

The Science of Motivation®

An introduction to the Reiss Motivation Profile®

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What Motivates You?

Deep down, what motivates you? What aspects of your life are most meaningful to you? What goals drive your behavior?

Professor Steven Reiss answered these questions in a unique way – scientifically. He asked thousands of people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds about their intrinsic motives. Although scholars had spent centuries studying human nature, Reiss was the first to conduct large-scale, scientific surveys of our human purposes and psychological needs.

The result of Reiss’s work is the first comprehensive, standardized measure of what motivates an individual. The Reiss Motivation Profile® (RMP) assesses the 16 basic desires that are deeply rooted in human nature and that are intrinsic to all of us. These goals are common not only to all people but also to our nearer relatives in the animal world – goals such as the consumption of food, avoidance of danger, the company of peers, triumph over opponents, and leadership among our companions.

What makes the RMP “The Science of Motivation®?” Unlike other tests in the field, Professor Reiss did not use an *a priori* approach. That is, he did not start with a list of motives and then write items to assess those motives. Rather, he developed the RMP using an empirical (scientific) approach. The initial draft of the questionnaire included more than 500 items reflecting every imaginable goal that might motivate someone. After paring this list to 328 items by eliminating redundancies, Reiss conducted a series of studies with four separate samples of subjects in which he used a statistical technique called factor analysis to interpret the data. The end result was 16 scales, each comprised of eight items. In short, Reiss allowed data to determine the list of motives, not his own musings.

“[Previous] psychologists had suggested many lists of needs without scientifically validating any one of them. We embraced a new approach to the study of universal goals. If we want to identify these goals, why not ask people directly?”

Professor Steven Reiss

Reiss Motivation Profile

The 16 Basic Desires of Human Nature



Acceptance: the desire for positive self-regard



Order: the desire for structure and stability



Beauty: the desire for aesthetically appealing experiences



Physical Activity: the desire for muscle exercise



Curiosity: the desire for understanding



Power: the desire for influence of will



Eating: the desire to consume food



Saving: the desire to collect things



Family: the desire to raise children and spend time with siblings



Social Contact: the desire for companionship with peers



Honor: the desire for upright character



Status: the desire for respect based on social standing



Idealism: the desire for social justice



Tranquility: the desire to avoid experiencing anxiety and pain



Independence: the desire for self-reliance



Vengeance: the desire to confront those who frustrate or offend us

What is a Basic Desire?

According to Reiss, basic desires (intrinsic motives) have two aspects:

- What is wanted, called the *intrinsically valued goal*

“Want is wanted” is the universal in human motivation. We all want the same 16 goals: acceptance, understanding, sustenance, offspring, character, justice, freedom, structure, muscle exercise, competence, sex, preparedness, belonging, respect, safety, and victory.

- How much is wanted, called the *satiating intensity*

“How much is wanted” is the particular in human motivation. Our differing satiating intensities for each of the basic desires are what make us individuals. A person with a high satiating intensity for Order develops the trait of “organized,” while a person with a low satiating intensity for Order develops the trait of “spontaneous.”

Reiss’s research identified the 16 universal goals we all want. The Reiss Motivation Profile® is a standardized psychological test that reveals an individual’s satiating intensity for each of the 16 basic desires, and it is these unique satiating intensities that determine our values, predict our behavior, influence the development of our personality traits, and create harmony or conflict in our interpersonal relationships.

“Intrinsic motivation is the management of experience with universal goals in accordance with core values.”

Professor Steven Reiss

The Origin of the Basic Desires

“Since our basic desires have a genetic origin, we tend to have the same basic goals throughout our lives.”

Professor Steven Reiss

Since the basic desires can be observed in animals and are evident in people from multiple cultures, it is likely they have a genetic origin. Accordingly, we tend to have the same basic goals throughout our lives. Curious children usually become curious adults, and adolescents who like to organize often continue to enjoy organizing in adulthood.

Of course, culture and upbringing play a role in the expression of the basic desires. For example, people everywhere are motivated by hunger and power, but they differ widely in the food they eat and in the ambitions they pursue. Specific desires may be encouraged or suppressed in some cultures or families. Two teachers may encourage their children to start reading at an early age, while two athletes may encourage participation in sports.



Our Basic Desires Determine Our Values

Motives and values are so closely connected we can infer values from motives and motives from values. For example, if we observe an individual engaged in frequent social interactions, we can infer he values a sense of belonging. Further, if we know a person values a sense of belonging, we can predict he will seek frequent companionship with peers.

Individuals vary significantly in how they prioritize each of the 16 basic desires. Athletes with a strong desire for Physical Activity typically place higher value on fitness than does the average person, while intellectuals with a strong desire for Curiosity typically place higher value on theoretical ideas than does the average person.



“We are a species born to assert our core values.”

Professor Steven Reiss

Basic Desires Predict Behavior in Natural Environments

“Basic desires are defined by goals, not emotions, because goals are more forward-looking and predictive of future behavior.”

Professor Steven Reiss

Since basic desires express the universal goals that motivate us, the identification of an individual’s basic desires predicts how the person is likely to behave. The Reiss Motivation Profile® assesses the goals an individual values most, which then leads to predictions that the individual will engage in behavior designed to achieve those goals. A few examples:

- If we know that an individual has a strong need for Curiosity, we can predict the person will spend a significant amount of time in intellectual activities such as reading books, listening to podcasts on a wide range of topics, and discussing theoretical ideas.
- If we know that an individual has a weak need for Tranquility, we can predict the person will participate in activities that provide a measure of excitement, perhaps even a brush with danger (e.g., mountain climbing, downhill skiing, paragliding).
- If we know that an individual has a strong need for Family, we can predict the person will want to have children, spend significant time involved in the children’s lives, and perhaps choose a career that does not require long hours or travel.

“The list of 16 basic desires is the only taxonomy of human needs that was empirically derived.”

Professor Steven Reiss

How Basic Desires Give Rise to Personality Traits

While previous motivational theorists spoke in general terms of motivation and personality, Professor Reiss was the first to devise a conceptual platform that connects motives to specific traits. **According to Reiss, intensity of motivation is central to understanding the development of personality traits.**

In the theory of 16 basic desires, each desire is viewed as a continuum of motivation, and each individual is postulated to have an optimal level of happiness with regard to the continuum. For the motive of Social Contact, for example, the continuum ranges from wanting to be alone all of the time to wanting to socialize for all of one's waking hours. To achieve an optimal level of social contact, the individual develops habits to regulate his experiences toward his desired amount of socialization with peers.

Reiss assumed that it is relatively easy to satisfy average desires because society is geared to meet our average needs. In the example of the motive for Social Contact, a person with an average striving for this basic desire does not need to develop special habits to regulate his experiences toward an average amount of socialization. The individual simply goes through life – attending school, getting a job, playing a sport, and/or participating in clubs – and these activities will provide the amount of peer interaction needed to satisfy an average desire for Social Contact.

Individuals with either a strong or a weak desire for Social Contact, however, must acquire habits that will help them to satisfy their extreme needs. Someone who wants to spend a lot of time with peers will need to develop such habits as hosting frequent parties and actively participating in several clubs – habits that become associated with the personality traits of friendly and outgoing. Someone who wants to spend a lot of time alone will need to develop such habits as declining party invitations and engaging in solitary hobbies – habits that become associated with the personality traits of serious and private.

“The same basic desire at varying degrees of strength produces different, even opposite, personality traits.”

Professor Steven Reiss

The Impact of Basic Desires on Relationships

Professor Reiss's theory of motivation, called the theory of 16 basic desires, has significant implications for relationships. When used with two people, the Reiss Motivation Profile® assesses their compatibility – that is, the similar values that bind them as well as the opposing values that tend to result in repeated quarrels. The relationship can be between any two people – for example, supervisor-employee, coach-athlete, parent-child, or romantic partners.

In the theory of 16 basic desires, four principles explain compatibility in long-term relationships:

Principle of Bonding: People bond to those with similar values.

Principle of Separation: People separate from those with opposite values.

Principle of Self-hugging: Self-hugging is the natural tendency to think our values are best, not just for us, but potentially for everyone.

Principle of Everyday Tyranny: We try to impose our values on others, thinking it is for their own good.

For basic desires on which two people are matched – that is, both have a strong need for the desire, or both have a weak need, the individuals share the same value, tend to understand each other, and generally think positively about one another. For basic desires on which two people are mismatched – that is, one has a strong need for the desire while the other has a weak need, the individuals have opposing values, tend to misunderstand each other, and generally think negatively about one another.

For the motive of Power, for example, people with a strong need for this basic desire value competence, productivity, and excellence. They seek challenges, work hard to accomplish their goals, enjoy giving advice, and may assume leadership roles. On the other hand, people with a weak desire for Power dislike self-assertion. They are nondirective, dislike giving advice, and may avoid positions of leadership. Since they value work-life balance, they tend to pursue goals that are less challenging.

If two individuals in a relationship are matched on a strong need for Power, both are willful and understand each other's need for achievement. If the two individuals are matched on a weak need for Power, both are nondirective and understand each other's preference for work-life balance.

A mismatch, however, occurs when one individual has a strong need for Power and the other has a weak need. The willful person may think the nondirective person lacks ambition and would be happier if he worked harder, while the nondirective individual may think the willful individual is a workaholic who would be happier if he devoted more time to leisurely pursuits. Since the conflict is one of core values, the relationship may be characterized by repeated quarrels about issues related to control and/or work-life balance.

“Mismatched desires on the RMP motivate conflicts of core values.”

Professor Steven Reiss

Applications

The Reiss Motivation Profile® has been applied to business, sports, schools, and relationship counseling.

RMP for Business

Based on The Science of Motivation®, the Reiss Motivation Profile® for Business discusses the implications of the person's unique motivational profile for job performance and interpersonal relationships at work. The results are used for leadership training, professional development, team building, conflict resolution, succession planning, and diversity and inclusion efforts.

Leaders learn how:

- their basic desires influence their management style
- motivational blind spots can create misunderstandings and frustration
- their unknowing attempts to impose their own values on others are likely to result in dysfunction, conflict, and employee turnover
- to manage employees based on what motivates each employee, not on what motivates them.

Teams become more effective because:

- conflicts between team members are diffused through understanding the differences in values that underlie the disagreements
- tasks can be assigned based not only on team members' skills but also on their intrinsic motives.

Applications

Employees gain:

- awareness of the sources of frustration experienced at work
- the knowledge needed to pursue positions that match their basic desires in addition to their skills.



Organizations benefit from:

- an increase in employee engagement
- a decrease in staff turnover
- the creation of a healthy culture in which individuals can thrive.

Applications

RMP for Sports

As reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, the Reiss Motivation Profile® for Sports enables coaches and trainers to help athletes motivate themselves for peak performance, manage their tendencies under the stress of competition, and understand the differences in values that underlie chronic conflicts with teammates.

Coaches and trainers learn which athletes are likely to:

- show inconsistent effort due to a fear of failure
- react poorly to constructive feedback
- have trouble managing their weight
- be self-disciplined during offseason workouts
- be team oriented
- perform better in competition than in practice
- work hard to achieve challenging goals
- want to assume leadership roles
- play poorly against inferior opponents
- have an unusually strong desire to win.

Applications

Reiss School Motivation Profile®

Based on The Science of Motivation®, the RSMP discusses the implications of the student's unique motivational profile for academic achievement, school performance, and interpersonal relationships. The results enable *school psychologists* to identify motivational reasons for poor grades and inappropriate behavior not related to a disability - and to plan effective interventions tailored to the student's individual needs. *Teachers* use the data to implement successful strategies to promote a positive mindset, while *school counselors* can offer students thoughtful advice about career choices based not only on the students' skills but also on the students' intrinsic motives.

The RSMP assesses six possible motivational reasons for poor school grades:

- fear of failure (a strong need for Acceptance)
- incuriosity (a weak need for Curiosity)
- lack of ambition (a weak need for Power)
- disorganization (a weak need for Order)
- lack of responsibility (a weak need for Honor)
- combativeness (a strong need for Vengeance).

Applications

The Reiss School Motivation Profile® assesses the likelihood that a student represents a danger to himself and/or others.

Four scales evaluate possible instigators for violent behavior:

Vengeance – a strong need for this basic desire indicates a student who is angry, easily offended, and confrontational

Acceptance – a strong need for this basic desire indicates a student who is unusually sensitive to rejection

Status – a strong need for this basic desire indicates a student who is looking for attention

Tranquility – a weak need for this basic desire indicates a student who is fearless.

Two scales evaluate possible inhibitors of school violence:

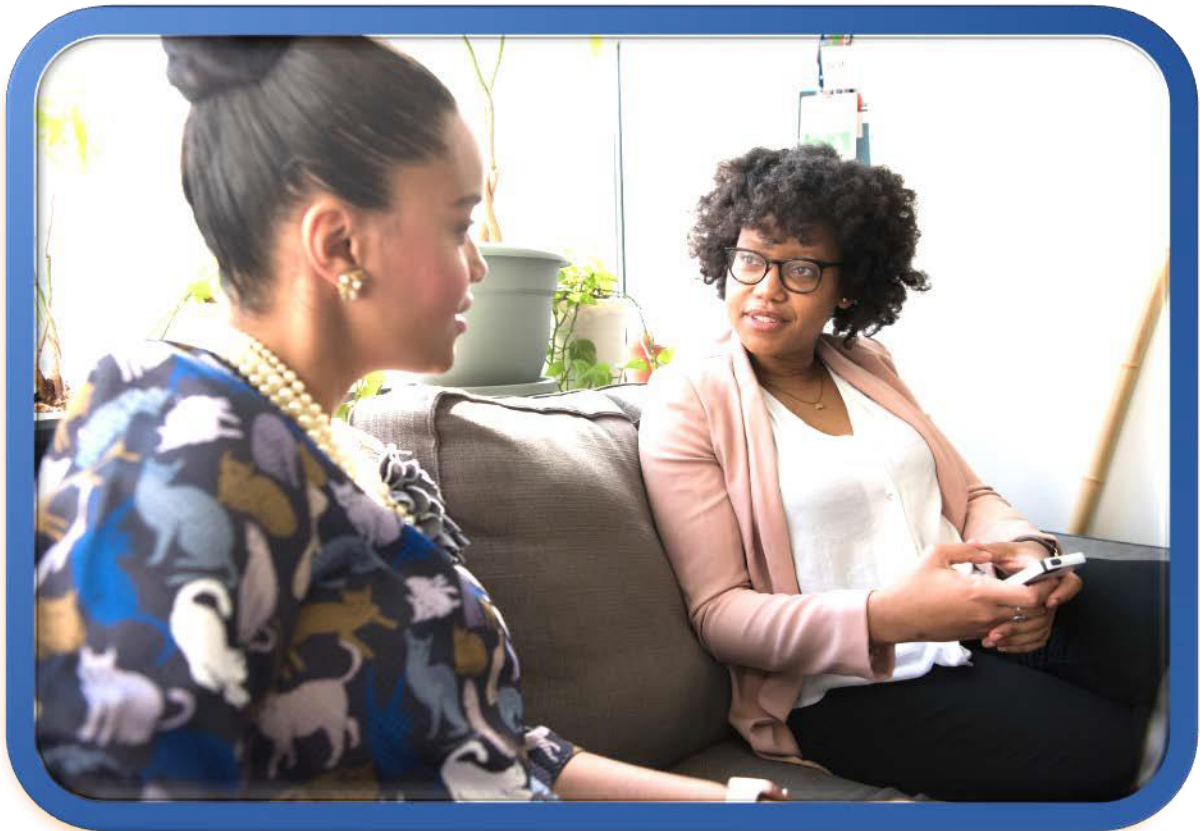
Honor – a strong need for this basic desire indicates a student who is concerned with morality

Idealism – a strong need for this basic desire indicates a student who is concerned with fairness.

Applications

RMP for Self-Discovery

The Reiss Motivation Profile® for Self-Discovery helps people achieve enduring happiness. In the Science of Motivation®, true happiness comes from meaning, and meaning comes from pursuing a lifestyle that affirms an individual's basic desires and values. The RMP for Self-Discovery assesses an individual's most important needs, knowledge which can be used by the individual to identify sources of frustration – that is, intense needs that are not being met by current relationships, work, or hobbies – and which can empower the person to seek new avenues for satisfying his deepest desires. When used with two partners, the Reiss Motivation Profile® for Self-Discovery clarifies the intrinsic motives that bind the partners as well as those that cause chronic conflict due to opposing values.



The Science

The Reiss Motivation Profile® was developed empirically over a seven-year period. The studies conducted by Professor Reiss and his colleagues that established the test's reliability and validity passed stringent peer review for publication in scientific journals. The test also has been validated by seven independent researchers from Canada, Finland, Poland, and the United States.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree to which a test produces stable and consistent results. Two common ways to assess the reliability of a test are test-retest and internal consistency. Test-retest reliability measures the consistency of results when the same test is repeated on the same sample of subjects at different points in time. Internal consistency refers to the degree to which each item on a scale measures the same construct.

Test-Retest Reliability: In a study of two-week test-retest reliability, Pearson product moment coefficients for the scales ranged from .80 to .96, with a mean of .83. In a study of four-week test-retest reliability, Pearson product-moment correlations ranged from .69 to .88, with a mean of .80. According to commonly-accepted statistical standards, these results indicated the RMP has “good” test-retest reliability. In other words, respondents’ RMP results are likely to remain stable and consistent over time.

Internal Consistency: The internal consistency of the RMP was assessed in a third study, in which confirmatory factor analysis of the subjects’ data provided evidence for a robust factor structure. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .74 to .92, with a median of .82, which is considered to be “good” internal consistency. That is, the eight items on each of the scales were found to measure the same construct.

The Science

Validity

Validity is the degree to which a test measures what it was designed to measure. Concurrent validity and criterion validity are two common methods used to assess the validity of a test. Concurrent validity refers to the degree to which a test's scales are positively correlated to similar scales on other assessments. Criterion validity refers to the extent to which a measure is related to an outcome. Data for the concurrent and criterion validity of the RMP have been reported for each of the 16 scales. Examples are described below for selected scales.

Acceptance

Concurrent validity: RMP Acceptance is positively correlated with Big Five Neuroticism. Both scales measure traits such as self-doubting and pessimistic.

Criterion validity: A strong need for Acceptance is associated with inconsistent effort due to a fear of failure. It was predicted low-achieving high school students would score above average on this scale, a prediction that was confirmed.

Idealism

Concurrent validity: RMP Idealism is positively associated with Big Five Agreeableness. Both scales measure traits such as altruistic and compassionate.

Criterion validity: A strong need for Idealism is associated with a desire to help the downtrodden. It was predicted community volunteers would score above average on this scale, a prediction that was confirmed.

Curiosity

Concurrent validity: RMP Curiosity is positively correlated with Big Five Openness to Experience. Both scales measure traits such as inquisitive and reflective.

Criterion validity: A strong need for Curiosity is associated with enjoyment of intellectual pursuits. It was predicted philosophers would score above average on this scale, a prediction that was confirmed.

Power

Concurrent validity: RMP Power is positively associated with Dominance on the Personality Research Form. Both scales measure traits such as assertive and controlling.

Criterion validity: A strong need for Power is associated with a desire for leadership. It was predicted ROTC military officers would score above average on this scale, a prediction that was confirmed.

The Science

Norms

While the initial norms from 2007 included 7,800 respondents, two subsequent re-normings completed in 2012 and 2017 were comprised of about 45,000 and 80,000 respondents, respectively. The most recent re-norming in 2022 was based on data collected from 135,807 individuals including 61,065 females (45%) and 74,732 males (55%). The test takers, who ranged in age from 12 to 99 (mean = 37), represent 159 countries across six continents (all except Antarctica). Seven countries had enough respondents to allow the creation of statistically valid norms: Austria, Finland, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the USA.

The current data analysis reaffirmed the findings of the re-norming conducted in 2017 with regard to gender differences in RMP scores. On average, women scored significantly higher than men for Acceptance and Beauty, while men scored significantly higher than women for Physical Activity, Power, and Romance. In other words, females generally attach greater importance to the needs for self-affirmation and aesthetic experiences. Males, on the other hand, generally place greater importance on the needs for physical exercise, achievement, and sex.

Consistent with previous data analyses, the current re-norming did not demonstrate a relationship between age of a respondent and a given motive.

Additional data analysis of generational cohorts showed no significant differences for any of the motives between the average scores of Boomers I, Boomers II, Generation X, and Millennials. That is, the findings suggest individuals from these generations generally share similar values.

For Generation Z, however, six motives were found to differentiate this generation from the other four generations: Curiosity, Eating, Family, Saving, Tranquility, and Vengeance. Compared to earlier generations, GenZers scored significantly higher, on average, for the basic desires of Eating, Saving, Tranquility, and Vengeance. They also scored significantly lower, on average, for Curiosity and Family. These results indicate GenZers attach greater importance to the needs for food, collecting, safety, and revenge while attaching lower importance to the needs for intellectual thought and family life, as compared to individuals from four previous generations.

In summary, current norms for the Reiss Motivation Profile® are based on 135,807 respondents who completed the test between 2007 and 2022. Statistical analysis of the data revealed differences across gender, country of residence, and generational cohort. Thus, separate norms were constructed for men and women, residents of countries with sufficient numbers of test takers, and members of Generation Z.

Professor Steven Reiss

Steven Reiss, Ph.D. was Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at The Ohio State University. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree, *magna cum laude*, from Dartmouth College, completed a clinical internship at Harvard Medical School, and earned his doctorate in psychology from Yale University. He was a Fellow of both the American Psychological Association and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Professor Reiss contributed original ideas, new assessment methods, and influential research studies to three topics in psychology: anxiety disorders, developmental disabilities, and intrinsic motivation.

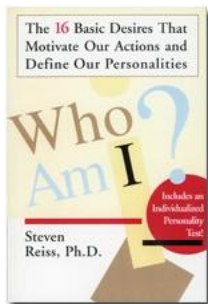


Reiss led the research team that discovered anxiety sensitivity – the idea that the fear of fear arises from beliefs about the consequences of anxiety, and he wrote the Anxiety Sensitivity Index® (ASI), a measure that has been translated into more than 20 languages. Anxiety sensitivity became an important topic in clinical psychology: The ASI has been used in more than 1,800 published studies, and the concept of anxiety sensitivity changed how therapists treat Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Panic Disorder, disorders that affect millions of people.

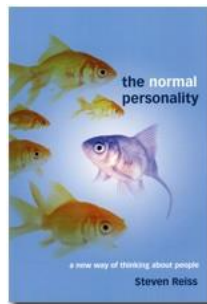
Professor Reiss was one of the world’s leading authorities on dual diagnosis, or the co-occurrence of mental illness and intellectual disabilities. He founded one of the first outpatient programs for people with a dual diagnosis, and the success of this clinic helped to justify and fund hundreds of new psychiatric service programs in North America and Europe. He introduced the now widely used term “diagnostic overshadowing” to refer to the tendency to overlook the mental health needs of people with developmental disabilities. He organized the first-ever international conference on the mental health aspects of intellectual disabilities, and he developed the Reiss Screen for Maladaptive Behavior®, which became the leading method in North America for identifying service needs for many thousands of people with a dual diagnosis. His work in the field of developmental disabilities was recognized with five national awards.

Following a life-threatening diagnosis in 1995, Reiss began to study what makes people tick. He and his colleagues executed the first large-scale, cross-cultural, scientific research surveys of what people say motivates them. The Reiss Motivation Profile® (RMP) identified 16 psychological needs or basic desires, which are goals common to everyone. Everyone is motivated by these 16 basic desires, but individuals prioritize them differently. This work was reported in most newspapers of record in North America, Europe, and Asia as well as by BBC and ABC.

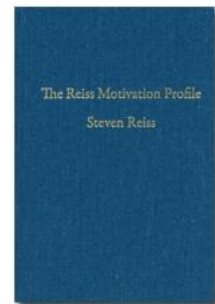
Professor Reiss authored eight books including five on the RMP, was editor on two books, and published numerous articles in prestigious scientific journals. He gave talks in 44 states as well as four Canadian provinces, made an invited presentation before the Civil Rights Division of the United States Justice Department, and gave invited addresses in Austria, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Wales. His obituary was published in the *American Psychologist*, an honor accorded to very few psychologists – only those who are considered to have made significant advances to the field.



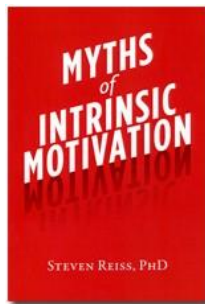
[Who Am I?](#)



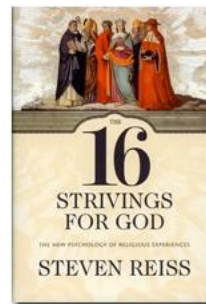
[The Normal Personality](#)



[The Reiss Motivation Profile](#)



[Myths of Intrinsic Motivation](#)



[The 16 Strivings for God](#)

Questions?

We encourage you to visit our website for more information about the Reiss Motivation Profile® and The Science of Motivation®, including how to become certified as an RMP Master:

www.reissmotivationprofile.com

For pricing, kindly email us:

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