

Grade 3

By Vicky McGrath

In school, I was disruptive and distracted and talked constantly and loudly. I rarely felt challenged and was more interested in talking to my classmates than paying attention to my schoolwork. I don't have a lot of recollection of how my teachers managed my disruptions in the classroom, although I'm sure my teachers were exasperated, and they would often tell of the disruptive behaviour on my report cards.

My grade 3 teacher chose a different approach to curb my disruption and asked me to do a special project for her. She asked me if I loved animals, which I did (and do!), especially dogs and horses and she asked me to draw, label and colour every kind of dog and horse I could research. When I had extra time in class, which I usually did as I finished my classwork quickly, I spent the time drawing, colouring and labelling dogs first and then horses, remaining motivated and focussed during class time to complete the project. I recall proudly showing her my work and her taking the time to appreciate it. I still remember the dogs and horses I researched and drew for that teacher, even though I don't remember her name. The memory of her approach to keep me engaged makes me think of the Maya Angelou quote: "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Feeling important is critical to developing self-confidence and self-esteem. Doing those special projects for the teacher made me feel proud and special. The truth is, I am actually extremely motivated by and dedicated to work and activities that inspire me. In my career, I have volunteered my time to participate in special projects for my employer and I have taken on work that was well beyond what was expected because I enjoyed doing them. I have intense focus and the ability to learn new strategies and approaches when I know they will benefit me. If they are not activities I enjoy or feel will bring me the results I seek, I am not as likely to do the things that are needed.

Self-motivation pushes you from within to stay encouraged and also plays a huge role in self-discipline. When you are able to control what you think and how you perceive, you are able to control your actions as well. Having a supportive person in your life, to help you focus your natural gifts and talents in a productive way will allow your focus and motivation to yield important results and help you grow as a person. Do you have a special teacher, co-worker or someone else in your life who helped you feel important when you needed it? Is there a "special project" you've worked on that shines a light on your natural gifts and talents? I'd love to hear from you.

About the Author

Vicky McGrath is a wife, mom, and business owner and was diagnosed with ASD in 2019, at 50 years of age. Vicky has an undergraduate degree from Trent University and a master's degree from Cambridge University. Vicky spent 20 years in the government sector in the environmental field before making the jump to business ownership. Currently, she is owner of a private home care company, caring for elderly clients in the safety of their own homes and also a professional speaker.

Vicky is also a runner and triathlete, having completed several marathons, half marathons and triathlons including half Ironman and three full Ironman triathlons. It was during a long training ride in 2006, before her (not to be) third Ironman that Vicky crashed her bicycle, broke some ribs, punctured her lung and sustained a concussion and launched her path of self-discovery, resulting in her autism diagnosis in 2019.



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