



Staying Motivated

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“How do I get my motivation back”, or “How do I stay motivated” are questions I get a lot. And it is true that motivation matters. A lot of what we value attaining in life is achieved by sticking to a course of actions. Seldom does doing one action once get us to where we want to be. Yet for a lot of people motivation seems elusive. It seems like something just out of their reach. They think to themselves, if only I could stay motivated then I could finish that qualification, start that business, get promoted, get fit, and so on.

The first thing to understand about motivation is that all motivation is self-motivation. Someone else cannot motivate you. They may get you to take action through threats and expectations of punishment if you don't do something, but that is not motivation. And when the threat is gone, you will no longer take the actions. In fact you may even dislike or fear the task that you never want to do it again. Trying to make you feel small and stupid if you don't take the action is also not motivation. Motivation has to come from you. And we are motivated when we really want to achieve something. When we find a task inspiring, or when we associate a lot of pleasure and happiness with achieving the outcome.

There are a number of ways you can motivate yourself based on what we know about how the human brain works. Will power, which a lot of people say they need to develop, will only take you so far. Don't rely on will power, it is unlikely you will stay the course.

1. We move towards what we feel will bring us pleasure or what is inspiring, and we run away from what we suspect will cause us pain. That is how our brains are wired to keep us alive. Which is the fundamental purpose of the brain. In coaching, when we are setting goals, one of the questions we ask is, “How inspiring is this goal”? If the goal is not inspiring you need to change the goal or reword it so that it is inspiring. If it does not inspire you, then all the obstacles that are part of everyday life will stop you from taking the necessary action. If you think something will bring you pain, or humiliation, or isolation, you probably won't do it.

2. Understand why you are doing something. Do not underestimate the importance of a vision. If you have a purpose in your life and consequently a vision, and you look at it often and read it everyday and know why that is your vision, you are more motivated to take the necessary actions to achieve the vision. There is the story which has been repeated many times of the man sweeping the floor at NASA, and when asked what his job was about, answered that he was helping put a man on the moon. Make sure you have a good “why” and make sure that it is inspiring for you to achieve. You may need to think about doing this. At school and at work we don’t usually get our goals and performance outputs linked to a meaningful vision. If you can do this though, you will be much more motivated. Look at the bigger picture and how what you do, really makes a difference in the world and in your life.

3. There is a lot written about BHAG’s (big, hairy, audacious goals). Most of my time in working with people who typically have not achieved their goals is in telling them that often small is better. Break the big goal down. If you achieve lots of small goals, you add up to the big goal. The human brain likes quick wins. And you definitely want to have some of these in your plans. It will increase your motivation. When we succeed at something our motivation to continue will increase. When we don’t succeed at a task, we feel less motivated to continue and will often give up. You need frequent wins to keep going and build the confidence to achieve more and more in the future. There is another question we ask in coaching related to goals or performance outputs required. ‘How achievable is this goal?’. Now the answer doesn’t have to be that it is easy to achieve. That is not really a goal. That is a “just go and do it”. However, if your brain perceives that this goal is really difficult to achieve and in fact the odds are you won’t achieve it, it will make it hard for you to continue. You will be continually fighting your mind which is telling you that you cannot do it. And your mind will probably win. You won’t do it. So, make your goals that you want to achieve reasonably easy. You can do that by breaking your goal down into smaller sections. You can also make something more achievable by getting more support and resources to help you achieve it. But the fact remains that human beings need quick wins. It builds enthusiasm and a sense of confidence and competence. And with that you can move onto bigger things.

4. Understand that there will be obstacles. I have so many people who, once we set a goal, and they have started to achieve it, suddenly hit a roadblock. For example, someone had a goal for saving a certain amount of money each month. Then, as happens in life, one month unexpected expenses arose. The next thing is she wanted to abandon that goal. She decided that goal was not for her. Lots of people are like that. Obstacles happen, and often the time agreed for achievement of the goal is not possible, and so they decide to forget about the goal. If you get that life will always throw curved balls at you, and you will definitely encounter roadblocks and obstacles on your way, it is easier not to get demotivated when they come. You will always have problems in life. It will most likely never be straightforward. So, know that, accept that, and don’t let it stop you. Just rearrange the timing for your goal if you need to. If you achieve the goal six months later than you wanted

to, you have still achieved it. Just don't give up. Because if you do, then you will never achieve the goal.

5. The final point I want to make is to resource yourself to achieve your goal in order to stay motivated. Your environment must support you in what you want to do. So, find people who will have your back and encourage you when you need it. Don't talk to people who will belittle and demean your efforts. Watch and read and listen to content that inspires you to stay motivated. And do this often, especially when you feel like giving up. As social creatures, we human beings are influenced by others whether we like to believe it or not. If you are surrounded by people who keep telling you what cannot be done, or that no one can do that, or what you want is unrealistic, it will not be long before you are demotivated no matter how much you try to not let it get to you.

Staying motivated is hard because life is hard. Especially if you don't understand the rules. Some people also seem to be spectacularly good at demotivating other people, without even being aware of it. A lot of what you get told is not that helpful. And some of it just engenders even more fear, and fear is a huge demotivator. Failing is also a demotivator which is why you want quick wins to build up your sense of competence and confidence and self-belief. If you have always wanted to achieve something or have something in your life, and you have given up, then try out some of the above points (or all of them), and work with your brain and psychology to help you stay motivated and get what you want most in life.