

Keeping Adult Learners Motivated

Adult education providers can boost learner motivation by intentionally addressing these needs through all facets and phases of the program. They can do so by employing multiple strategies. Conversely, one strategy often addresses several needs. For example, an informative and welcoming student orientation that begins the goal-setting process and that involves enrolled students as presenters can begin to address adults' needs for a sense of belonging, clarity of purpose and competence.

Sense of Belonging and Community

It is human nature that when we feel welcomed, respected, and develop a sense of belonging, we are more apt to return to the setting or task than when those factors are not present. When adults decide to resume their education, their expectations are usually based on whatever their previous educational experiences were like. For some adult learners, the decision to go back to school can be anxiety provoking. They are stepping into unfamiliar territory, possibly without an expectation of belonging there. For that reason, cultivating a sense of belonging from the moment a prospective adult learner comes through the doors or calls is an important persistence strategy. At the most basic level, building community calls for fostering connections among people. ***Activities and processes that help students and staff get to know one another build trust and camaraderie.***

Clarity of Purpose (Goal Setting)

Clarity of purpose refers to helping students gain clarity about their own purposes for learning - their goals and dreams - and about the program's expectations and approaches to providing education. That way, adults can make informed decisions and take responsibility for their learning. Research shows that learners who establish concrete goals and ***are given the opportunity to see that they are making measurable progress*** toward them are more likely to persist in their studies. With more information and confidence, students frequently change their goals. By hearing the goals and aspirations of others, they often expand their notions of what is possible.

Feeling of Competence (Give Feedback)

All adults have a need to feel competent in key aspects of their lives. A decision to return to school as an adult bespeaks of adults' desire to build their competence in areas which more schooling can address. Adults' beliefs about and realistic assessment of their competence can have a profound effect on their persistence and achievement. Helping adult learners improve their self-efficacy is a powerful motivation booster and feeds the adult need for feeling competent. Students with more self-efficacy are more willing to persist to reach to their goals in the face of adversity. People who have high self-efficacy visualize success whereas those who doubt their efficacy typically visualize failure. ***Providing regular assessment and positive feedback contributes to a learner's motivation and can do attitude.***

Relevance

The degree of perceived relevance of the instructional program to the adult learners' goals, interests and life experience is a key factor in adults' motivation to persist in their studies even if they need to stop out for a while. Most adult learners juggle many competing priorities that may take precedence if the instructional program does not ***feel meaningful to their needs and interests.***

Stability

Learning is difficult in an environment that is chaotic or unstable. Yet many adult programs are designed, out of the best intentions, to allow students to enter and exit classes at any time. Many adult learners' lives are marked by instability caused by poverty and trauma. The major challenge to the educator working with highly stressed or traumatized adults is to furnish the ***structure, predictability, and sense of safety that can help them begin to feel safe enough to learn.*** Even when we cannot change students' life circumstances outside of school, offering predictable, consistent programming enables students to participate more fully and with greater ease.