

How to Motivate Yourself

Your 10 Step Guide to Staying Motivated!



No matter how committed we are to our goals, there are times when we struggle to keep ourselves motivated and moving forward.

When we're not feeling fully confident in ourselves or our abilities or can't see the next step, fears, doubts and inertia can quickly set in leaving us feeling stuck, even wanting to give up.

When this happens, here are 10 ways to help you 'dig deep', motivate yourself and rebuild your momentum;

1. Use goals to define what's important and to provide focus and direction

- When we don't know what we want, it is difficult to focus on anything or feel that tasks and activities are important or worth doing. We feel: 'why bother?'
- Without goals, the things we do aren't helping us **move towards what we want** - but more likely to reflect a passive motivation to avoid pain or punishment.
- Positive motivation starts with defining what is important to you and what you want, then setting goals and identifying actions that will **focus** your efforts to achieve them.
- Use your goals and action plans as the lens to evaluate the things you need to do: what activities are helping you move closer to reaching your goals? What activities are important?
- When you feel stuck, re-connect with your goal on an emotional level. **Feel** how much you really want to achieve it and how your life will feel once you succeed. Then think about the task: is it important? How will it help you reach your goal? How do you feel about it now?
- Keep focused and assess your progress daily: are you doing something **every single day that will bring you closer** to your goal? Are you moving in the right direction?

2. Ensure your goals reflect what really drives you and makes you happy

- What drives you? What activities and achievements truly make you happy? Learning new things? Money? Caring for others? Travelling? Creating? Building Security? Being admired? Making a contribution? Expanding and reaching your potential?
- It is one thing to have a goal and to work hard to pursue it, but if it is at odds with what really drives you and makes you happy, it will always feel like hard work!
- Sometimes, in spite of great success, for example, in our careers, we can still feel unfulfilled and vaguely dissatisfied - this happens when our achievements do not reflect what truly makes us happy.
- If you're happiest at home working in your garden or spending time with your family, will working towards a large promotion into a role with longer hours, even extensive travel, going to make you happy? How does it impact your motivation?

3. But what if you just don't want to, but 'have to'? Work with your intrinsic and extrinsic motivators

- **Intrinsic motivators** are our self-generated, internal motivation: that sense of satisfaction and achievement we feel when we spend time on activities that reflect what drives us - activities that we enjoy.
- They can include: learning new things, being creative, solving problems, using our skills and talents, completing challenging work, work that gives us power, autonomy, makes us feel important, appreciated or accepted or will advance our careers / move us towards our goals.
- When you are struggling to feel motivated, analyse the task to see if any aspect of it can appeal to your intrinsic motivation.
- Understand how extrinsic i.e. external things given by others motivate you. These could include; money, bonuses, financial incentives, security, praise, recognition, promotion or even punishment or withdrawal of privileges.
- Extrinsic motivators are often short term; without them, our motivation disappears. Would you still go to work if your salary disappeared? They can be a means to get the things that we really want. Understand your extrinsic motivators: how and why they are **the carrot** that influences your actions and behaviours.
- When you're feeling unmotivated, see if you can call on your intrinsic and extrinsic motivators to get you moving. Get in the habit of rewarding yourself for your efforts and your achievements.

4. Get your subconscious on side and build your self-confidence

- Our subconscious mind can be our **most powerful motivational force**: it can fuel almost super-human effort with desire, belief and a strong inner drive to overcome anything in our way.
- Equally, it can turn against us, sapping our confidence and self-esteem with negative beliefs and vicious self-criticism - we become our own worst enemy.
- Monitor your self-talk with vigilance. If it is working against you, destroying your self-confidence and motivation, over-write it with a new mantra of belief and pride in yourself. To re-write your mental script:
 1. Focus on all that you have and have achieved, rather than what you haven't got: count your blessings and enjoy how they feel and what they bring to your life;
 2. List what you have achieved in every sphere of your life plus your strengths, talents and compliments you've received. How does this list make you feel?
 3. Laugh at and replace any self-talk that is blatantly untrue with the facts. Is it true that you 'always' fail? Every single time? You've never succeeded at anything once in your life? Laugh at these statements and eliminate their power over you;
 4. Focus on what you want, connect with it on an emotional level. Emotion is the language that our subconscious understands. Visualise the actions that you're going to take to get what you want, **focus on feeling positive and confident** as you 'see' yourself taking them. Repeat often, turning up your confidence 'dial' with positive self-talk.
- Rebuild your self-confidence. Start with small achievable goals and use every victory, no matter how small, to build momentum, your belief in yourself your confidence, your appetite for greater achievement.
- Don't let your own mind be the one thing that is holding you back. Show it who's boss.
- What could you do if you were unstoppable? What would you do if you could not fail?

5. Name your fears

- What's stopping you? A lack of confidence? Fear of failure? Doubt?
- It is interesting how often we freeze or can't even start due to the fear of failure, even when we have successfully done something many times before - e.g. writers' block or public speaking.
- When you're stuck or just can't get started, break it down: what is really happening at a deeper level.
- Name your fears and doubts. Can you rationalise them? Have you done the task before? Were you successful? Did you learn something that can help you this time? Can you get help and support? What do you need to succeed?
- In their own words, these 'failures' were actually the **only way** they could find the knowledge that they needed to succeed. If you do 'fail' let it just be the way that you find what you need to ultimately succeed.
- In the words of Thomas Edison: 'If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward'.
- **Remember, if you have done it before, or if only one other person has ever done it before: then it is possible.**
- Of course, you don't need to stop at what you know to be possible: think where we'd be if Christopher Columbus settled for a career cruising around the Mediterranean or the Wright Brothers were happy just to fly kites.

6. Bounce back after setbacks

- Failures and setbacks can kill our motivation, even our dreams. When we sacrifice and work extremely hard and do not get the results we want or feel that we deserve, it can be devastating.
- When the setback is caused by something outside of our control, it's even worse - we feel powerless. What's the point?
- We all experience failures and setbacks at some point in our lives. As difficult or as devastating as it can be to face, we need to decide whether to quit or to pick ourselves up and just keep going.
- **'Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts'** - Winston Churchill
- 'Many of life's failures are people who did not realise how close they were to success when they gave up' - Thomas Edison
- When you are ready, find a way to dig deep into yourself, your character and your strength reserves, take a deep breath and make a plan to start again.
- No matter how painful and hopeless it feels, it is possible: Abraham Lincoln lost 8 elections, went bankrupt twice and suffered a nervous breakdown before he reached the White House. **Keep going.**

7. Break it down

- Research shows that we are generally more likely to delay or avoid abstract, difficult and longer term tasks.
- If your goals leave you feeling stuck and unmotivated, check whether they are defined specifically enough so that they can actually be achieved (**SMART**) and ensure that you have broken them down into tangible small, achievable steps.
- To keep moving forward, always ensure that an achievable next step is clearly defined.
- **Do it for just 10 minutes:** once you get going, you may be tempted to just keep going.

8. Get in the zone

- **'Being In The Flow'** is a state where we feel happy. We are completely immersed in what we are doing, we experience inner clarity, a sense of timelessness, serenity and a feeling that the activity is achievable.
- When we're in the flow, we are experiencing our intrinsic motivation: the activity itself is its own reward.
- Know what gets you in the flow and see what you can do to re-create this state whenever you need to focus and feel motivated.
- What else gets you into your 'zone?' For example, do you have some motivational music that gets you in the right mental state to take on any challenge - a soundtrack to your own 'Rocky training montage?' What gives you the 'Eye of the Tiger' and inspires your blood, sweat and tears?

9. Just start: act like it for 10 minutes

- When all else fails, just start. Even if it is just for 10 minutes
- If it helps, act as if you are the most motivated person on earth. This is the time to call on your inner Meryl Streep or Robert De Niro and give an Oscar-worthy performance; that of a convincing motivated person.
- With the mindset, posture and actions of a motivated person you'll soon start to actually feel motivated for real. Once you get going, build momentum and keep going.

10. It's not you: it's them!

- **Motivation Theory** explains how we are motivated to take actions that we feel will help us meet our needs.
- No matter how motivated we are, a bad boss or an organization or work that does not meet our needs can soon leave us deflated, even depressed.
- It isn't realistic to be motivated when our efforts are unappreciated, or when we feel that we're being treated unfairly (**Adams**), where there is no tangible link between our efforts and rewards (**Process Theories of Motivation**), or our organization lacks the motivators and hygiene factors (**Herzberg**) that meet our needs.
- If your boss's behaviour repeatedly takes the wind out of your sails, or your organization or the work itself does not meet your needs, see the situation for what it is and decide what action to take.
- First, identify your needs and which needs are not being met by the situation.
- Second, assess your options.
- Can you talk to your boss about what you need from him / her to improve your motivation?
- If not, is the situation 'toxic' and causing you stress and unhappiness? Can you leave, move departments or can you out-last your morale-sapping boss? In today's continuous cycle of corporate restructuring our current boss may not be our boss for too long!
- If the organization or the work itself isn't right for us, we need to decide whether the extrinsic motivators they offer are enough for us to stay and keep trying. If they are not, for our own happiness, it may be time to find a situation that is more likely to meet our needs and where we can be happy.
- In either case, the important thing is that you actively decide whether to stay or go for your own reasons. Making the choice can give us a sense of power and control over our lives, which is positive, and can be motivational in itself.