



Wellbeing Insights

Carrot and Stick

Wendy Tuohy of The Age, on 14th March, in *Parents warned against 'carrot and stick'* writes of an insight by Alyce Kirk, (a mental health nurse of thirteen years) when dealing with patients, "Don't try and manipulate [patients]," she says. "You actually have to have a communication with them and give them a bit of control." This insight, according to Alyce Kirk, could be useful in parenting too.

Her insight, Tuohy continues, is backed by a three-year study by positive psychology expert Dr James Donald and his team at the University of Sydney's business school. Published the week previously in the *American Psychological Bulletin*, it concludes the traditional 'carrot and stick' method of raising children – and management of people in workplaces – encourages self-interest and even anti-social behaviour but giving them freedom "unlocks people's good sides." Dr Donald, a behavioural psychologist adds, "The overuse of both carrots and sticks tends to shrink [people's] world to focusing on, 'What do I need to do to get the carrot and avoid the stick?' rather than to get them thinking about why this might be important...or why am I doing this?"

How fascinating to see confirmed in research, that a long-held practice for controlling or modifying behaviour, the 'carrot and stick' method, is not only outdated, but counterproductive! Instead of producing 'rounded human beings', it is more likely to produce self-centred, competitive ones. Dr Donald's research further indicates that an alternative practice to the 'carrot and the stick', albeit requiring work, is that of 'supported autonomy.' We at **my manifesto** posit that with *this* method, even the most vulnerable, such as the young child or the mentally ill, can retain some personal power and are more likely to develop empathy for others.

Conversely, withdrawing or denying power by single-handedly taking control, disenfranchises and disallows discovery of strengths and potentially, purpose.

To extend this awareness to our institutions, and workplaces: listening, genuinely collaborating, and responding to each other's ideas and feedback, rather than attempting to control or manipulate to suit our personal agendas, may just result in human beings who feel heard and who value connection. We may, in turn, all experience the rewards of greater social cohesion.