Can You "Ace*" this Comprehension Test?

The value of taking a reading or listening comprehension test is that it gives you a way to check your understanding of a difficult article, and get explanations and vocabulary help if needed. (Of course, it also gives you practice with test-taking and common test question types—very useful if you need to take an important test soon.)

This test checks your understanding of a TED talk: (http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation.html). Dan Pink's talk about the uses of extrinsic motivation versus intrinsic rewards has an important message for businesses. Dan Pink presents himself as a lawyer making his case (presenting his arguments) on why businesses need to change their thinking.

He jokes about himself and about American attitudes (expressing or exaggerating stereotypes he doesn't really believe-- that his audience knows he doesn't believe, such as "Americans don't believe in philosophy") to make a serious point. He talks about a "mismatch between what science knows and what business does." Business practices should—but do not-- match what researchers have repeatedly proved to be true. His hope is to reverse the assumptions that employers make about how to get the best work from their employees, to make the U.S. and the world more productive.

After watching this video, I highly recommend you read the transcript (the written record of what he said) in English before taking this test. You can find the transcript at the bottom right corner of the video on their page. Later you may also want to read its translation into your first language—but take this comprehension test first, to see how much of the English you could understand after listening and reading it.

I think this research is important enough to be worth the time it takes to both watch and read it—and it will increase your English vocabulary and fluency as well! *(Incidentally, to "ace" a test is a slang or casual way of saying to get an 'A'—to get almost all of the answers correct.)

A Comprehension Test on Dan Pink's TED Talk on Motivation

Background to question 1: Dan Pink discusses a famous problem-solving experiment called the candle problem. Researchers give participants a candle, a box of thumb tacks (used to attach light-weight objects to a wall), and a book of matches. They ask them to see how quickly they can find a way to attach the candle to the wall so that it will not drip its wax onto the table when it is lit.

Some participants are offered a reward (money) if they can find the solution faster than most people. Others are just asked to work as quickly as they can. Which group would you expect to finish first? The actual answer surprises many people. In fact, most of the rest of the talk is devoted to explaining it.

(Incidentally, the kind of "right-brained" creative problem solving needed for the candle problem is also called lateral thinking, or "thinking outside the box"—outside of what is immediately obvious.

Now try the test:

1. Which group was the fastest at solving the candle problem?
   - A. The participants who were offered a reward.
   - B. The participants who were not offered rewards.
   - C. Both groups took approximately the same amount of time.
   - D. Different groups finished faster depending on the country in which the experiment is done.

2. Why was the candle problem much easier to solve when the tacks were already taken out of the box?
   - A. It was obvious the tacks could be used to fasten the candle to the wall.
   - B, It was easier to pick up the tacks.
   - C. The participants didn't waste time emptying the box.
   - D. The box was more noticeable.

3. What is Dan Pink's basic point about what science knows that business doesn't?
   - A. People do better work when they are motivated.
   - B. People work better when they fear punishment if they don't meet a quota or goal.
   - C. People do better creative work when they are self-motivated or believe the work is important.
   - D. People do better creative work when they are offered a big salary and other rewards.

4. Which of these is NOT an intrinsic reward?
   - A. freedom of action
   - B. working for a good cause
   - C. getting praise and recognition
   - D. a sense of accomplishment

5. When do rewards and other extrinsic motivations work best?
   - A. With creative problem-solving work.
   - B. With routine, well-understood tasks.
   - C. In very high pressure environments.
   - D. In relaxed, low-pressure environments.

6. What is the connection between extrinsic motivation and creativity?
   - A. Too much pressure or desire over-focuses the mind and prevents lateral, "outside the box" thinking.
   - B. Pressure sharpens the mind and encourages creativity.
   - C. Creative people need the promise of lots of money and other rewards to do their best work.
   - D. There is no connection between money or other 'perks' and creativity.

7. What do economists mean when they say, "We find that financial incentives can result in a negative impact on overall performance." ?
   - A. Money is the best incentive.
   - B. Money is a negative motivation.
   - C. People perform best when they are offered more money.
   - D. Offering more money can actually reduce results.

8. Which word is closest in meaning to 'incentive?' (** See bottom of answers for explanation if you have a problem with this question.)
>   A. incentivitize
>   B. motivate
>   C. valuable
>   D. reward

9. An attachment is
>   A. something fastened to something else
>   B. an individual part of something
>   C. an extra piece
>   D. a potential connection

10. Extrinsic means
>   A. inside
>   B. outside
>   C. attached
>   D. only loosely connected

11. A norm is
>   A. a normal event
>   B. an abnormal event
>   C. a standard to measure by
>   D. a mathematical average

12. Knockout is a boxing term for when a boxer wins by knocking out the other boxer (hitting him in a way that makes him unconscious-- "out.") The boxing match between Ali and Frazier (both famous boxers) was THE big game in boxing some years ago.

Why does Dan Pink mention all those boxing terms when he talks about the difference between Encarta and Wikipedia—two different types of encyclopedia?
>   A. He's showing that the success of Wikipedia confirmed the value of intrinsic rewards.
>   B. He's saying that Wikipedia is a better fighter than Encarta.
>   C. He's saying that Encarta was knocked out and destroyed.
>   D. He's showing that making encyclopedias is as competitive as boxing.

** Explanation for the answers to question 8: an incentive can motivate a person, but motivate is a verb meaning to move or cause, and incentive is a noun, whether it is concrete like money or a gift or abstract like praise]

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So, did you "ace" the test? It really doesn't matter if you missed several questions, as long as you learned some English and got a little better at understanding English-language tests.

Answers

1. Which group was the fastest at solving the candle problem?
    B. The participants who were not offered rewards.

2. Why was the candle problem much easier to solve when the tacks were already taken out of the box?
    D. The box was more noticeable.

3. What is Dan Pink's basic point about what science knows that business doesn't?
    C. People do better creative work when they are self-motivated or believe the work is important.

4. Which of these is NOT an intrinsic reward?
    C. getting praise and recognition

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    A. something fastened to something else

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    A. He's showing that the success of Wikipedia confirmed the value of intrinsic rewards.

** Explanation for the answers to question 8: an incentive can motivate a person, but motivate is a verb meaning to move or cause, and incentive is a noun, whether it is concrete like money or a gift or abstract like praise.