

# A LINE ON LIFE

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## Volunteerism — Not "*Without Reward*"

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In another article, we talked about getting people to continue specific types of behavior by reinforcing those acts. However, some people continue behavior, even though they apparently are not getting any reward. What is causing the behavior to continue?

One possibility is that they are getting reinforcements that are not evident to an outside observer. The best example is the wide array of **volunteer** programs that are developing in the United States. Many people wonder why volunteers do a great deal of work without any material reward. These people suspiciously ask, "*What do they (the volunteers) get out of it?*"

Typically, volunteers are financially secure. Although they may not be rich, they don't have to constantly worry about keeping a roof over their heads or having enough food to eat. People who have these worries must seek paying jobs to meet their basic needs.

According to Abraham Maslow's **hierarchy of needs**, once the **basic needs** — physiological and safety — are met, people strive for **growth needs** — love and belonging, self-esteem and finally self-actualization. Meeting these growth needs is part of what reinforces volunteers. They will typically become part of a relatively close-knit group, meeting many new and interesting people (love and belonging). In addition, volunteers contribute greatly to increasing the quality of life for others, giving the volunteer a sense of purpose (self-esteem). Also many volunteers expand their horizons, developing previously hidden talents and skills in themselves (self-actualization).

Meeting the above needs is part of extrinsic motivation. **Extrinsic motivation** involves some external reward. It is a *means to an end*. Whether paid by money, food, a good grade, a gold star, acceptance or recognition, all these rewards are outside the act that is performed.

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**People learn more quickly and perform better,  
if they enjoy what they do.**

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In contrast, **intrinsic motivation** involves an internal reward; the act is pleasurable in itself. It is an *end in itself*. Mainly, it is the enjoyment of doing the act. Volunteers tend to *enjoy* what they do.

In addition to volunteer work, hobbies and sports can be intrinsically motivated. You do them primarily because you enjoy the activity, not because you expect an external reward. When you go on vacation, the activities you *chose* to do are typically intrinsically rewarding. It may be skiing, swimming, golf, tennis, card games, dancing or some other activity. If the score doesn't matter in the game, or you don't need to be praised for your performance, you are probably intrinsically motivated.

However, many people receive *both* intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for some activities. For instance, Although I enjoy the act of teaching in itself (intrinsic), I still like my paycheck and being praised for a "*job well done*" (extrinsic). Even so, people tend to *work harder and learn better if they are intrinsically motivated*. One major source of job dissatisfaction is the lack of intrinsic motivation. Even though the pay and working conditions may be good, some people are stuck with jobs they do *not* like to do. (Would anyone become a "*clock-watcher*," if they really enjoyed what they were doing?)

The problem of women who feel sexually "*used*" by men also relates to the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Kissing, hugging and touching — whether sexual or not — can be intrinsically rewarding. The same is true of sexual intercourse. You can gain pleasure from the act itself. However, some women use their sexual favors in an attempt to gain extrinsic rewards. It may be some material gain — money, jewels, a car — or for some nonmaterial concession on the part of the lover. For example, some women submit to sexual intercourse solely as an attempt to keep their boyfriend from leaving them. If this extrinsic goal is not met — the boyfriend still leaves — they often feel "*used*" by the boyfriend. However, if they have intercourse mainly for intrinsic reasons — because they enjoy it — they are more likely to feel "*it was nice while it lasted*," even if the boyfriend leaves. The question is "*Who is using what?*" Is the boyfriend "*using*" the woman? Or is the woman "*using*" — although unsuccessfully — her sexual favors?

Although it is nice to have external rewards — material or otherwise — it is much better if you can enjoy what you do. This is what many people refer to as "*the quality of life*." If you are *not* enjoying what you are doing, isn't it about time for a change?

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