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PEOPLE ARE MORE MOTIVATED TO COMPETE WHEN THERE ARE FEWER COMPETITORS

Did you take standardized tests like the SAT and ACT to get into college? How many people were in the room when you took the test? What does it matter? Research by Stephen Garcia and Avishalom Tor (2009) shows that it may matter a lot. Garcia and Tor first compared SAT scores from locations that had many people in the room taking the test to scores from locations that had smaller numbers. They adjusted the scores to control for the educational budget in each region, as well as other factors. Students who took the SAT in a room with fewer people scored higher.

Garcia and Tor hypothesized that when there are only a few competitors, you (perhaps unconsciously) feel that you can come out on top, and so you try harder. And, the theory goes, when there are more people, it's harder to assess where you stand, and therefore you're less motivated to try to come out on top. They called this the N-effect, with *N* equaling number, as in formulas.

COMPETING AGAINST 10 VS. COMPETING AGAINST 100

Garcia and Tor decided to test their theory in the lab. They asked students to complete a short quiz, and told them to complete it as quickly and accurately as possible. They were told that the top 20 percent would receive \$5. Group A was told that they were competing against 10 other students. Group B was told that they were competing against 100 other students. Participants in Group A completed the quiz significantly faster than those in Group B. The interesting thing is that there was no one actually in the room with them. They were just told that other people were taking the test.

Takeaways

- * Competition can be motivating.
- * The smaller your audience, the more likely they will be motivated to do an exercise that involves competition.
- * If you have any control over the size of your audience, then plan for smaller groups for any activities that involve competition.
- * If you have a large group, then might may want to limit the number of activities that require competition.

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PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED BY AUTONOMY

People actually like to be independent—to feel that they are doing things on their own, with minimal help from others. People like to do things the way they want to do them, and when they want to do them. People like autonomy. Rather than hire an expert, people often want to do things on their own.



Autonomy motivates people because it makes them feel in control

The unconscious part of the brain likes to feel that it's in control. If you are in control, there is less likelihood that you'll be in danger. The "old brain" is all about keeping you out of danger. Control equals keep out of danger equals do it yourself equals motivated by being autonomous.

HOW TO SOFTEN YOUR ROLE AS PRESENTER

As the presenter, you have authority and control. It's easy for some people to chafe at that authority and feel that they have lost autonomy. If they feel that way, they won't be motivated to engage and participate in your presentation. You can help this situation by recognizing that people like to feel autonomous and building in ways for people to feel in control. These can be small, but they are significant. Here are some ideas:

- ★ **When you have an activity, give people a choice about the details.** For example, in many of my presentations, I have participants work on a case study to apply the ideas we are talking about. Instead of assigning them a case study, I give them a few alternative case studies and they can pick which one to work on.
- ★ **Let people form their own teams.** I often break the group into teams to work on an activity. I don't assign people to teams. Instead I let them choose 2-3 people to form a team with.
- ★ **Let people work individually on some activities.** I like to have group activities, but not everyone likes to work in a group. Balance group activities with individual activities.

- ★ **Let people choose which call to action they will take.** At the end of every presentation, I give people a call to action. This is the action I want them to take. But instead of giving them one call to action, I give two or three different actions they can take and let them choose.

Takeaways

- * People like to do things themselves, and are motivated to do so.
- * Although it's good to have some group activities in your presentation, you should consider balancing those with individual activities.
- * Whether you have participants do group or individual activities, sometimes give the person or group some control over the activity. People like to have the autonomy to make their own choices.

“The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.”

— Robertson Davies

HOW PEOPLE LISTEN AND SEE

The school in my town just built an auditorium. Before the auditorium was built, I had logged years of attending many performances in the gymnasium. They would lift up the basketball hoop, put out metal folding chairs, hook up an inexpensive and not very good sound system, and put on a play. They did their best, and it was good theater despite the issues with the room, seating, and sound. Now that we have a nice auditorium with good lights, better sound, and comfortable seats, it seems like the performance has improved.

Presentations are performances. When you get up to speak to a group, whether 2 people or 2000, you are performing. In addition to your great content, you have to make sure that you are taking the human eye and ear into account. You have to make sure that people can see the information you are showing them, and that they can literally hear what you have to say.