all plants need sunlight to grow. Some students may have already learned that, and there will likely be a majority who have not. Either way, those who don’t know it are intrigued because it is antithetical to their knowledge of plants and sunshine, and to those who do know it, they feel very competent in their knowledge.

**5. Engage strong emotions.** Emotions are the gatekeepers to learning (Goleman, 1995). Memory and learning are founded on our emotions. Think about certain events in your life. How many are marked by a strong emotion? Likely, all of them. People remember things not in categories, alphabetical listings, or neat file folders, but rather, we remember things based on emotional connections. Jensen (1996) says that engaging students' emotions in a positive way will enhance their motivational orientation toward the learning. Using drama, personal stories, games, music, and role-play are examples of tapping into emotions. People are driven to act on their emotions because they are compelling decision-makers (Jensen, 1996). Emotions influence selective attention (what am I going to pay attention to?), event interpretation (how a student perceives an event, whether it is positive or negative), motivation, prediction, recall, decision-making, problem-solving, and learning (Jensen, 1996).

**6. Utilize different learning modalities and styles.** Since all people learn differently, as educators we need to teach using the different ways in which students learn, like utilizing multiple intelligences. Also, there are four basic learning modalities, what I refer to as intake modes because it is how information is brought into the brain, or, how we intake information. These intake modes are audio, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile. When students know that you are going to present content in ways other than just talking (audio), then they will be likely to direct their motivation toward that content (Jensen, 1996). Once the information has entered the students' minds, they need to process that information to make it knowledge. These are called learning styles and have many different names, but they all fall into four basic categories: doer, thinker, observer, and personalizer. Jensen (1996) states that providing choices in how learners learn (i.e., letting students engage in the content through their learning style), will be more accessible to the student and thus, more engaging.