

Inspiration and Motivation

By Ryan Ashton

Below I have constructed a table that compares what I believe are the defining features of inspiration and motivation in a list format. The table is brief and over-simplified, but by reading and comparing both processes, I believe the reader can form a basic and useful understanding of the differences I see between the two. The distinctions drawn between the two categories are polarized to a large degree to make the differences as obvious as possible, but in practice there is often an overlap between the two. I go on to fill out in more detail each of the nine list items from the table to explain more completely what the difference between the two styles is and why I favor the inspirational style in my life coaching practice.*

Inspiration

- From Within (Internal)
- Individual
- Private
- Spiritual
- Emphasis on Feeling
- Unconditional
- Permanent
- Moved by What IS Wanted (Positive)
- Unconditionally Fulfilled

Motivation

- From Without (External)
- Collective
- Public
- Material
- Emphasis on Sensation
- Conditional
- Temporary
- Moved by What IS NOT Wanted (Negative)
- Conditionally Fulfilled

From Within (Internal) vs. From Without (External)

This comparison identifies the fundamental source of human action and thought in terms of internal self and external world. Inspiration is used to capture a form of action and thought that originates purely from an individual's own psychological center, independent of the forces of the exterior world. Conversely, motivation is used to identify those sources of human action and thought that originate purely from outside of an individual's own psychological center—i.e. from the environment.

An individual operating from inspiration will have a purely subjective mental-emotional event (e.g. intuition or impulse) which is the cause, or reason, for the individual's subsequent actions or thoughts. The outside world does not play a causal role in the event of inspiration.

Motivation, on the other hand, is the result of an objective event(s)—something external to an individual's mental-emotional center; the objective event may be real or imagined. An individual acting or thinking under the influence of motivation is therefore behaving in a

* Note that others may use different definitions of the terms inspiration and motivation. My aim is not to provide a textbook definition to fit everyday usage; rather I aim to define two broad, opposite styles of explaining human behavior that in itself serves some utility in understanding and applying the principles of human action and thought.

reactionary manner. In essence, the picture of motivation involves a circumstance or event either occurring, or being expected to occur, in the environment (an objective event) whereby, through contact with the environment, an individual's actions and/or thoughts are affected by these environmental forces.

In this sense, inspiration is an *internal* mechanism for individual action and thought whereas motivation is an *external* mechanism for individual action and thought.

Individual vs. Collective

This section follows closely on the heels of the previous section, but places an emphasis on the purely human factor of our lives—the individual *person* as opposed to the collective *society*. Here is where inspiration places precedence on the sources of action and thought that are derived and defined wholly by the individual him or herself. Motivation then is the category that cites the forces of society as the source of an individual's actions and thoughts. In other words, it is what people outside of self do and say that provides the source or reason for one's own actions and thoughts. Motivation is seen as a reactionary approach to action and thought.

The implications for individual change here are profound. Through inspiration, an individual need not go outside of self to find transformative power to affect changes in personal actions and thoughts. Conversely, through motivation an individual must depend on the transformative powers of others in society to affect a desired change in personal actions and thoughts. Through inspiration, therefore, an individual has more direct access to the powers of transformation, and thus a greater locus of control over the behaviors of self. And, naturally, the more control one has over their own sources of action and thought, the more deliberate their life experience becomes.

Private vs. Public

This section targets the explanatory power of each category of human behavior in terms of who ultimately is capable of understanding the source of an individual's actions and thoughts. Inspiration is something that is privately and exclusively known by the individual experiencing the inspiration. Therefore, where inspiration is present, no one except the inspired individual has direct access to the transformative power of that inspiration, and therefore only the individual knows how influential that experience is on his or her actions and thoughts. Those attempting to understand the actions and thoughts of an inspired individual can only make indirect inferences regarding the inspirational experience of that individual; the inspiration itself is not measurable.

Motivation, however, is sensitive to outside measurement as the factors that determine its power are objective. Witnesses have the ability (at least in principle) to observe the same environmental conditions that affected the motivational influence as the motivated individual him or herself. Therefore, motivation is a public phenomenon insofar as persons outside of the motivated person can witness and directly comprehend where and how the motivational effect

was derived. The key point to remember for those utilizing inspiration, then, is that others may not understand, much less agree with, the reasons for one's chosen actions and thoughts. Inspirational behavior, therefore, requires a high degree of comfort within one's exclusively private understanding of self, and an indifference to the opinions of others. Those operating under motivation have an easier time explaining to others what they are doing and why, but then they are also limited by the sources of transformation that others can understand.

Spiritual vs. Material

In this section we dive more deeply into the metaphysical nature of inspiration and motivation. Metaphysics is a rich topic in philosophy that deals with questions of essence and existence. One central question of metaphysics, and the one we will deal with here, is the question of physical and non-physical substances or "things."

Dr. Wayne W. Dyer once wrote "inspiration is our word for in-spirited."[†] I use the term in the same way. To be inspired is to live with, in, or through *spirit*. Spirit is a non-physical "thing" that is used to describe the essence of a human being. Spirit is another word for "pure consciousness" or "soul." To understand inspiration as I am articulating it, one has to grant my assertion that the spirit is a real "thing" that each human possesses, and that it is instrumental in the way that humans act, think and experience life. It is by virtue of this non-physical spiritual nature that the concept of inspiration derives the majority of its appeal for human living. It is a powerful, intelligent and positive force that underlies the essence of humanity. To harness it is to live according to humanity's nature.

The opposite of spiritual is material, and thus motivation, as the opposite of inspiration, is material. Motivation, utilizes the properties of the physical, material world to elicit its transformative effects in human behavior. The properties of physical "things" include that they are tangible, observable, inert, and subject to the physical laws of nature (e.g. gravitational, electro-magnetic and nuclear forces). Therefore, for one to operate through motivation, one must be conscientious of how these physical properties behave and in what way they impact a human being's experience. In a sense, then, to operate motivationally is to first identify what is possible according to physical law, and secondly to adjust one's behavior to fit physical limitations. In other words, motivation dictates that physical laws condition one's behavior in the world. In a sense, then, motivation can be seen as mechanical whereas inspiration can be seen as organic.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain in detail how one can harness their spiritual resources through inspiration, but it is the purpose of *Inspirational Differences* as a whole to teach how this can be done. The aim here is to merely provide a context for understanding the nature of inspiration and how it differs from motivation. Subsequent essays on harnessing inspiration will follow.

[†] See Dr. Wayne W. Dyer, *The Power of Intention*, © 2004, p. 5

Emphasis on Feeling vs. Emphasis on Sensation

In virtue of its spiritual nature, inspiration is predominantly a feeling-oriented process that requires a significant degree of introspection and self-awareness. The means by which spirit communicates with self (or ego) is through feeling mechanisms like intuition, impulse and creativity. Therefore, in order to utilize inspiration, one must emphasize a capacity to feel.

Opposite feeling is physical sensation, and motivation therefore emphasizes the physical senses. Humans are generally awarded five physical senses—taste, touch, sight, smell and audition. These five senses are the translators between self and outside world. These senses predominantly function such that the outside world leaves impressions or physical signatures on the sense organs that are later decoded and interpreted by a person's psychological makeup. Therefore, in order to utilize motivation, one must interact with the physical world such that his or her sensory mechanisms are emphasized. In this way, motivation is again reactionary to the conditions of the physical environment and limited by those physical conditions.

Inspiration has an advantage over motivation here in the sense that it has access to creative, imaginative avenues to self-improvement that can *create* the conditions desired. Motivation, conversely, can only *conform* to preexisting conditions.

Unconditional vs. Conditional

By framing inspiration in a way that is intimately centered on one's core self—his or her spiritual center—there is a natural understanding, then, of inspiration operating *unconditionally*. To tune into one's spiritual self, one need not rely on anything outside of his or her personal connection with spirit. Now, it is likely easier to tune into spirit while external stimulations are minimal (i.e. in calm, quiet surroundings), but it need not be so. Since spirit is a fundamental attribute of a human being, it is present and available throughout a human being's life. Therefore, inspiration is unconditionally available.

Motivation, on the other hand, is dependent on the exterior world insofar as it is reactionary to five sense reality. Since physical conditions are predominantly controlled by the physical laws of nature, and the state of nature is in constant flux, motivational advantages must be seized at opportune moments whenever and wherever they are available. This, therefore, renders motivation a *conditional* process.

The advantages of an unconditional process are likely self-evident, but it is worth mentioning that the utilization of the unconditional spirit is like being constantly plugged in to an energy source. Not only is persistence and perseverance present in such an unconditional state, but the level of excitement, pleasure and enthusiasm also increase with the added spiritual energy.

Permanent vs. Temporary

Following closely from the preceding section, we can further point out that inspiration is a permanent process that, once mastered, can be utilized continuously throughout one's life regardless of circumstance. Since spirit is a non-physical substance, it is not constrained by the time-space limitations of the physical world. Spirit then is an unyielding, infinite resource that a human being can tap into at any moment of life experience.

Motivation, of course, is then the opposite of permanent—it is temporary. Since motivation is sensitive to the conditions of the changing physical environment, motivational advantages can only be harnessed within the duration of the ideal physical conditions—once conditions change, the motivational advantages change accordingly.

In terms of self-improvement, inspirational approaches yield more permanent results than do motivational approaches.

Moved by What IS Wanted (Positive) vs. Moved by What IS NOT Wanted (Negative)

This section dives a little further into the realm of metaphysics, as we are going to talk about the nature of spirit and matter once again. Since spirit is non-physical, and therefore independent of the limitations of physical time-space reality, its ability to focus itself in an undiluted fashion is uncompromised. As a result of this, spirit's attention to what IS desired—in a positive, affirmative way—is undivided. Any impulse or intuition a human being then receives from his or her spiritual center is likewise oriented exclusively toward *pure* desire. Through this process, attention toward what is *unwanted* ceases to become a factor. What is unwanted is not instrumental in guiding one's actions and thoughts when the process of inspiration is at work.

Conversely, motivation, with its physical, five-sense foundation, is more concerned with the navigation through and around those environmental conditions that are not desired. Attention to unwanted consequences is often the most powerful of motivational circumstances. For example, one's concern of ill health is often a motivator to eat more carefully, exercise regularly and visit doctors periodically. Given the perceived power of the external world, the motivated person must be tuned in to the probable results of a given behavior in the world and take active steps to avoid those unwanted results.

Inspiration is considered “positive” in the sense that its attention is focused in a way such that it generates “yes” responses from the inspired individual. Motivation is considered “negative” in the sense that it generates “no” responses from the motivated individual. The inspired person draws energy from the *positive* features of what *is* desired and is therefore drawn, or attracted, to the object of desire. Inspiration is a process of affirmations. Motivation draws energy from the *negative* features of what is *not* desired. It is the fear or concern for the possible lack of a desire that provides the energy for transformation. Inspired individuals talk predominantly in terms of what they *do* want; motivated persons talk predominantly in terms of

what they *don't* want. Inspirational Differences believes that it is more pleasurable to predominantly focus on the positive features of a desire than it is to focus on the negative features of the lack of a desire, and thus inspiration is preferred over motivation.

Unconditionally Fulfilled vs. Conditionally Fulfilled

This section is perhaps the most significant from a personal point of view because it deals with the idea of fulfillment in one's life experience—something everyone is inherently looking for. Inspiration, with its undiluted connection to spirit, is capable of unconditionally fulfilling a person's life experience. This fulfillment includes feelings like joy, pleasure, enthusiasm, contentment, excitement, anticipation, etc. Through inspiration, the end goal is not the only source of fulfillment; rather, every step along the way (including the inception of a desire, the imagination and creativity involved in identifying the path to a goal, and the eventual attainment of a desire) fill an individual with enjoyable experiences.

Motivation, on the other hand, must rely predominantly on the rewarding experience one obtains at the achievement of a goal or life circumstance. Since there is more attention on obstacles and challenges when dealing with the physical world, motivated persons are more often experiencing conflicts and struggles than savoring the natural, easy unfolding of a desire. Motivational tactics usually employ concepts of sacrifice, discipline and hard work in the path from desire to manifestation. Therefore, fulfillment most often comes at the conclusion of a goal rather than during the process of achievement.

Inspirational Differences believes that life is more fulfilling when both the processes of achievement, as well as the achievement itself, are enjoyed as opposed to the achievement alone. For this reason, again, inspiration is preferred to motivation.

Summary

This essay's aim was to explain how inspiration can be distinguished from motivation and to provide insight for the reader to understand how he or she might prefer to approach a desired state of self-improvement. Inspiration and motivation are often used interchangeably in common usage, but this essay attempts to draw very distinct lines between these two methods of human transformation to facilitate more careful thought about how and why attempts at self-improvement might ultimately succeed or fail. Inspirational Differences believes that inspiration is easily the superior method and therefore argues for its use. Further considerations about inspiration are best served by exploring the nature of spirit itself, and inspirationaldifferences.com exists to further those explorations through articles and essays posted on the website.