

Neil Duran

English

Professor Hall

In these past few months I've involved myself heavily in a newfound endeavor; being a mentor. My mentoring consisted of me pushing for the academic and social success of my mentee, this transition from being someone who's taught to the teacher helped me reach a realization. It shouldn't be the responsibility of the students to motivate each other to succeed. The responsibility lies on the educational system to provide the incentive to achieve academic greatness. I noticed that the positive affirmations that I gave my mentee were ultimately more rewarding than the grades she received for doing her work. Instead of searching for what the educational system could do better, I became more enthralled with the effects of positive reinforcement and active mentoring. Mentoring has shown me firsthand the strength of positive reinforcement, it proved that taking a teacher role is beneficial for both the mentor and mentee.

Students will go through their entire academic careers motivating themselves to get through the school year. This poses a problem since how can students maintain the optimal mentality for getting their work done. This was the problem for me especially, as I started to realize that all the studious habits I picked up in high school became quite obsolete. This led to a lot of personal struggle for me when it came to school, especially when it came to memorizing material. A lot of students don't realize that reading a concept multiple times over isn't the only way to remember material covered in class. Actively teaching, in the form of tutoring or this case mentoring has proven to be an effective study method. The learning center for the University of North Carolina had this to say about teaching being used as a study method ["Try to explain the material in your own words as if you are the teacher. You can do this in a study group, with a study partner, or on your own. Saying the material aloud will point out where you are confused and need more information and will help you retain the information."](#) This demonstrates that when you take the material into your own hands then you're able to internalize the information more effectively, also introducing your peers into your study group will improve your ability to retain the information. This is a tactic that I used as a mentor to help my mentee when our work intersected, it was beneficial for me as well since I was able to gain a lot of information by simply reiterating the information to my mentee. When I put my mentee in the position of a teacher, she could more accurately recall the information later when we went through it for a second time. Instead of us going over psychology together, I made her the psychology teacher, not only did this improve her confidence but it helped her value and retain the information. The article goes on to state that ["Creating a quiz for yourself will help you to think like your professor. What does your professor want you to know? Quizzing yourself is a highly effective](#)

[study technique. Make a study guide and carry it with you so you can review the questions and answers periodically throughout the day and across several days.](#) Standardized testing has proven to be the bane of all students' existence; a widespread criticism against standardized testing is that the education system doesn't prepare students properly. A lot of schools will provide you with strategies on how to succeed under the stresses of the test, but the student is expected to endure these pressures on their own. In my endeavors to help my mentee prepare for the ACT I set up a mock exam for her, this helped her internalize more of this information. This method makes the test-taking strategies complementary instead of necessary. The education system should take a more active role in pushing students into teaching each other, this helps students grow from each other and become better in their respective academic settings.

This second part of my mentoring journey did not come as organically as most of my experience did. I definitely started to struggle to motivate my mentee, and after trying a couple of motivational speeches that did not affect me, I was stumped. One of the most important aspects of mentoring that I happened to overlook was the fact that I didn't know my mentee that well. I met her through a mutual friend and tried to dive right into the mentorship instead of getting to know her first. This definitely gave me a lot of issues in the beginning since there was a divide that I couldn't bridge, one being her lack of motivation, as well me being a new person in her life. I ended up hearing about positive reinforcement from another close friend. He talked about how he used it to motivate his sibling into doing his chores for him, this piqued my interest. So I searched around on the internet and eventually stumbled upon an article detailing positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is defined as ["Positive reinforcement means giving something to the subject when they perform the desired action so they associate the action with the reward and do it more often. The reward is a reinforcing stimulus."](#) As students one of our biggest struggles is developing our autonomy and becoming competent on our own, positive reinforcement can help develop these skills. St Peter's Preparatory School states this about the relationship between autonomy and positive reinforcement ["If you reinforce a behavior that is a strength of a child's, then you are doing them a great service. Focusing on a child's strengths and rewarding that particular behavior enables them to practice their strengths and skills. Meddling or repeated negative discipline can result in a child feeling incompetent, and also stifle any creativity they might have."](#) Positive reinforcement can be a powerful tool that can foster the repetition of desired actions in students, this is a very useful skill. At the end of the day, a grade on a paper is not enough satisfaction for the student, making sure that their work is appreciated and giving them a feeling of accomplishment is essential to conditioning that student to continue striving for greatness. Positive reinforcement also helps you establish a close and personal relationship with the individual you're supporting, allowing you to help positively influence them, I implored this tactic myself when it came to my mentee making sure I gave her positive reinforcement even for the little things she was doing. If she took the time out of her day to do even half of her work I'd congratulate her, even if she didn't finish the work. The benefit is letting the person know that they're on the right path, small affirmations like this can have a big impact in the future. The Saint Peter's Preparatory School said it best when they said ["Children](#)

want to be seen and acknowledged for making good choices. When we praise these good choices, it encourages children to repeat them.” When exposed to these positive affirmations students will be able to develop patterns, these patterns will help become useful tools. These tools will help students become more organized and build structure when it comes to their academic endeavors, if a student feels as if the countless hours they put into studying is worth their time they will be more inclined to repeat that behavior. Giving students the recognition they deserve will make school seem like a rewarding experience instead of an obstacle in their daily life.

To summarize everything that was said, being a mentor has been one of the most humbling experiences I've had the pleasure of doing. Taking a position as a teacher/mentor has made me a better student, and the use of positive reinforcement is something that will stick with me indefinitely. Mentoring has proven to be a useful tool in the development of myself and my mentee, and combined with positive reinforcement it's clear that it helps improve academic success. The strengths of positive reinforcement are apparent as I was able to help my mentee gain the confidence and motivation to want to work towards her goals. Everyone should try to take a chance at mentoring, it's an extremely rewarding experience that helps not only the mentee but the mentor develop and grow as an individual.