

# Understanding motivation in ourselves and others

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We often see self-motivation as a desirable trait in ourselves and others, and yet it can also be somewhat elusive, especially when we're overwhelmed or easily distracted, and it can be difficult to harness and encourage in others.



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Motivation comes from the word “motive” meaning movement which is at the heart of it. Motivation guides our behaviours and is the energy for action required to want something enough and to overcome the inertia to get started. It is our internal drive pushing us forward to initiate, continue, achieve, produce, develop, keep moving and even stop a behaviour that isn't serving you.

The interesting thing about motivation is that it is largely internal. Many people believe that they have to feel motivated in order to take action. The problem with this thinking is if you depend on feeling motivated to do what you don't feel like doing, you are unlikely to accomplish hard-to-achieve goals.

If someone else wants you to be motivated to act, the very most that they can do is influence you and tune into your concerns, needs, emotions, and goals. They cannot tell you what your needs are, nor can they force you to share the same sense of values, and they cannot give you a strong desire to achieve an outcome - all of this must come from you.

The same is true for teams at work.

## **Making the connection between motivation and discomfort - the desire to escape discomfort**

As humans, we're up against some pretty hardcore neurobiology. Our brains are wired to assess threats, risks and avoid pain. We seek comfort, pleasure, and safety and, as a result, tend to always seek the path of least resistance.

This is where we have some reframing to do ... being safe and being comfortable are not zones where learning and stretch are possible. Ironically, we need some tension to learn, grow and achieve difficult things - it's the space where courage and motivation converge. Discomfort can provide vital information to you about something that isn't working and move you forward. There would be no need for innovation if there wasn't discomfort in the world. It can be leveraged, like fuel, to propel us forward. Instead of looking for the easiest way to rid ourselves of pain/discomfort, we can look within to understand what's driving our desire to escape the way we feel. What are we avoiding when we don't do the things we really want to do? And what future possibilities might we also inadvertently be denying?



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### Self-motivation is a skillset - some self-motivation skills to work on developing are:

- **Be your own coach and develop stick-to-it-iveness:** This is that get-up-and-go tendency to act, take charge, and move forward before others do, or push you to. It also speaks to our commitment to goals and others, our ability to follow through with persistence in order to complete tasks and reach goals. Pay attention to what you're saying yes to - what promises, another word for commitments, are you keeping and slipping on and what does this mean for your own trustworthiness and the trust in your relationships?
- **Know what motivates you and others:** Who and for the sake of what are you doing this for? Keep a reminder on your desktop of what you're working so hard towards, and make sure to reward yourself when you hit that mark. Make sure you know what brings a spark to each of your team members.
- **Rise strong and watch your inner-self talk:** Cultivate self-compassion and resilience to get back up again after setbacks, disappointments and even failures and to keep going in spite of difficulties and discomfort. Remember the power of positive thinking: if you believe you will fail or succeed, you will prove yourself right.
- **Keep learning and improving:** Learners are earners is the saying! The eagerness to learn and desire to try new things and take on new challenges stretches us and this desire to improve has propelled us forward for centuries and in so doing, built confidence and self-efficacy, the belief that actions will lead to desired results.
- **Find a motivation role-model to speak to:** We all need a safe space, place and face to confide in, whether it's a partner, colleague or coach. By voicing out aloud your commitments, goals and concerns with another person you respect, and who will meet you with objectivity and empathy, is a game changer.

### Some techniques to shift your focus from procrastination and distraction to motivation:

When procrastinating, people tend to focus on the task they are avoiding – they imagine themselves doing the task, which leads to a negative mental image and emotion and since emotions drive behaviour, the risk of avoidance is heightened. Instead of focusing on the task itself, focus on the result – the feeling of pleasure and achievement that comes with completing a task. Notice your motivation shift. With enough practice, this change in focus can become automatic and

unconscious in a short space of time.

Each morning spend some time thinking about the top five things you need to do that day that you are not looking forward to. Go through each task one at a time and focus specifically on the feeling you will experience having completed each task. Repeat the process a few times. Very quickly, your brain will learn to automatically give you pictures and feelings of the achieved result, rather than focusing on the perceived negative association of doing the task. These pictures will prime you for the pleasure of the end result and are more likely to cause you to act.

To lack self-motivation and take the procrastination off-ramp from time to time is normal; shifting your focus from the task to the results, and settling into a good routine will go a long way to ensuring that procrastination doesn't become a problem.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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