



# The Need for Consequences

---

by Mike Hawkins  
[mike@alpinelink.com](mailto:mike@alpinelink.com)



The concept of consequences has a bad reputation. Consequences, whether at work or home, are generally equated to punishments and penalties. Establishing and enforcing consequences is akin to spanking and criticizing – two societal taboos. Yet without consequences, so goes rewards and recognition. So goes accountability. Without consequences, many people have no motivation to perform or achieve.

Think however you like about consequences, but the reality is that consequences drive behavior. People think and behave the way they do because of what is at stake. If there are no consequences to completing homework, or making good grades, kids don't do their homework. If there are no consequences to not acting like a team player, employees don't help their colleagues. If there are no consequences to elected officials for fulfilling their campaign promises, they conveniently forget their campaign promises after being elected.

You might be someone who has a strong inner sense of responsibility that drives you regardless of what is at stake, but realize that not everyone is like you. Most people need to know what is at stake in order to take action or give their best.

Some people believe measurements fulfill the role of consequences, but measurements only help to the extent they are acted upon. If there is no difference in the reward or punishment for making a “B” grade on a report card versus a “D”, many kids don't care which grade they receive. If managers pay their employees bonuses and give their employees pay raises even though the employees miss their targets, employees don't take their targets very seriously.

Whether leading yourself, your children, or employees, consider the consequences - both the favorable and unfavorable ones. Consider what is at stake – what is to be gained or to be lost. If there is nothing at stake, or what is at stake isn't understood, don't expect there to be much motivation to think, behave, or perform in a desired manner. Without consequences, words and measurements are meaningless.

Consequences involve both punishments and rewards. They can't merely be rewards because there is a point at which people need to go to jail, government officials need to be removed from office, employees need to be fired, and children need to lose their privileges. As importantly though, positive consequences need to be in place too. People need to know the benefit that awaits them if they think, behave, or perform in a desired manner.

When understanding, establishing, or communicating consequences, emphasize the positive consequences of good performance first. Because people head in the direction of their dominate thoughts, promote positive thoughts of what people can hope to gain rather than focus on what they hope to avoid. When performance is poor however, don't neglect to understand and communicate the negative consequences. Never let it be a surprise when privileges are taken away, employment is terminated, or admonishment is given. Know for yourself and communicate to others whom you have responsibility for what is at stake well before it is too late to make any needed adjustments.

Consequences don't have to be financial, or as severe as termination. The most effective punishments and rewards are neither. They are incremental signs of progress. They are based on receiving more or less recognition, empowerment, or other privileges.

---

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.activatingyourambition.com](http://www.activatingyourambition.com)), and president of Alpine Link Corporation ([www.alpinelink.com](http://www.alpinelink.com)), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

For other articles on reaching your peak potential, visit  
[www.alpinelink.com/Leadership\\_Sales\\_Management\\_Consulting\\_Papers\\_Tools\\_Templates.aspx](http://www.alpinelink.com/Leadership_Sales_Management_Consulting_Papers_Tools_Templates.aspx).