



**Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes**

*Alfie Kohn*

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The basic strategy we use for raising children, teaching students, and managing workers can be summarized in six words: Do this and you'll get that. We dangle goodies (from candy bars to sales commissions) in front of people in much the same way we train the family pet. Drawing on a wealth of psychological research, Alfie Kohn points the way to a more successful strategy based on working with people instead of doing things to them. "Do rewards motivate people?" asks Kohn. "Yes. They motivate people to get rewards." Seasoned with humor and familiar examples, *Punished By Rewards* presents an argument unsettling to hear but impossible to dismiss.

## **Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes Details**

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# **From Reader Review Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise and Other Bribes for online ebook**

## **Brittney DeFriez says**

To sum it up, this book is how we are slaves and make each other slaves to rewards when, in fact rewards are actually shown to decrease intrinsic motivation. Case studies showed children who were given a reward if they played with certain toys and then, once that reward was taken, the children were turned off to that toy. When I read it, I loved it. It seemed inspired and appealed to my soft spot for rebellion. I felt that this might be what was wrong with public education.

Now, that I am finishing my student teaching, I have no clue how in the world teachers would survive in a class of 40 without the lure of grades. Extra credit, credit for bringing a book to class, credit for not talking during presentations, credit for taking notes... I loathe myself for this, but has Alfie ever tried out his preaching with an afternoon 10th grade class?

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## **Beth A. says**

I love parenting books, and I love exploring different ideas on how to parent, but this one was more difficult for me. The first few chapters are based on the assumption that no one human has the right to control another person. The idea is abhorrent to Kohn. This may be true in the workplace, but for parenting and to a lesser degree schooling, there are times when even the most lenient parent must have some control. You can't exactly reason with a two year old that running in the street isn't safe and expect them to comply. Some control is necessary. Preferably some sort of physical boundary.

The book became more interesting to me when he started discussing intrinsic and extrinsic boundaries. Kohn presented research that proves that when rewards are used to mold behavior (he calls it pop-behavioralism), although there may be an immediate change in behavior, when the rewards are removed, the behavior returns to pre-reward or worse. There are also many studies that show that when people are offered an award for a doing a difficult task they take longer or are less likely to accomplish the task than people not offered the reward. And when children were paid for doing a puzzle, they were less likely to play with it when they thought the study was over than someone who was not paid or rewarded. So his points were that rewards (and punishments) don't work, and that they cause our motivation to become extrinsic. That is, instead of learning for enjoyment, one learns to please the teacher, get a sticker, or a grade. Instead of sharing because of an inner compassion, we share to please a parent or because we are praised for sharing. This makes sense to me. I want my children to be motivated by intrinsic motivation, to have and act upon values deeply rooted within themselves. But as a parent, trying to teach these values, when you take away rewards and punishment (which he states is even worse than rewards), what is left? Kohn seems to suggest discussing values and reasons with children. My son is not very verbal. I think I could talk all day and still not persuade him or get any idea why he objects to my request. I really feel that Kohn has taken away my parenting tools without giving me an adequate replacement. I don't think that he provides enough examples of solutions that do work.

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## Elizabeth Fuller says

A lot of what the author says - that the use of rewards as motivators (for children, students, employees, etc.) is not only ineffective, but often detrimental to morale and motivation - makes a lot of sense, and certainly represents a fresh perspective. Despite this, however, I couldn't shake a lingering feeling of disagreement. Not that I don't believe his arguments...but I also don't think he leaves enough room for individual difference. For example, while I do agree with him that intrinsic motivators are better in the long run than extrinsic ones, I can think of numerous times that rewards, praise, "A"s, etc. have effectively motivated me without killing a more native drive to succeed. Still, the book provides a lot of food for thought - and fodder for potentially productive argument- to anyone raising kids, teaching students at any level or managing employees. Certainly worth reading.

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## Seth Warner says

but u knew

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## Sharlee says

As a college student, I had been very interested in Alfie Kohn's philosophies. After graduating and getting a job much sooner than expected, I decided to read this book. I am amazed by how much we control other people with rewards. I've never been a fan of behaviorism...in any form. Which doesn't make me widely popular as a teacher. My students were stunned when I took over and explained that I do not give treats for asking questions or learning. I also explained to them that they are not dogs and they don't get a treat for doing what they're asked. It's still a little rough at times, trying to keep order in a classroom with students who want rewards for doing so. I feel that so much character is built on intrinsic guidelines, it's too important to tamper with. I whole-heartedly agree with Kohn and love how he takes this book into life with adults as well as children. It puts me in a student's shoes--how do I feel about my boss trying to reward me into working hard when I would do that in the first place. What does it do to our work ethic, self esteem, and intrinsic motivation?!! I found this book very interesting and absolutely a MUST-READ!

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## ????? ?????? says

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«תגלו כי יש משהו שאתם יכולים לעשות כדי שהצרכים שלכם יתקיימו. תגלו כי יש משהו שאתם יכולים לעשות כדי שהצרכים שלכם יתקיימו...»

10 השנים האחרונות, החל מ-2010, חקרתי את המוטיבציה של אנשים והתברר לי כי המוטיבציה היא תוצאה של צרכים שיש ליהנות מהם, ולא פשוט של צרכים שיש להימנע מהם. למשל, אנשים רוצים להיות אוטונומיים, רוצים להיות מעורבים, רוצים להיות מוערכים, רוצים להיות מועילים, רוצים להיות מועילים לאחרים, רוצים להיות מועילים לעצמם, רוצים להיות מועילים לעולם, רוצים להיות מועילים ל...»

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**David says**

What a great book! I have long been bothered by the question, "How do you motivate people?" And the answer is here--you cannot motivate people with extrinsic rewards. You can only set up situations so that the motivation comes from within, *intrinsically*. You must do this by giving the person *control* over decisions, over his life. Incentives, rewards, grades, and punishments *remove* personal control; they work in the short term, but when the incentives are stopped, the desired behavior stops also. A huge amount of research went into this book; all of the findings are extremely well documented.

The book has truly altered the way I think about dealing with other people. So, the big question is, "Do I have the courage to follow through with this approach?"

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## **Kelly Deriemaeker says**

Mind blown. Werk aan mijn winkel.

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## **Beth Williams says**

This book blew me away. It has made me rethink so many things I've come to accept as just "the way things are" and realize the Skinnerian world in which we were all raised. "Do this, and you get that" is such a given and such an easy quick fix to the way we obtain compliance as teachers, parents, or employers. But does it really work? and if so, for how long? and at what cost?

I am grateful to have read this book while my children are still young and I have a chance to make some choices about how I respond to them, what schools we choose, etc.

Alfie Kohn is a tremendous writer. Witty, interesting, full of good information, and acknowledges that it may not be possible to change every single habit, the system, etc. That doesn't change the fact that small changes can be made, and we can do better. I'm Alfie's newest fan girl, and have requested all his other books from the library. Cannot recommend more highly.

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## **Marshall says**

I didn't give this book a 5 for fantastic writing. Although, Kohn is funny and insightful at times but he is also kind of repetitive (if you only read the first 5 chapters you'd learn everything you needed to know about the problem with rewards). The ideas in this book rang true to me as I read them. For example, achieving short-term compliance from my kids by offering them rewards (go get ready for bed without a fight and I'll read you stories until 7:30) is not only manipulative and selfish motivated but undermining my long term goals of raising responsible, caring, self-motivated adults.

I should warn you that I found this book disconcerting. I could see the disadvantages of rewards in my parenting and in the schooling I received but still not at all sure what I'm going to do about it (when I was trying to finish the book I kept offering my kids rewards to go away and let me finish in peace). However, it is already paying dividends with Eden who before this was going through what I was calling the "terrible threes" when in reality the problem was we were trying to parent as if she were 5 not 3.

Jani's currently reading through a newer book of Kohn's called Unconditional Parenting. From our discussions it sounds like it has the same ideas repackaged and focused only on parenting. (Punished discusses schools and work rewards as well as parenting). So, if you're interested only parenting maybe you should try that one.

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## **Jennifer says**

The overarching premise of this book is that rewarding people can actually decrease the desired behavior. When people are manipulated by "if you do [x], then you get [y]" type rewards, the extrinsic motivator (the

reward) starts to replace any intrinsic motivation the person might have towards the task and are much less likely to continue the behavior if/when the rewards stop. One quote that stuck out to me was that programs like "Book It!" (Pizza Hut) only serve to produce fat kids who hate reading.

The author applies this concept to both the work environment and also to education and parenting. I will admit that it has changed the way I've thought about interacting with my kids, making me think twice before offering the rote "Good job!" praise (a reward).

The author goes on to talk about alternatives to rewards, which was my favorite part of the book. He talked about the Three C's - collaboration, content, and choice. Collaboration means actually working with people (children, employees) instead of just trying to manipulate them to get them to do what you want. Content means looking at what you're asking them to do. Is it reasonable? If you want a child to do something just because YOU SAID SO, and there's no real point to it, you should rethink what you're asking. Giving people real choice about what they study, what they work on, what they are intrinsically motivated to do creates buy-in and ownership.

I applied these ideas to my current project. One of my coworkers was tasked with a tedious and uninteresting piece of work, and the return on investment was low. I realized that he had no collaboration, bad content, and no choice in the matter. He did, however, have some great ideas about improving the architecture of the code, and that work would have a very high ROI. I talked to the stakeholders of the system, pitched it to my manager, and got permission for us to shift our focus and do something that was both good for the client and infinitely more interesting for him. Now sometimes you don't have a choice about what you do at work. Uninteresting tasks need to get done - but don't assume that you have no choice. If you look for better options, ones that are more engaging and more enjoyable and more useful to the client, you might just find them.

The author lost me when he started talking about grades being a reward. He seemed to think that children shouldn't be given grades in school... there are several reasons why I disagree, but it did bring up a lot of good discussion in my book club and was worth thinking about.

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### **Jurgen Appelo says**

Rock-solid research offered with cheeky humor. Required reading for every manager, teacher, and parent.

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### **Karin says**

My daughter's gr. 1 teacher just announced that if the kids read 100 books, they'd get a reward. Instead of being enthusiastic, or eager to read, DD just got upset and worried that now she can't get the reward because 100 seemed way too many. How different is 100 from a bazillion to a gr. 1 kid who barely knows how to count that high?

Reading this book helped me to understand that frustration, and non-interest is a normal reaction to bribery. Kohn states that kids and adults alike see both rewards (incentive programs) and punishments as methods of controlling them. They tend to like the task less and work less hard to accomplish the project. This goes against society's ingrained belief that rewarding someone -whether by tangible items or praise motivates



them to do better. He believes we should discuss things with kids, employees etc. & work together to empower people no matter what age so they feel interested in the work they are doing. Kids can only learn to develop values and make decisions by being given the opportunities to practice and see the natural consequences of their own choices (age appropriately, of course.)

My daughter does like to get a reward when she accomplishes something that's difficult for her! I guess I'm kind of working on the less rewards/ punishments and more explaining stuff to her. OTOH, how do you explain to a 6 yr old she can't stand outside the grocery store because in our society she could get picked up by an evil person. I don't want to scare her. I also didn't want her to find out the hard way that I was right on this one (hopefully I'm wrong). So it became a 'because I said so and I don't want to scare you so I'm not telling you why'.

I did let her watch her ballet class last week instead of making her participate. By the end of the lesson she decided on her own that maybe she could have participated. This week she went to class no problem. I let her learn by her own experience that she actually likes dance class. So I am testing his theory out.

Good points: Kohn backs up his theory with lots of studies. He divides the book into sections so if you're just looking for how incentive programs work to motivate employees you can turn to that chapter. Ditto for school teachers and for parents.

Unfortunately because the book is divided into sections above, it gets repetitious. hence 4 1/2 stars.

fav quotes:

P 250-1 Ryan and Deci have made an important distinction between 2 versions of internalization. In 'introjection' ... children swallow the rule whole. It is inside them but essentially unprocessed. It is possible to feel controlled from the inside as well as the outside; people sometimes pressure themselves in much the same way that they can be pressured by external events.'

Internalization by itself- even the kind identified as introjection satisfies someone whose chief concern is to get a child to do something without the adult's having to stand around prodding him with bribes and threats. Like a wind-up toy, a child who has introjected a particular value will stay in motion after the controller has left the scene. No wonder those who direct and profit from a particular ... system prefer a 'self-controlled—not just controlled—work force.' 47

Ryan & Deci argue persuasively that we should aim higher than this. [They propose] integration, [which] involves helping a child make the value her own, understand its rationale, and experience a sense of self-determination in acting in accordance with it. The objective here is a deeper experience of choice, one understood not just as a selection of Option A over Option B but as something 'anchored' in the sense of a fuller, more integrated functioning. 49. Adults can help children reach this goal by supporting their autonomy, giving them chances to solve their own problems... inviting them to participate in making meaningful decisions and engaging them in discussion about all of the above.

I [A Kohn] think we want children not only to be deeply committed to our values and rules but to be capable of making their own decisions about which values and rules to embrace. Here, too, the best preparation for making decisions is practice at making decisions... Moreover, we will have to trust children at some point. This is a far cry from trying to implant a piece of ourselves in a child so he or she 'voluntarily' makes all the same decisions we would make.

P 265 In another study, ... supervisors were told that someone whose work they were overseeing either enjoyed the task or was doing it just for the money. Even though these messages were generated randomly and bore no relation to the individual's actual attitudes, the supervisors who believed they were in charge of

someone who was extrinsically motivated responded by becoming more controlling. As a result, the employee did in fact end up less interested in the task, confirming the expectation about how one 'has to' treat such employees. Conversely, the belief that a worker wasn't just interested in getting a reward led supervisors to create the kind of work environment where the employee did come to enjoy the work more. 1

1 Pelletier, L & R. Vallerand. Supervisors' Beliefs & Subordinates' Intrinsic Motivation. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 71 (1996) 331-40

252 In the final analysis, none of the virtues, including generosity and caring, can be successfully promoted in the absence of choice. A man recalled being "taught that my highest duty was to help those in need" but added that he learned this lesson in the context of the importance of "obeying promptly the wishes and commands of my parents, teachers, and priests, and indeed of all adults...Whatever they said was always right."

The man who said this was Rudolf Hoess, the infamous commandant of Auschwitz. Prosocial values are important, but if the environment in which they are taught emphasizes obedience rather than autonomy, all may be lost.

Question: My daughter is afraid to try new foods (won't even touch them.) If i reward her for surmounting her fears is that the same as rewarding for something normal? See, i thot that getting something tangible helps her think about something other than how afraid she is. And it seems to work, too. She sees the goodies from the dollar store and wants to try a new food ( or retry a new food, since it takes more than 1 try to like a food, experts say) to get the coveted toy she's seen. She now eats vanilla yoghurt :)

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### **Clint says**

A great book. The book is written for two audiences, educators and business professionals. I only had to read the sections that pertained to education, but after reading them, I am curious to know if the business world is like the education world. I will not praise Alfie for writing a well informed book, but simply acknowledge that it is. Teaching second grade, I can already see in 7yr olds how praise, rewards, and other behavior manipulators have altered there perspective of life. The "whats in it for me" mentality is a hard thing to break and to motivate students in the importance of actual learning instead of the main focus to get straight A's is equally difficult because so many parents are demanding just that. Alfie explains that we are training kids to grow up and be selfish and that the only reason to do something is to get something physical in return, because the act of doing a good deed because it might bring on a good feeling to oneself is a waste of time. I highly recommend this book to every educator in schools, day cares, churches, and parents.

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### **Lisa Delaine Youngblood says**

I have never read a book that so questioned societal norms, nor have I ever altered my views so much based on the concepts introduced in a book. The title of this book explains exactly what readers can expect. As with any book discussing parenting skills, work levels, and manipulation, readers will have to determine for themselves whether or not they can agree, disagree, or at least rethink their previous opinions. This book

requires readers to look closely at the heart of motivations -- both intrinsic and extrinsic -- and at the true outcomes that we wish to achieve.

Because the concepts "rang true" for me, I began re-evaluating my parenting and managerial skills. I took most extrinsic rewards out of my dealings with my children, with my staff, and with our customers. As a library director I even insisted that we take prizes out of our summer reading clubs. I have been amazed at the positive results. Since that time my children have done much better in school. My staff members seem to give much more of themselves to their jobs. Our summer reading club enrollment and final numbers DOUBLED the first year. The main problems that I have had are when parents and teachers (though almost never children) seem unable to make the change.

Unable to follow every single precept in the book, I do continue to dole out sporadic "good job" and "I appreciate that you ..." to acknowledge excellent work. :)

Though thought provoking, the book is repetitious. It is broken into several sections, and readers may choose only to read the section or sections that pertain to them.

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