

*The rewards for work are not limited to the paycheck; but extend to what we become as a result of our endeavors.*

*- Unknown*

---

## **What We Really Do as Gymnastics Teachers**

---

By Michael A. Taylor

Last month I wrote an article about easy ways to reward employees. I outlined many ways you could help workers feel valued and appreciated. There is no dismissing the importance of a smile, a thank you or a pat on the back. Perhaps the most essential reward an employee can receive is one that they can give themselves. The most vital reward is the intrinsic reward of simply feeling good about what we do because we recognize the true value of what we do. How do we accomplish the warm-fuzzies when all we do is “teach cartwheels?”

Let's take a look at what we do. Patty PreSchool Teacher runs around and sings songs and plays with little kids all morning; Betty Beam Choreographer dances around all afternoon helping kids walk straight and point their toes; Victor Vault Coach stands around spotting handsprings all evening. When asked about what they do, most gymnastics instructors answer with things like, “I teach gymnastics” or “I coach level 5” or “I'm a preschool movement educator.” If you asked them about their jobs, all three would probably say that for the most part they really enjoy what they do. Typically they are glad they get to work with children, hang out with people with similar interests, dress casually, remain active and maybe they would tell you the best part is they get paid for something they like to do.

Do they know what they are really doing? Current research confirms that physical activity is imperative to early brain development and learning. Studies show that children learn cognitive skills more effectively in an environment that includes the body as well as the mind (Barrett, 1998). Gymnastics and early childhood movement education is directly attributed to developing neurological pathways in students and promoting reading readiness. While Patty PreSchool Teacher runs about and plays with her little kids, she is preparing her students for successful experiences in school; children who have participated in movement education activities have longer attention spans, increased communication skills, general problem solving skills and improved self-esteem.

Recreational gymnastics is a key to balanced human development and has been proven to be a significant factor in reducing alcohol and drug use (Williams, 1994). Victor Vault Coach is directly responsible for reducing the crime rate in the city; statistics show that children actively engaged in organized “positive choice” extra-curricular activities such as youth sports are less likely to be involved in self-destructive and anti-social behavior and juvenile crime (Soenstrom, 1986).

With obesity affecting an epidemic 13% of the school-age population (Centers for Disease Control, 2001), healthy activities like gymnastics keeps our kids off the couch and engaged in a healthy lifestyle. Betty Beam Choreographer is contributing to lower health care costs in the United States; active children are more likely to grow to become active and healthier adults, reducing the burden on the health care system. Sedentary lifestyles have been linked to the development of coronary heart disease, diabetes mellitus and numerous other chronic ailments. Nurturing the enjoyment of movement and motor skill development at an early age will help to promote continued participation in physical activity. Long range, these active and therefore healthier adults are more likely to be more productive at work, take less sick days, and have fewer “on the job” accidents (Paffenbarger, 1986). Gymnastics also contributes to the immediate economic vitality of your local community; gym owners pay rent, employ people, pay taxes and purchase goods.

Now what do you think your staff would say and how do you think they would feel if they realized how important they are to the development of children and how significant they are to a healthy society? They not only are making a buck, they are making a difference. Can you think of anything as admirable and honorable as being a gymnastics teacher? This is the greatest reward we can give our staff – the knowledge of how important they are and how valuable what they “really do” is.

***About the Author:***

Michael A. Taylor is a USAG Kinder Accreditation for Teachers (KAT & MELPD) Instructor, serves on the USA Gymnastics PreSchool Advisory Panel, is a USA Gymnastics National Safety Instructor, serves on the USA Gymnastics Safety Review Board, is a USAG PDP I Video Clinic Administrator, an American Red Cross CPR/First Aid and Sport Safety Instructor, and an American Sport Education Program Coaching Principles (PDP II) Instructor. Michael is a Certified National Youth Sports Administrator; an Instructor for the Stanford University based Positive Coaching Alliance, a long-time member of the United States Elite Coaches Association and a former gym owner. He is currently the Director of the Burgess Sports and Aquatics Center that includes the 1600 student Menlo Park Gymnastics program in Menlo Park, CA. A Certified Pool Operator and a licensed National Playground Safety Inspector, Michael is also the owner of Gym.Net, a Gymnastics Professional's Network of Educational, Business, Consulting, and Internet Services specializing in Gymnastics oriented businesses. Michael has served expert witness testimony in numerous Gymnastics safety lawsuits. He can be reached at:

Michael A. Taylor,  
E-mail: [coacht@gym.net](mailto:coacht@gym.net) or [mataylor@menlopark.org](mailto:mataylor@menlopark.org)  
Phone: 650-330-2274 / Fax: 650-327-2323  
501 Laurel Street  
Menlo Park, CA 94025