

ARTICLES

The Secret about Staying Motivated

By Chelsea Pasquali – August 14, 2020

We've all felt the push of motivation. Motivation sparks, and the energy to work comes easily. Work is enjoyable when you're motivated. But then, without fail, the flame is smothered. Motivation appears and then leaves on its own terms. You get tired or distracted. Your argument is rejected or criticized. Your work plateaus.

Productivity happens while motivation flows. And it doesn't feel a lot like work because there is excitement behind motivation. It's no wonder we think the key to success is staying motivated.

So what's the secret behind staying motivated? It's simple: Don't.

Don't rely on motivation. Instead, teach yourself discipline. Motivation is a fair-weather friend. It's undependable and dramatic. Discipline is steadfast and reliable. Discipline is behind the scenes, working hard when motivation gets flakey.

Merriam-Webster's *English Language Learner's Dictionary* defines "self-discipline" as "the ability to make yourself do things that should be done." Notably, the dictionary refers to what *should* be done, not what we want to do. Let's break down a few ways to use discipline to accomplish tasks after the motivation that made you want to work has worn off.

1. Set Goals

First, identify the task that needs to be accomplished and when it needs to be done. Focus on a specific task that you can identify and achieve. Perhaps you need to meet a few deadlines this week or write a few dispositive motions this month. Maybe you have three days to accomplish a series of tasks.

Don't get caught in the trap of an unspecific goal, like wanting to do "more" or "improve" certain aspects of your job or life. These are too subjective to reach. Whatever your goal, it should be objective and measurable. A goal that cannot be measured is an ideal, not a goal.

2. Break It Up

Break up goals into smaller portions. Determine what you need to do each day, week, and month to finish timely. Breaking up a goal into smaller portions helps to mentally manage the goal and to get a realistic idea of what is required.

Determining exactly what you need to do each day, week, and month also ensures that the goal stays on course. And if tasks fall behind pace, you know exactly what you need to do to make up for the lost time. Smaller portions allow you to know whether you are on track and, if not, how to adjust accordingly and with precision.

Smaller portions also help you to feel accomplished in the pursuit of your goal. Instead of finishing each day with the notion that your goal has not been achieved, smaller portions allow

you to finish each day with the acknowledgement that you've achieved that day's goal and the comfort that you're right where you need to be.

3. Prioritize

Goals cannot be achieved by waiting until the timing is right. This is all too often the breaking point where motivation gives way to the status quo. Look ahead at the schedule each day and determine how to accomplish the portion that is assigned to the day. Determine where it will fit.

But don't just prioritize. Be willing to sacrifice. A new task cannot be added to an already packed schedule with any realistic expectation that it will get done. Determine what you may need to remove from the schedule to fit in the new task. This doesn't look the same from person to person. A night owl may give up an hour of TV for the task. A morning person may give up an hour of sleep. Perhaps you can skip your lunch with colleagues for one day.

Priorities and sacrifices are essential to avoid an overcrowded schedule and burnout. But these decisions do not have to be permanent or even consistent. You can and should constantly reassess as each day presents new challenges and opportunities.

4. Make Yourself Do It

Ultimately, the key to discipline is the ability to just do it. As made clear by Merriam-Webster, discipline comes down to the ability to *make yourself*. Block out excuses. Put your phone away, get out of bed, or turn the TV off. Force yourself to get started. Force yourself to continue.

Motivation is a great jumping off point. It can teach you a lot about yourself and help shine a light on what drives you. Motivation is a great way to set goals. Discipline achieves them.

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