



Cultivate motivation

Each January we make New Year's resolutions. Some of us keep ours and reap the benefits and some of us simply point the finger to and blame our motivation and willpower! If you belong to the second group of people then you are surely confused about the meaning and nature of motivation and willpower.

This lack of understanding prevents you from keeping your resolutions and improving yourselves. Let's take this opportunity to reveal the characteristics of motivation and willpower.



Let us say that Peter's New Year's resolutions included getting fit, thus he's joined a fitness club and has been working out four hours a week for the last year. As a result of his workouts, he's lost some weight. No longer carrying excess baggage, he now has more stamina and energy, both at work and at home. He has a general feeling of wellbeing, is healthier, has more stamina, and he seems to be able to think more clearly. In fact, there is a glow about him that attracts the attention of others. He feels good and is self-confident. And why shouldn't he be; after all, because of his self-discipline, he is in control of his own life. Since he is enjoying life and because of his exercise regimen, will continue to do so for a long time.

Is there anything surprising about the fact that he works out four times a week? Not in his mind. You see, he is reaping so many benefits he wants to continue working out. He is motivated to act because he has a motive or reason. The reasons for acting are the benefits and payoffs that he receives.

Now, in our minds, let's use an illustration to diagram the dynamics of motivation. Pretend we're in a vacant field and before us is a seesaw. On the right side of the seesaw we will place the obstacles Peter has to overcome to reach his goal of physical fitness. The obstacles include the sacrifices he has to make, the effort he has to put in, and the resistance he has to overcome. Examples of sacrifices he makes are occasionally missing a favourite TV show or turning down an invitation to join his buddies at a nightclub. Going out of his way to travel to and from the fitness club and doing gruelling exercises at the club are examples of the efforts he has to make. Finally, overcoming the discomfort of acquiring new habits and fighting the inertia of habitual laziness are examples of the resistance that Peter had to struggle with.

Returning to our seesaw, we will now place the benefits or payoffs of Peter's workouts on the left side. Let's start piling them on the seesaw. They include more energy, a zest for life, self-

confidence, a slimmer and more attractive appearance, self-mastery, greater happiness, new friends, better health, sound sleep, strengthening of the bones, a longer life, and also greater physical strength, power, endurance, flexibility, and cardiovascular fitness.

Do you see what happened? The benefits were so numerous that they outweighed the costs / obstacles. So, the left side of the seesaw tilted and reached the ground. Seen sideways, the plank of the seesaw forms a line rising upwards. If we were to put an arrowhead on the right side of the line (plank), it would be pointing upward. The arrow is pointing toward Peter's goal (physical fitness). The line, arrow, or plank represents motivation. **Motivation, then, is self-generating.** It is created by the payoffs we get when we perform worthwhile actions. Because of the rewards we receive, we want to continue to do more of the same. When viewed in this light, we will soon realize that 'willpower' is nothing more than want-power.

By now, the concepts of motivation and willpower are probably clearer. But to put our newfound understanding to good use, let's now look at steps we can take for the cultivation of motivation. What is it that you would like to do, but haven't because of a lack of motivation?

Pick a goal and follow the steps below:

1. Begin by analyzing the costs of acting and not acting. Many people wistfully dream about things that they would like to do without considering the obstacles involved. So, if they make an attempt, they quickly give up after striking the first few hurdles. Considering the costs involved gives you power. It prepares you and offers the opportunity to look for resources and solutions before problems arrive. Don't forget to consider the cost of not acting. Let's say you don't workout because you refuse to get off your butt and put down that bag of potato chips. If so, you are giving up what you want most (good health) for what you want now (beer, potato chips, and TV). Does that make sense?
2. Analyze the rewards you will receive after achieving your goal. List everything you can think of because there will be many that you will overlook or be unaware of.
3. If the benefits outweigh the costs, make a commitment to start working toward your goal.
4. At this point you might say that since motivation is generated by the payoffs we get after taking positive action and you have nothing yet, how can you be motivated. Begin by anticipating the rewards. Add power to your anticipation by visualizing the advantages of acting in clear, specific terms.
5. Looking forward to success is enough to get you started in taking your first small steps. The rewards you get after taking those initial steps will be enough to motivate you to take additional steps. After all, nothing motivates like success. Each step you take causes motivation to snowball and accelerate.
6. Repetition strengthens outcomes. For example, you feel good after dropping a kilogram or two, feel better after dropping five kilograms, and feel ecstatic after dropping ten kilograms. However, motivation won't continue to grow unless you notice the improvements, so keep records and monitor your progress. (After all, if your life is worth living, it is also worth recording!) Repetition also reinforces motivation and makes it easier to maintain because it becomes habitual.
7. To keep the momentum, don't deviate from your plan. (You may be flexible but don't lose track of your goal and keep your focus). People sometimes say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing – thus we recommend it daily!! As long as you keep up the pace, motivation will remain strong.