



From Novice Amateur to Professional Photographers:

How Motivation and Peers Impact Our Growth



Why Build a Peer Mentor Program ?

All photographers were First an Amateur and all of us have taken a different path to become the photographers we are now. But there are some common variables impacting our motivation and photographic abilities. Some professional photographers may not recall the motivational path that brought them the success they are experiencing. And many novice amateurs are struggling to discover the skills and motivation that will improve their photographic images. The goal of this **interactive workshop** is to reveal through discussion some of the key ingredients with a particular emphasis on motivation and mentoring. The workshop will conclude with the introduction of a **Peer Mentor Photography Program** for the Teton Photography Group. Photographers of all levels of skills are encouraged to join in the discussion.



Randy's Goals for this Workshop

1. Begin to build a community that supports the growth of Amateur Photographers,
2. Explore the impact of motivation on photography,
3. Discuss how feedback (critique) can improve, or discourage, motivation and how to improve the feedback given to others,
4. Discuss the value of working with peers to improve amateur's photographic skills and their photographic eye,
5. Describe a Peer Mentor Photography Program and invite suggestions to improve the implementation of the program.



We all start as First an Amateur

Tonight we are going to work together. To work together effectively we have to be honest and supportive of one another AND ALSO be sensitive to the potential insecurity that some folks might experience. I know about that insecurity – it can get in the way of improving. I want everyone to “categorize” their “skills” into one of three categories. Don’t feel intimidated or embarrassed.

Remember, we are here to help one another.



No one is going to make fun of you or put you on a throne. Different levels have different experiences and tonight each level will learn from other levels. You have to trust me on this one !



What type of Photographer are you?

We have different levels of skills and goals. Would you describe yourself as a Professional Amateur, Novice Amateur, or Advancing Amateur?

- **Professional Amateur** – You occasionally sell your photos through a gallery or website or Instagram. You feel comfortable with photo gear and post-processing.
- **Advancing Amateur** – You have come quite a ways in your photography but are constantly working to improve. You understand your photo gear but are working on improving your shots with better exposure, composition, & post-processing.
- **Novice Amateur** - You would like to improve but feel you have a lot to learn. You use your phone, a point-and-shoot, or a DSLR on Auto. You don't use much, if any, post-processing. You sometimes feel lost with lots of questions and few answers.



Randy's Educational Story



1st Hand Experience about Motivation Challenges

- I did poorly in high school and was accepted to college on probation
- I had a college professor that cared and pushed
- Graduate school:
 - Pretty good 1st semester (Andy was my young advisor)
 - Challenging 2nd semester (with Dr. Mehrens)
- My motivational challenges (particularly negative motivations) led me to study educational motivation for 30 years. This changed my motivation and was the foundation of becoming an innovative college teacher. I understood why some students were having problems and created a program to help them succeed. I believe what I learned in the classroom and in my university peer mentor program will help me to help amateur photographers to improve.

Novice and beginning Advancing Amateurs – I can feel your pain. 😊
Tonight is your time to ask questions. It's OK to be a rookie.



Different levels have different experiences and tonight each level will learn from other levels. Please indicate on your name tag which level you are at by using blue, red, or green.



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What had the most
important impact?
(Rank Order)

What are the most
difficult challenges?
(Rank Order)



Professional Amateurs

When you were first an Advancing Amateur what was the **most important events/support/challenge to help you?**

- A. Dealing with discouragement and difficulty improving
- B. Taking classes, workshops, readings
- C. Learning skills (e.g., camera, LR, PS)
- D. Receiving feedback from others
- E. Reflecting on my improvement
- F. Shooting/shooting with others like myself

Advancing/Novice Amateurs

As you are improving as a photographer, what is the most **difficult challenge** you have had moving from a Novice to an Advancing Amateur?

- A. Dealing with discouragement when you didn't see any improvement
- B. Getting motivated to get out and shoot
- C. Learning skills (e.g., camera, LR, PS)
- D. Reaching out to (or finding) other photographers to help you with challenges
- E. Sharing your photos with others for feedback



Please excuse me, I'm gonna go academic

There are many ways to categorize motivation but for tonight I am going to focus on one aspect of motivation that I think is very valuable for photographers to be aware of when they look at their own motivation. Since I am going academic I might as well give you a psychological definition:

Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards. In other words, the motivation to engage in a behavior arises from within because it is intrinsically rewarding.

This contrast with extrinsic motivation, which involves engaging in a behavior to earn external rewards or avoid punishment.



Since Professional & “Professional Amateurs” are selling photos, are they Extrinsically motivated?

Since Novice and Advancing Amateurs are simply trying to improve their photography, are they Intrinsically motivated?

What is the difference? What is the best motivation to improve your photography?



Love of the game

- Jason started playing soccer at a young age. He had the same buddies for many years and many trophies. He had with his buddies.
- At 12, 13, and 14, he was on the team and went to the Midwest soccer camp and he came home with a scholarship. When he was invited to the camp at 14 he was invited.
- Jason's high school team was runner-up in the first state tournament. As a senior he was team captain and was voted all-state. He had a number of scholarship offers but in the end decided not to play soccer any more. Why?

How can our “love of the game” (e.g., intrinsic motivation) be undermined?



Ed Deci's Theory of Intrinsic Motivation

Deci's theory has demonstrated that intrinsic motivation is impacted by three variables. All three of these variables can have an effect on our motivation to take pictures and improve on the photographs we take.

1. **Self-Determined** - Motivated people feel in control
2. **Competent** - Motivated people feel they are improving their skills.
3. **Connected to Others** - Motivated people typically work with others



Intrinsic Motivation depends on **Self-Determination**

Forced means that you are doing the task because **you** have to.

Are you “working” to improve your photography skills because ...

- What is the definition of work?
- Is photography “work”?
- Are professional photographers ...

Many professional wildlife photographers are photographers because they love the outdoors and the animals they are shooting



Rearrange your Groups

Put yourselves into *diverse groups* of about 3 or 4 people with (hopefully) at least one:

- Novice Amateur
- Advancing Amateur
- Professional Amateur



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1. **Self-Determined** - Motivated people feel in control
2. **Competence** - Motivated people feel they are competent.
3. **Connected to Others** - Motivated people typically work with others



Intrinsic motivation depends on



Competence

One of the most important ingredients in intrinsic motivation is competence. But what does that mean?

In your group define photographic competence

Make sure EVERYONE is included in creating your definition.

Did the professional amateurs and novice amateurs have the same definition? How can we define competence so that it will enhance the intrinsic motivation of everyone?



What is Competence ?



Competence could very well be the most critical variable in intrinsic motivation AND it has a huge impact on being truly motivated in photography.

How do you decide competence in your:

1. Plumber
2. Auto mechanic
3. Tax accountant
4. Doctor
5. Chef
6. Your own photography

The more subjective the task, the more challenging it is to judge competence. If your car doesn't run, the mechanic may not be competent. If you don't like the food ...? But what about your photography or the photographs of others?



Competence in Photography

- Deci would define competence in intrinsic motivation as the improvement of skills. Most of us feel “competent” in golf, cooking, and photography **if** our skills are improving over time.
 - If we enjoy golf and are watching our score decrease we feel competent and may be more intrinsically motivated to play golf (as long as we aren’t too competitive vs. a neighbor or family member.)
 - If we are starting to become an amateur chef we may feel competent if we decide the food tastes better, or if our spouse says our cooking is improving.
- But how do we judge our “skills” in photography? It may be that we decide based on how our photographs look to us. Or maybe we count on the comments of our spouse or family or friends (e.g., “Your pictures are awesome.”) or comments on Facebook or other social media.

Is “awesome” good enough ?



Improvement?

Why?

Is there evidence of improvement?
Does evidence of improvement

Fall, 2014

**What exactly
has improved?**

Improvement?
Qualify as competence?

Fall, 2015



Talk about these two photographs in your group



Who, or what, should get the credit?

Was it:

- If you think Randy's Fall 2015 is an improvement from Fall 2014, what is it that has been improved? What about the 2015 photo is better?
 - What are the activities, resources, people that might have helped Randy to improve this photo and other photos?
- A. Taking classes, workshops, readings
 - B. Learning skills (e.g., camera, LR)
 - C. Dealing with discouragement and difficulty improving
 - D. Receiving feedback from others**
 - E. Shooting/shooting with others like myself**
 - F. Reflecting on my improvement**



Reflection is Key



- Take time to **look at your progress**. How are your photos different from: last year, last month, the last time you went to Oxbow? What is different ?
- **What do you know** now about your camera, your lens, Lightroom, exposure, **composition**? How do these new skills change your photographs?
- **How do you see the world differently?** Do you notice the light differently? Do you imagine what “this scene” would look like in a photo? Do you notice clouds, leading lines, color, shorelines differently?



Reflection helps but sometimes we need outside help



Let's start with the easy answer

I believe the credit for much of my improvement is my involvement in the Teton Photography Group (TPG).

- Connection with photographers of all levels
- Side-by-side Summer Photo Shoots
- A partner (peer mentors) to do photo shoots all year
- Feedback at the Informal Critiques

But didn't they "let you have it" with those crumby photos?



Informa

In your group discuss which of these FB comments would be most beneficial to your competence and why it would impact your competence. Novices start the discussion since competence is so important to you.

Be good listeners !



Feedback

- You were out this morning for a sunrise shoot at Schwabacher. The color was fairly good but you weren't sure about the composition. You've taken quite a few shots at Schwabacher so you were trying something different today. You posted your best photo on Facebook and were looking for some good feedback to help you reflect on the comments. Which of the following help you with your feelings about the photo?
1. Awesome shot. You must have gotten a lot of likes.
 2. Gorgeous photo. I'd love to be there with you.
 3. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. I'd like this on my living room wall.
 4. Too plain. I've seen this a million times.
 5. I like the unique framing of the mountains with the trees but there is a bit too much color saturation for me.

If #5 is helpful for you,
what are you doing to
get more #5s ?



Informational Feedback



- **Evaluative feedback** is typically a simple statement of support 😊 or non-support ☹️. It doesn't give specifics about why the person thinks the photograph is good or bad. It is the standard comment on FB and from you non-photography friends. You can help them by asking **why?**
- **Informational feedback** includes specific information about your photos. It requires that the person giving the feedback evaluates **WHY** the photo is good or not so good. It is thoughtful. It requires *some* understanding of photography or art. But it does not require that the feedback use photo jargon.



Return to Groups that are Similar

This can be a very intimidating question, especially for Novice or new Advancing Photographers. Veteran photographers should explain how they overcame the concern they may have experienced when they began as photographers.

Sharing photographs with others can be intimidating, especially if the other people are serious photographers. How do you feel about showing others your photos? How does that help or impede your progress?

- A. I seldom/never show others my photos.
- B. I let family/friends see photos but hesitate to let other photographers see my photos.
- C. I let photographers see my photos ... sometimes (only the best?).
- D. I seek feedback from others and take it to heart.
- E. I enjoy discussing my photos with others, especially with other photographers.



Competence - Improvement & Discouragement

It is easy for photographers who have made great improvements (e.g., Professional Amateurs) to forget their discouragement. If you compare your photos to the photos in books, National Geographics, or the galleries in Jackson, you are likely to be hard on yourself.

Your **improvement** is the best way to evaluate your competence.

- A good way to do that is to **look at photos you took in the past.**
- Another helpful approach is to **work with a partner** that you trust and feel comfortable with for a photo shoot and critique.



Ed Deci's Theory of Intrinsic Motivation

Let's look at the third variable in Deci's theory of Intrinsic Motivation. This variable may differ from person to person but there is some power in it for almost everyone. AND in photography it is fairly easy to implement.

1. **Self-Determined** - Motivated people feel in control
2. **Competence** - Motivated people feel they are improving their skills.
3. **Connected to Others** - Motivated people typically work with others



In your **diverse groups** discuss these types of partners and why you would want them to be your peer mentor.

Is anyone here tonight that fits the bill?



If you could spend a day with another amateur photographer, what type of person would you choose and how could they help you to improve your photography? I would like a person that:

- A. Has skills like mine and is supportive of my photos
- B. Has skills like mine and is honest, supportive, and critical
- C. Has similar photographic interest and pushes me
- D. Has a variety of skills different from mine and is willing to share experiences, skills, and critique
- E. Has better photography skills and directly teaches me



Randy's Improvement



There are many ways I have improved in the past year and most are connected to my involvement in the TPG. I suppose I could have grown without them, but my connection to many photographers in many ways (including taking photography classes) certainly speeded up the process.

- **New Skills** — Composition, Exposure, Post-Processing and more
- **Confidence** — Photo shoots with photographers of varying levels of skills helped me “see the light” and overcome discouragement. My competence grew, I could see an improvement in my photographs and skills. But I still have a long way to go.
- **Reflection** — Working with a partner (Summer Shoots and my “peer mentor”) encouraged me to think on my travels back home, when I entered my images into Lightroom, and when I went out on shoots by myself.



What's the philosophy of Peer Mentoring?

- It would be nice if our best friend was incredibly supportive, patient, honest with us, and was a professional photographer that had unlimited time to teach us all they knew. But that kind of person doesn't exist.
- From my experience in the university I found that peer mentors have a unique edge over the teacher in the teaching-learning process. Peers often know the difficult pieces in the learning process AND often have a strategy to overcome the challenges. They have been-there-done-that.
- Peer mentors who are supportive and have good listening and feedback skills (informational feedback) are more likely to be received with open arms (and ears) when their partner is having trouble.
- So what do you have to do ?



Peer Mentor Photography Program “History”

In the summer of 2015 the TPG organized three Summer Shoots. The shoots were on the third Saturday in June, July, and August. Each shoot was followed by a Informal Critique on the Monday after the shoot. After each of the Saturday Shoots we went out for breakfast (at Dornan’s in the park) and got to talk-photography and get to know each other. These Saturday Shoots are what got me interested in a Peer Mentor Photography Program.

After the June Shoot I asked one of the participants (Mario) if he would be interested in continuing Saturday Shoots through the summer and fall. I think I can say that this improved the photography and confidence (competence) of both of us. I also think it can help most, if not all, amateur photographers.

What’s next?



What are the “demands”?



There aren't any real “demands” or costs, but to make this program work we need to have *some* commitment and I need to know who might be interested.

1. We need everyone who is involved to have a partner. It would be nice if everyone could identify someone they would like to partner-up with but I am happy to share the list with everyone that signs up and help begin the communication. Peer mentor groups do not have to be 2 people (it could be 3) but I found that 2 people tend to work better than 3.
2. The program will be set-up in a way that is similar to the Summer Shoots with a shoot followed by a critique. BUT the shoot does NOT have to happen on a Saturday although the Informal Critique needs to occur once a month at the Art Association. Peer Mentor partners can have a shoot together at any time but we need a commitment to the Informal Critique.
3. The one difference between the Informal Critiques and the PMPP will be that the PMPP will also discuss our progress as well as our photographs.



What could be in it for YOU



- **Partner** — Having a partner for photo shoots and discussion will help answer your questions (even if both of you don't have an answer) and get you intrinsically motivated.
- **Group Shoots** — We will likely go on monthly photo shoots (expanding the TPG Summer Photo shoots to include spring and fall) to explore great places to take shots.
- **Monthly Critique & Progress** — The TPG has month Informal Critiques that the PMPP will have each month that will include critiques of photos but also an exploration of growth.
- **Involvement with Advanced Amateurs & Professional Amateurs** — Depending on the success of the PMPP I am hoping to include some of the more advanced photographers in the TPG to answer questions and work with us occasionally.



Tentative Set-Up



1. Interested participants **sign-up**: name, e-mail, phone
2. Participants **choose a partner** (peer mentor) – You can choose you own partner (tonight may be a good time to do this), or you can request that Randy find you a partner.
3. The plan is for the program to **begin in April**. It will include:
 - An **optional shoot date** – Each month we will have an optional shoot in Grand Teton National Park (similar to Summer Shoots)
 - A **PMPP Critique** – Once the program is set-up I will arrange a critique date (in part from your input) for everyone to attend
 - **A Guideline** – Each month we will have a photography progress topic (composition, exposure, motivation, competence, etc.) that focuses on your photography progress. Participants will help Randy decide.
4. **This is OUR program, not Randy's**. What are your questions ?



WHAT ARE YOUR QUESTIONS ?



The most important lessons I learned from my Peer Mentor program at the university was that the best way for the program to grow was to get the input from my students who became peer mentors. And the best way to get their input was to let them ask questions.

What questions do you have ?



WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS ?

This is NOT Randy's program. This is the program of the amateurs in the Teton Photography Group, for the amateurs in the TPG. I need to know who is interested AND I need to know what I can include in this program that will help the amateurs of the TPG improve their photography.

What are your ideas?



WHO IS INTERESTED?



The first step is to identify who is interested in participating.

I need to identify who might be interested. I have a sheet that is going around for anyone that MIGHT be interested to sign-up. This is NOT a contract that you have to live up to but rather a way for me to contact you with more information. Please indicate your level of interest.

I presently have a blog that is for amateur photographers:

FirstanAmateur.com