

How to Master the Art of Motivation – © Maree Stachel-Williamson

First why do people fail to get motivated? Here are 3 common mistakes:

1. Getting hung up and stressed out by details.

This is what I call “doing overwhelm”. Imagine the following situation: Sarah puts on a pair of pants she hasn't worn for a while and notices in horror that they no longer fit. This triggers her to think she needs to lose weight. If she then thinks in detail of *all* the things she has to do to get back to her old size, she is likely to get overwhelmed. Things like what she needs to eat differently breakfast, lunch and dinner. Plus snacks, can she have snacks anymore? What was the latest research? 3 meals vs 8 small meals? Exercise is important but what type, how long and how often? When could she fit it into her busy schedule? There's no time! Cost of gym memberships, what will friends say? What will happen to the Friday night girls nights out? Alcohol or no alcohol? Were diet drinks ok or bad for bones? What about fat reduction patches? Is it perhaps genetic or her metabolism?

You can see how Sarah is doing overwhelm here. Just reading it, you get the idea that soon she's likely to think “screw it” and just continue as she was, burying her head deep in the sand. The reason why this is a sure path to non-motivation is because it is emotionally draining, confusing and stressful. Nothing much gets achieved when you're feeling overwhelmed. And of course you can imagine how this same though process could pull the brakes on other things such as cleaning out the garage, looking for a new job or pretty much getting started on anything.

2. Failure to speak nicely to yourself

We all have a voice in our head as we think to ourselves. How you talk to yourself actually has a big impact on whether you get motivated, discouraged or sabotage yourself.

People quickly become unmotivated when they treat themselves like dirt, reverting to name-calling (you're such a lazy cow) or an inner dictator putting out orders (You must! You should do this! You have to!).

On the one hand this is likely to lead to failure because it saps energy rather than boosting it, on the other hand people enter risky territory with these kinds of thoughts because they can be reminded of people they have negative memories with such as, stressed out and incompetent school teachers, abusive family members, friends who judge or ex's. Because of this connection with the past, the risk is that you end up thinking “I can do whatever the hell I want!” and rebel, forgetting completely that in actual fact you are *only* rebelling against yourself thus creating dreaded self-sabotage.

3. Trying to motivate yourself with negative reasons

While in the short term you might get started and get results by thinking about you don't want, you lack the vision to take you into the future with long-term success. For example, if you start going to the gym because you hate your flabby upper arms, you will only go to the gym until that they are no longer flabby. Then you might just stop or continue half-heartedly. After a while, the flabby arms will come back again. The point is it's not that successful to run away from something if you don't know what you are running towards. *What do you actually want?*

How to master the art of motivation

Step 1: Start with a clear goal

Before you take any physical action you need to know what you want. Be as specific as possible, word it positively and set a time frame e.g. Rather than 'Lose weight', decide to 'weigh 70kg, be able to run 5kms, have toned arms, visible abs in 7 months.' Rather than 'stop eating junk food', decide to 'leave biscuits and chips in the supermarket, eat ½ plate of vegetables at lunch and dinner – do this for 6 weeks.' Of course only you know your goals, so get started by getting clear on what it is precisely that you want to achieve.

Step 2: Focus on today

Identify the first steps you can take to start the ball rolling. Instead of overwhelming yourself with all the future steps and things to consider, decide on a couple of doable actions for today and tomorrow. The first steps might be simple like calling someone to get information or to put a date in the diary, going for a 5 min jog,

printing off a healthy recipe from online. Breaking it down into your initial steps helps increase hope of success because it's do-able.

Step 3: Underachieve – Just 5 minutes

If it's about cleaning out the garage, tell yourself today your task is to find 3 things that can go in the bin. Allow yourself to do more if you want to after that but decide initially just to do 3. As one client once said to me, the most important part about her exercise plan was just driving herself to the gym and walking in the door. Literally just getting the ball rolling is sometimes the hardest step for people to take. So tell yourself for example, "just 5 minutes" or "just 3 things".

Step 4: Talk to your cheerleaders

The people who are supportive of you and your happiness are your cheerleaders. Talk your ideas through with them. Let them know what you've been thinking and how you would like things to be. Also let them know how they can support you. There might be others in your life who will only be negative and try to talk you out of your goal – you might seriously want to hold back from sharing your plans with them.

Step 5: Get emotional

The word motivation has its origin from the Latin word *motere* 'to move' which is also the root of the word emotion. The intensity of your emotional investment can make motivating yourself feel like an effort or a breeze. Think about it, if you don't care whether you succeed, then you won't care if you fail. So dig deep. Why is this important to you? How will doing this change your life? Why's that important? What will life be like in 5 years if you achieve this? And if you don't? What will life look like then? What about in 10 years? What bigger picture is this part of?

What else you can do:

Clear out the cobwebs

If you are constantly sabotaging yourself in life and are always stopping before you've even started, then you probably have old unhelpful beliefs about yourself that could do with getting rid of. Some beliefs that could hinder motivation are: "I'm not good enough", "I don't deserve it" and "I'll only make a fool of myself".

Get a mentor

If you lack information on how to do whatever it is you want to do then getting help from someone who knows what they're doing will make the path to success smoother. e.g. if you want to garden – join a community garden, if you want to exercise – get a fitness buddy or get a plan from a personal trainer. You get the picture right? Plus these days, not only is there a wealth of knowledge at the local library but someone somewhere is bound to have uploaded a 'how-to' video onto the internet.

So what are you waiting for?
What do you want?
What's your first step?
Go for it!

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