

## How Motivated Are You?

Lendon H. Smith, MD

Thirty years ago, I was asked to examine a newborn baby as a semiemergency. The mother of the baby was an acquaintance from college days. My perception of her at that time, was that she was narcissistic, haughty, and somewhat cold.

The baby was not sick. After the exam, I had to tell her that she had a Down's syndrome baby.

"What are you going to do?" (In those days many parents elected not to see a baby who was not quite perfect. Putting the baby in an institution was a common method of shucking off a problem.) This mother, however, had gone through two very stressful pregnancies complicated by hyperemesis to the point of dehydration. Her obstetrician had elected to terminate those pregnancies to save her life. During this third pregnancy, intravenous fluids and complete bed rest allowed her to take the child to term. After all that misery she felt she needed to keep this baby, no matter what.

I witnessed the impressive transformation of her personality over the next 20 years. She became loving, devoted, eagerly responded to her challenge, and completely selfless. Eddy was sick a lot -- ears, throat, chest -- but each sickness seemed to make Eddy's mother more determined to make something significant out of her fate.

As a matter of fact, she became the innovator of a system of help for mentally and physically handicapped children and young adults. She gathered children and young adults with developmental delays like Eddy's at a teaching facility where they learned some useful jobs -- stuffing mailing tubes, packing products into plastic bags, learning to flip hamburgers, and make beds. She was motivated. She provided a reliable service for the community and gave each of her charges, and Eddy, a good self-image. Without her, these young people on the outer edge of social acceptance would have just become useless blobs or couch potatoes.

Rearing a child with a handicap, she became a tireless mother and a caring, warm person. Who are we to say what she should have done at Eddy's birth? God, fate, Mother Nature -- something was working in wondrous ways. Some force within her knew she could rise to this occasion. Someone, probably her, knew she had the potential of being a real social, human being. She just needed a little nudge.

I learned a lesson from this lady. Humans have great potential for good if life gives them the right challenge at the right time.

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Editor's Note:

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DECEMBER 1992

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