

Why do human beings ENGAGE?

26 Impulses That Sustain Engagement

ONE. COMPLIANCE

A sense of duty or obligation; assignments that contribute to a goal; assignments from an assignor that counts (as a result of affection or consequence). Likely to produce procedural engagement.

- "I need to do it."
- Mowing the lawn because my dad told me to; finish a course because I want to graduate.

TWO. GAP AWARENESS

Exposure to high standards or quality performance may motivate improvement; quantified self data compared to your own performance or top performers. Bob Lenz, Buck Institute, said, "Once a new group sees the previous bar that has been set they are highly motivated to beat it not copy it; they have a clear understanding of what they need to learn to do it and their sense of competition inspires high engagement."

- "I need to get my 10,000 steps in today." "Wow, that is so much better than mine."
- A Fitbit reminder to walk up the stairs; an anchor paper creates a picture of what good looks like; Uber raises the bar in transportation convenience.

THREE. CURIOSITY

Time and permission allow curiosity to flourish. Asking good questions rather than providing quick answers can bolster curiosity.

- "I wonder how plastic is made?" "I didn't expect to see that here."
- Projects where students can pick the topic; surprising merchandise at Costco (creating the, "I wonder what will be there next time" suspense).

FOUR. INTRIGUE

Novelty and variety can spark curiosity. If curiosity is intrinsic, intrigue is an external stimuli that sparks interest, makes a connection, initiates engagement—and intrigue expert Sam Horn suggests a good three part question to do all three.

- Did you know? Have you ever? What if?
- Shocking experience; unexpected opening; a great question.

FIVE. CHALLENGE

A well constructed task, prompt, or status check can promote critical thinking and engagement. Periodic performance challenges (e.g., game, race, concert, recital, speech, demonstration) can produce positive stress and sustained engagement. A well constructed task promotes conceptual not just procedural understanding.

- "How will we ever be ready for this concert?" "What an interesting question."
- Text+1 asks students to read one text in light of another; Reynoldsburg High design process; Spartan Race poses unique physical challenges.

SIX. CRAFTSMANSHIP

Doing things well, taking pride in quality. The desire to develop a quality product, driven by a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, can encourage engagement. Constructive intermediate feedback on a production task can promote persistence and improve performance.

- "I can't believe you made that!" "After some critical feedback we published a great paper."
- Quality publications from the Journalism Program at Palo Alto High; cool maker projects.

SEVEN. CONTRIBUTION

Creating something of value, beauty, importance for the world. Ron Berger, Expeditionary Learning, noted that the act of production can yield a combination of craftsmanship (#5) and contribution.

- "Your OpEd made me think differently about the issue." "The video went viral and alerted the world to the problem."
- Ron Berger's famous Austin's butterfly video.

EIGHT. AUTHENTIC

John Larmer, Buck Institute, discusses the importance of real and authentic work, "Work has a direct impact on or use in the real world." That suggests work focused on real problems, producing real products of real value, for real audiences. Bob Lenz said, "Fostering curiosity through inquiry and allowing students to choose their topic or product has proven to make a difference in motivation."

- "We did important work for a real client."
- Projects at NYCISchool for business clients; High Tech High projects.

NINE. REFLECTION

Periodic reflection builds appreciation for progress made. Building a portfolio of production artifacts, a sash of badges, or a collection of digital tokens denotes progress.

- "That was hard but we learned a lot." "My writing has improved so much this year."
- Student led conferences; annual performance review.

TEN. CONSEQUENCE

Stressing why content matters, says game-based learning expert Sasha Barab, can produce consequential engagement where learners may even develop a sense of pride that they used their knowledge and skills to achieve meaningful ends.

- "I need to finish because this matters." "I need to pass this test to gain a professional credential."
- Training for a Race for the Cure; meeting with beneficiaries of community service; project on energy, environment and the economy at Reynoldsburg High.

ELEVEN. FEAR

Related to compliance (#1) and the negative side of consequence (#9), fear can capture and keep attention. It may be fun at the movies, but it's not a constructive long-term engagement strategy.

- "I'm going to smack you the next time you touch that." "I'm keeping my head down and try not to get fired."
- Corporal punishment; a boss who always threatens to fire people.

TWELVE. BURN

People with a fire lit under them. Dave Potter, VIF International Education, suggested that this burning desire is a combination of frustration, passion, outrage for a Cause (#24), Consequence (#10), and Challenge (#5). If too much anger is involved, a burning passion can be corrosive and flame-out quickly or turn into vengeance.

- Malcolm X said, "There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution."
- Malala Yousafzai's Nobel Prize winning struggle against the suppression of children.

THIRTEEN. COLLABORATION

Encouraging two or more people build, attempt, or learn something together can boost engagement by creating a shared goal and it can enhance knowledge creation by sharing experiences and taking on asymmetry roles.

- "It wasn't easy but we accomplished more as a team."
- Team projects; addiction recovery group; professional learning community.

FOURTEEN. COMPETITION

The observation of public, goal accomplishment, and competition with others can be highly motivating for some. Public recognition (on a leaderboard or in article) can motivate performance and persistence for some.

- "I moved up to #3 on the leaderboard." "I'm going to beat Phil this time."
- Game leaderboards; prize competition leaderboards; classroom behavior management systems.

FIFTEEN. FLOW

Meaningful practice can create what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called flow, an intense and focused concentration where time seems to stand still.

- "Time flies when I'm practicing."
- Games callbrate difficulty to maintain flow experience.

SIXTEEN. FUN

According to a global Nielsen Survey of Trust in Advertising almost half of the respondents said that humor resonates with them more than any other content approach. Many people enjoy the challenges, positive associations, and unexpected rewards of games.

- "I love that show." "I can't stop playing that game."
- Candy Crush gets a billion plays a day because it is accessible, polished, playable in short frustration-relief cycles.

SEVENTEEN. AGENCY

The ability to control some context variables, to direct one's own experience, develops a sense of ownership and can be highly motivating through challenge growth progressions. Real voice and choice can be highly motivating.

- "I know where I am and where I'm headed." "My opinion counts here."
- Mastery-tracking software informs developmental pathways; regular employee climate surveys.

EIGHTEEN. TEACHING

Extending one's self to support the growth of another (Scott Peck's side benefit of reinforce learning and developing a more robust mental model. Teach Justin Wells has students model Bill Nye and write a science paper, make a video, and teach a lesson.

- "I understood the concept better after teaching it."
- Peer-to-Peer tutoring at Summit Public Schools; montessori models that rely on older learners to work with younger learners.

NINETEEN. EMPATHY

Most people have some ability to understand or feel what another person is experiencing. Tapping into this emotion can be an emotional hook to initiate engagement.

- "Wow, that's really sad." "I wish there was a way I could help."
- Puppy pictures in animal rescue commercials.

TWENTY. NARRATIVE

A great story connects people. It often deploys intrigue (#4), develops empathy (#19). Storytelling is connecting shared values. Unlocking the power of fiction, visual literacy can be compelling.

- "Wow, that was a great story." "I know where they are coming from."
- Storytelling class at Science Leadership Academy; This American Life or The Moth on NPR.

TWENTY ONE. FEEDBACK

Katie Salen, Institute of Play, talks about games as an "invitation with a contract." Alan Gershenfeld said designing an effective invitation is a real craft. Once an individual is initially engaged and starting to make progress, the quality and timing of the feedback (through technology, peers, teachers, mentors or some combination) can be the difference in whether someone stays engaged or not.

- "The feedback made me keep going. I could see myself getting better."
- Game feedback promotes persistence; teacher feedback on writing promotes revisions.

TWENTY TWO. AFFECTION

The pursuit of affection for a person, place, or thing can yield short-term infatuation or sustain long-term engagement. In a recent blog, Bob Lenz talks about his experience as an athlete and how his coaches used structures and high expectations to engage and motivate him. Lenz said he and his teammates were motivated by the coaches they loved to new heights in performance.

- "I want to learn more about dinosaurs." "I'd do anything for her."
- Writing a cooking blog because you love to cook; a team that excels because they love their coach.

TWENTY THREE. REWARD

Compensated contribution is can produce sustained engagement. That's what makes prizes so efficient (but paying students for grades has mixed results).

- "I can get a good job if I finish this degree." "We get a big payout if this plan works."
- Jobs, paid internships, incentive compensation.

TWENTY FOUR. CAUSE

Contributing to a cause contributes to a sense of altruism. Reward may be intrinsic and/or external recognition for contribution (#8). In Drive, Daniel Pink said motivation was a function of autonomy (#13), mastery (#5) and purpose. A sense of personal mission and goal attainment can add to a sense of purpose.

- "We can make things better here." "After setting a goal, I made a lot more progress."
- Service learning projects; peaceful protests; political advocacy.

TWENTY FIVE. FOMO

The "fear of missing out," a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent.

- "I need to get in on this new thing."
- Downloading the latest game craze or joining the latest social network.

TWENTY SIX. CONNECTION

Building a network can be a motivating goal related to a sense of belonging, social status, and/or interest in monetary reward.

- "I added 20 followers today."
- Building a professional learning community; adding LinkedIn or Facebook followers.

ENGAGEMENT TEMPLATES

6 Ways to Structure Learning Experiences

xPository PROMPT
PERFORMANCE
problem Personal
Experience POSSIBILITY