



# Dan Pink

Best-Selling Author, “Drive”

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<https://predictablesuccess.com/dan-pink/>

**Note:** *This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and understanding. There may still be grammatical and spelling errors,*

**Les McKeown:** Hi and welcome to another in our series inside Predictable Success, where we talk to people who have experienced, or bring to others, Predictable Success in their own lives and career. And today I'm delighted to be speaking with Dan Pink. Of course, Dan is very well known to many of you listening, either through his previous book, 'A Whole New Mind' or his current book 'Drive' that we're going to talk mostly about on our call today. Welcome Dan.

**Dan Pink:** Les. Great to be with you

Les McKeown: Dan, you know, I mentioned A Whole New Mind and Drive, but, I first came across you, gosh, way back. I must've been about 2000, 2001, when you were writing, I think it was in Fast Company and that eventually became 'Free Agent Nation'. What sort of led you up to that path where Free Agent Nation arrive? You had a background, I believe politics and law. How did you get there from there?

Dan Pink: Hm. Well, first of all, thank you for remembering that book. No one else does. So I appreciate that. I got there. Well, it's interesting. I got there in sort of a strange way, as you mentioned I did go to law school. you know, I grew up in the US - Columbus, Ohio, you know, I did all the right things, went to college, went to law school, but I wasn't really interested in being a lawyer. I was very early in my life was very, very interested in politics. And so that's what I decided to do. I worked on some political campaigns, most of which lost I, and then just, you know, ended up on political campaigns, things that are sort of at the juncture of policy and communications, particularly economic policy, and did some of that kind of work.

Dan Pink: And eventually this became, just, I mean, again, there were no planning or anything just became a speech writer. I worked as a speech writer for the US labor secretary, Robert Rice, and then became chief speech writer to vice president Al Gore. And, you know, in the midst of, in the midst of that, work, I started saying, Hmm, I'm not sure whether I want to be in politics. I'm not sure whether, whether that's what I want to do with my life. I was very, politics, American politics, a very, very cynical place. and I felt like, you know, this isn't really where the things going on there were really were not the things that mattered. And meanwhile, it looked,



this is, you know, mid 1990s, I looked in the world and I said, well, there are all these other interesting things going on in business and technology, and I'd always done some writing on the side.

Dan Pink: And I said, well, maybe I should go to work for myself and explore what I'm really interested in. And that's what I did. And just to kind of career from one thing to another, but ended up writing about that initially, because I went and did it, I left a traditional job to go work for myself. I went from the, you know, to, to, you know, working mayor to working for the vice president of United States to working on the third floor of my home from the, you know, as we say, from the white house to the Pink House.

Les McKeown: So the white house to the pink house, I nearly stomped on that. What a great line. That's excellent. Was the book Free Agent Nation the flex point for you? Did that sort of set you off in another sort of direction career?

Dan Pink: No, I think that the, the decision to go work for myself was really the flex point.

Dan Pink: I think that that's what turned my life in a very different direction. and the idea of exploring what I was really interested in, it's sort of like, you know, there was a certain, you know, there's, there's certain things in life that you're interested in and then you become less interested in it. And then there are other things that are profoundly more interesting. you know, I had that experience once in my life when I was, I used to be deeply interested in baseball. and then, I discovered that the girls were far more interesting than baseball and I lost interest in baseball, you know, and found that as a much deeper interest, the, the, much more interesting, much more complex, much more challenging, much more rewarding, and I'll stop there. and the same thing is true and that sort of had this, this, this interest in politics for a very long time as a, as a, as a much younger man.

Dan Pink: And they eventually exhausted it. It just ended up not interesting me that much. And I'd always been interested, did in a work, in particular, and I'd always done writing even through law school. I would, I was writing for magazines. I was writing op-eds for newspapers, you know, in, in law school. I did it even on the side when I was working in politics and even very, very demanding jobs. And I think that's one lesson, actually. It's kind of interesting for your listeners less. Yeah. That everybody always, at least, I mean, maybe it is. I mean, it's a lesson that, that I, I didn't really learn, but it's a, it's a lesson I realized, which in retrospect, what should have been a lesson. So here I was in law school, I was yeah. Magazine and newspaper articles on the side here. It was in demanding jobs, very demanding jobs.

Dan Pink: And I was writing for magazines and newspapers on the side. And in this case, when I was working for the vice president or working for labor secretary, doing it for free, because it was, I wasn't allowed to get paid for side work. and you know, everybody always tells you do what you love. And I, and I think that's usually pretty good advice. but I think that the, the better



advice sometimes is to do what you do that is, you know, what do you actually do when you have discretionary time when you have freedom to control your life what do you actually do And again, I see this only in retrospect, that is this idea of like the constantly on the side, I was doing these things, no matter what I was doing for the main course on the side, I was always doing these things. And that basically that should have given me a clue that that's what I really wanted to do. Right. So the, and it always had always, truly had a very deep and abiding interest in work. And a lot of the policy work that I did, had to do with, you know, labor policy and technology policy and workforce policy and, you know, all those sorts of all those sorts of things. and so, you know, then it, then it came together and, but without any great planning,

Les McKeown: Okay. So it comes together. I get free agent nation, which despite your, you know, a reference, it was a great book. very formative, changed a lot of people's views about what, what they were doing at a very artificially inflated stage and the economic cycle, but just a great book five years later, comes along a whole new mind. Were you working in that, was that noodling there, or did you just decide, you know, five years later, it's time to put another boot God, how did Jesus say no

Dan Pink: Well, that, that, that had that the seeds that were in Friesian nation, definitely because, for that, I traveled around the US talking to people who were working for themselves, people who had decided to leave large organizations to work for themselves, or who were kicked out of large organizations. And what I found is sort of the first hint that I had was that, there were a lot of these people, they were working as accountants or management consultants, and they were kind of, sort of living like artists, you know, they would call their home office a studio. And, and that was kind of peculiar to me. And I just kind of, I talked that up in some other business writing that I did. And you mentioned fast companies and business writing, they did profess company. A lot of the really interesting people I kept encountering, in business were often had a background in the fine arts and they weren't in the fine arts in their professional life, but they maybe had a BFA in oil painting or an MFA in ceramics or something like that.

Dan Pink: And I thought that was kind of interesting. And then the other thing just again, on, on, on happenstances, it, it so happened that, had the fall after my first year of law school, I enjoyed it so much that I didn't go back and instead went to India. and I ended up, spending a lot of time in India as a pretty young guy and had always been deeply interested in India and, ended up, writing about, offshoring pretty early in the game and recognizing that it was going to be a pretty important force. And, you know, I, so I started seeing all these things that seem to be connected and then just looked at the data and looked at the numbers and said, wow, there's something significant going on here.

Les McKeown: Yeah. I knew Tom Friedman stole that stuff from somewhere.

Dan Pink: I know. Well, no, he, he talks about he actually, he talks about a whole new mind in the world is flat. So, I think he



Les McKeown: Acknowledges his sources. That's right.

Dan Pink: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Please go ahead. No, no, no. I was going to say, no, I think that's, I think it's actually the Mark of a good mind to listen to a lot of different voices and then be able to synthesize it. And I think he does that pretty well.

Les McKeown: Absolutely. So we're marching our way towards drive, but we've got to take a little detour here. Then you bring, what, it was quite rightly called the first buying a book may conceivably be still, still will be the first, the business mind cookbook, or the last one is my, what was the, what was that about? What, what got, I mean, I love it, but what got you there? Did somebody say somebody triple dog dare you, or,

Dan Pink: You know, you see that yeah. I, you know, I just, I thought it'd be cool and interesting. And, and that's why, and that's how I did it. What had happened was is that, you know, I had been to Japan and I'd seen how popular this form was in Japan and not just for superhero stories or, not just for superhero stories, but for, or teenage romances, but for all kinds of things. Right. And I said, well, why can't we do that here? And so, I ended up getting a fellowship to go to Japan and, to study the Manga industry. And yeah, I went to Japan for a couple of months on a fellowship to study and talked to my family with my wife and our three kids, and, studied the Manga industry just to find out a little bit how it worked and ended up doing some magazine articles about, about that.

Dan Pink: And, and it, you know, I thought it was really fascinating and I thought, I thought I would give it a try. And the other thing was the theory of the case was that there was so much, it was, it was experimental in a number of ways. So one of the things that I'm thinking about as a writer is in a world of Washington, all this information in a world where literally at our fingertips of our phone or a computer people access to all this information, what's the role of a book in that kind of environment. And, you know, and you think about a career book. And I just, if you think about the behavior of people who are navigating their careers, if they're going for a job interview, they don't go pick up a book to find out about the company.

Dan Pink: If they're putting a resume together, they don't go and get typically a resume book. If they, you know, working on their resume at that moment, they go online and say, you know, what keywords should I put in? And I said, well, there's people are getting so much tactical information about careers online, a book can't give tactical information, but I think a book could give strategic information, big picture information. And so, but I think it could do it in a way that is very hard to do, on Google. And, and so this form was becoming popular. And so all these things coalesced and I said, well, let's give it a try. Let's do a business book with tech, with strategic advice, aimed at a younger people and do it in a form that is demonstrably popular among young people, but that has never been used for this sort of material.



Dan Pink: And so, I found a great artist named Rob Tempus to be the collaborator on this. And it worked, you know, it worked, it worked pretty well. The book did okay in the US the big surprise. And this is what I love about doing these kinds of things. Like any kind of business person is, I mean, you talk about Predictable Success, but I think there's a level of unpredictability and all this kind of stuff. You know, it's like, you're, you know, one of the great things that one of the things that makes business fascinating is you come out with a product or service and experience that you sell out there. And I think a lot of times business people are surprised by who their market is. The market that they think they're selling to might not be it. And so we went out there thinking that this is a great book for 20 somethings. These, that was my idea. And we didn't do that well with the 20 somethings. Now, the big surprise is we did really well with a much younger crowd, middle,

Les McKeown: No schoolers, right. Who do not get good career constantly. So that's, that's brilliant. That's good.

Dan Pink: It was a total surprise. And then we also ended up doing very well, outside of, the, outside of, the English speaking world. Not even as much outside of the industry, but outside of the US UK, Australia. We ended up doing very well in a place like Brazil, to some extent pretty well in India. Some extent pretty well in, in Japan, but, Indonesia, Turkey, these places that have, grilling armies of very young white collar workers, whose parents were not white collar workers, and are looking for advice and don't have the kind of established career counseling infrastructure that you have in the US or the UK or Canada or Australia or Japan, and are looking for some kind of advice. And it ends up being a very easy book to translate.

Les McKeown: Absolutely. I could see that there are many words. I love the content. It was super, I must say, when I stumbled on your fifth point and I'd make excellent mistakes, it sort of, it brought a whole meta level of understanding of my entire career to date, I think, has been the stakes. So let's move up to, to drive your latest book, which is the one that I really want to spend most of the time on. And I'm going to pretend that it doesn't have, I mean, just have a look well about 25 post-it notes, stuck to it, and well, thumb through it. And I'm going to ask a naive question. You get the subtitle is the surprising truth about what motivates us. So what is it, what's the surprising truth

Dan Pink: Surprise is that I think there's a view out there that, what really motivates people, particularly in business and at work is this, it's an architecture of rewards and punishments that if you want people to perform well, you give them the right set of rewards or threaten them with the proper set of punishments. That is if you get that configuration, right, it's, it's difficult that, people will, perform at a high level. and it's, you know, it's difficult, but at least it's, it's doable and somewhat predictable and that's wrong. It turns if you look at them, 50 years of, of science and, and for this book, which is a little bit different from the previous books, it's, you know, I went back and looked at, I don't know how many hundreds, if not thousands of papers I read trying to sort of get the history of motivation and the research on motivation, over the last 50



years and what it shows pretty clearly as the following that for simple routine rule-based sorts of tasks, algorithmic tasks, stuffing envelopes, turning the same screw the same way on an assembly line.

Dan Pink: adding up columns of figures, those, the kind of carrot and stick motivators, what I call if then motivators, if you do this, then you get that. They worked pretty well. They're pretty effective. The problem is, is that for the creative conceptual sorts of, of work, the more quote unquote right brain work, coming up with a new product idea, inventing something that the world didn't know, it was missing something very complex, ambiguous, Merkle defined problems that, that kind of work that let me, sorry, that kind of, those kinds of motivators, the if then motivators, rarely work and often do harm. And this is a very robust finding in the social science, social sciences. That's been, you know, essentially birth maybe 40, nearly 50 years ago, and replicated and replicated over again by psychologists exploring different dimensions of it. And even more recently by economist, exploring different dimensions of it. And they all reach essentially the same conclusion, which is routinely ignored inside of business.

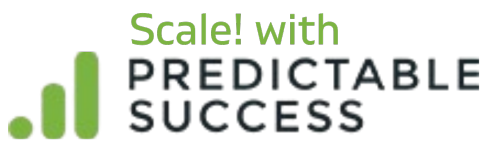
Les McKeown: Well, he turned me right there and it was that the, the, the progenitor for the book down to had you been working with organizations and, and getting a sense of frustration that they old classic, extrinsic motivation wasn't working.

Dan Pink: It wasn't even that it wasn't, you know, what, it wasn't even that elaborate. I have to say, it was really interesting, cause I haven't really thought about this much before, but your questions are making me think about it. Is that again, you know, it's another situation where the seeds were in the previous work, not Johnny Bunco, although I do talk about intrinsic, I do mention intrinsic motivation in Johnny Bunco. the, the seeds were in many ways in a whole new mind because what happened was that, that, you know, if people say if you're right Pink, or, you know, if you're more right than wrong, that these right-brain sort of abilities of the ones, excuse me, are the ones that matter most, how do we get people to do that

Les McKeown: Is that what are the right reward structures What are the

Dan Pink: Right incentives How do we motivate people to do this And I didn't have a clue. I knew there was a body of research in human motivation. And so I went to look at that and it had discovered that it was a, just a treasure trove of research and B, that it said some things that ran a foul of much of what we do every day

Les McKeown: In business. Right now you set up in the, in the book, I thought, just as, as soon as I started reading the chapter, in which you covered this, just a whole series of insured or dominoes fell down for me, it just felt absolutely right. You talk about, they will classic model of type A's and type B's, but then you reference what you call type I's and type exes. Can you share with our folks a little bit about that Yeah. I just, I mean, that's just



Dan Pink: Shorthand way of, of, of describing, a more complex set of ideas. And so if you think about someone behavior that is type I, well, let's go type X behavior that is type X is more extrinsically motivated than intrinsically motivated. That is, it's behavior where you do something in order to get the bonus in order to get the prize in order to get the acclaim that that's the main motivation for doing it. that's a type X behavior, a type I behavior is the opposite. It's the main motivation. The reason you're doing something is for the joy of the task itself or for the internal rewards, for the sense of satisfaction, you get doing it for the contribution that makes to the world. now it's very rarely that black and white, so that if you're doing something, if you're more motivated by external or than internal, it doesn't mean you hate every moment of what you do.

Dan Pink: And the only reason you're doing it is for the prize at the same time. It doesn't mean that if you're more internally motivated, then externally motivated for a particular task, it doesn't mean that you don't cash your paycheck, or you refuse to accept any kind of recognition for these things, but it really means so what's the central driver and what, and what a lot of the research shows is that type I behavior is, a healthier and more likely to lead to high performance. and that's a little bit of a paradox because, and there's a lot of, I think really cool research there's research on one great study of artists that I thought was, was, was really intriguing, that shows that, you know, the, the type X behavior often doesn't lead to the rewards, that type X behavior seeking, and that type of behavior can often lead to that where those rewards precisely, because they're not being sought. So this is weird sort of Zen thing going on where the best way sometimes to get those external rewards is not to seek them.

Les McKeown: Right. And, your, thesis, your underlying thesis then done is that there are three main elements to pooling out that intrinsic motivation you call them autonomy, mastery and purpose. Right. th th here's the question I had as I was reading it is I can absolutely see. as I mentioned a moment ago, intuitively just rippled right through my mind. I can absolutely see that individuals respond very much in one or other of those ways, depending on the environment that they're in. But, what I was wondering was this, do you think an organization can become systemically a type I organization Are there things that leaders can do to make the entire organization and not, in other words, can they become more than the sum of just the individuals in the organization Can you put in place systems, processes, dynamic that makes you a type I organization Yeah,

Dan Pink: I think so. I think it's really hard. And I think in some ways the default is type X. That is, it's very much kind of externally, externally focused. I think that it's possible. And I think what it means is it means, it means essentially doing a way with, with management at least. I mean, I'm not, you know, management is, is a technology. We don't think about it that way. Gary Hamel is the first person to introduce this idea. It's it hasn't been around forever. It's not a force of nature. It's something somebody invented, it's a technology, it's a technology designed to get compliance. That's what it's for. It's an 1850s technology whose sole purpose is basically to get



people to comply. that's fine. but, and it's a good technology for compliance. It's not a very good technology for engagement and that's more and more what we want.

Dan Pink: And so if you have companies that are run in ways that are provide much greater levels of autonomy, much, much greater opportunities for self-direction much greater domain over giving people much greater domain over, when they work, how they work, what they actually do, who they work with. then I think that it can produce better results and become, you know, not rely on an individual, be an accumulation of individual behaviors you say, but make it something that is part of, the ecosystem of that company. I think the other big factor there is purpose. you know, there are a lot of, I think what we're seeing more and more now is in some ways the inadequacy of the profit motive as a motivator, I mean, it's, it's a good thing. Profit motive is it's makes the world a better place. I'm convinced of that.

Dan Pink: I think there's a moral aspect to it that is valuable, but, it's a good thing, but it's not the only thing. And in some ways that is insufficient, it's an instant profit as an insufficient motivator for particularly for creative and conceptual tasks. it's an it's, it's, it's an insufficient motivator for really, really great things. And I think there has to be a sense of purpose. So if you have companies that are animated by the purpose motive, even more than the profit motive and companies that have much greater degree of self-direction internally, then I think that you, you know, you have a fighting chance of, I think you have a fighting chance of scaling this right. But it's really hard. And it's doubly hard if you have, if you're a publicly held company when the countervailing forces are ferocious. Right.

Les McKeown: That's really interesting what you said. Cause it was just ruminating as you were, as you were sharing that on the little subsection that you, that you've got in the book where you talk about five type I schools, and of course that's an environment where it's much more possible to make that happen. Then as you say, the way publicly owned companies are currently, almost over overseeing at the minute is much, much harder to bring that into place. You Claire. Right you, you talked, I just moving towards a close on, you talked a rather fascinating there, but hi, I'm Johnny bunko popped up in different ways in different areas than you had expected. You seeing any trends and drive about, who's finding this particularly useful about, organizations, industries, groups, demographics that, that are finding it particularly helpful.

Dan Pink: yeah. well, I mean, I've gotten some interesting feedback from schools, more than I would've expected, because I think in the US especially schools are moving in the exact opposite direction in the US schools are being, incentivized with more and more high-stakes rewards for short-term performance and tying teacher pay to standardized test scores and even things like, you know, giving kids money for showing up and for getting good marks in school. and so a lot of, interesting feedback from, from educators, the I'm getting far less pushback from business people than I would've expected for this kind of book. Yeah. Yeah. I think part of that honestly, is, is timing. I, I think if I had come up with this book and this book has been in the works for a few years, but it's just timing. if I had, come up with this book say two years ago, it might've had a less





receptive audience. I think that, that, that coming out after a economic collapse that was due in part to high stick short-term external rewards, made people more people more receptive to it. I think that played, I think that played a role. And so what I find people asking is, you know, how can I, how can I do this and how can I, not forego accountability when I do this

Les McKeown: Well, it's, it's a masterful book done. certainly, in my book, one of the most important publications we've seen in the last two years, and it absolutely beats, against the wall, my personal rule for business books, which is that, I have a belief that 95% of them contain everything you need to know in the first three chapters maximum bloat. And your absolutely does not do that. In fact, it's quite the opposite. You really got to buy and read the whole book in order for, for you to see the multidimensional way that you approach it. And I think it's a, it's a great, centerpiece to Predictable Success. You talk about autonomy. We talk a lot in Predictable Success about self ownership and accountability as being a linchpin. And where you talk about purpose, talk a lot about

Dan Pink: The need for mission, vision, and values, really, to be reconfigured in order to get to Predictable Success. But the bit that you bring so strongly here that I would have to say, go buy drive for this is the whole mastery side of it, which we didn't touch at all. So it's a great combination. what's next for you done what's what's in the works at the moment, huh Not a heck of a lot less, know getting a bit of time to enjoy the Pink. Well, no, no, no. I'm out, you know, I think that, you know, I, I, you know, as much as I would like to believe that you can simply, write a book and send it out into the world and the sheer brilliance of the idea and majesty, or the pros will draw readers, inexorably, equitably to its pages. It doesn't work that way.

Dan Pink: And so I spend a lot of time. I spend a lot of time out there talking about the ideas in the book, to, to really get the ideas out there. I mean, it's so noisy and crowded out there that you really, if you, if you come out with something that you really care about, you got to spend a lot of time out there. really talking about the ideas, not only talking about yourself, but, but trying as much as you can to, encourage conversations on the part of others and to listen to feedback from others and to hear what they're and to hear what they're thinking. So I'll, I'll continue on I'll I'm sure I'll do another book pretty soon. And it's chances are it's seeds will be in, in, in drive. Well, they're not having a lot, believe me.

Dan Pink: I'm like the, you know, I'm the worst person for a long-term plan. In fact, in fact, the Johnny bunko rule number one is there is no plan. That's right. Well, it's a great book then I just encourage everybody, go get it, go to your independent, local, independent bookstore, support them first. If you kind of go to Barnes and noble, and if you have to go to Amazon, but wherever you get it, get a copy of drive, go, go to, at Dan's, blog had done, is it Dan pick up Daniel Pink.com I can't remember. Did they both get there They both. Neither one of you have done this before. a great book. If you want to know the role of nail clipping in the subway, superstar, thank you so much for, for sharing with is done and all the best with whatever comes next. Thank you. Been