

[The Ultimate Guide to Motivation - How to Achieve Any Goal](#)

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal." - **Henry Ford**

One of the biggest challenges in meeting any goal, whether it be related to productivity, waking early, changing a habit, exercising, or just becoming happier, is finding the motivation to stick with it.

If you can stick with a goal for long enough, you'll almost always get there eventually. It just takes patience, and motivation.

Motivation is the key, but it's not always easy, day in and day out, to find that motivation.

What follows is a guide to motivation using what I've learned over the last few years in a series of successful accomplishments, goals and habit changes. I've had many failures, but also many successes, and I've learned a lot from all of them. Motivation has been a particularly important topic of exploration for me.

What Motivation Can Achieve

What have I accomplished using these motivation methods? Too much to mention, just in the last 3 years: running two marathons, learning to become an early riser, losing 40 pounds, completing a triathlon, becoming vegetarian, becoming more productive, starting a successful blog, writing a book, becoming organized, simplifying my life, quitting my day job, tripling my income, eliminating my debt, and much more.

That's not intended to sound like bragging, but to show you what can be accomplished (just to start) if you find the right motivation.

How Does Motivation Work?

Before we get into specific methods, it's useful to examine what motivation is, what it does, and how it works.

Motivation is what drives you toward a goal, what keeps you going when things get tough, the reason you get up early to exercise or work late to finish a project. There are all kinds of motivations, of course, from positive to negative. Having a boss threaten to fire you is motivation - you'll likely work harder to complete a project with that kind of pressure. But I find that positive motivation works better - if it's something you really want to do, you'll do a much better job than to avoid something you don't want (such as being fired).

So motivation, in its best form, is a way for you to want to do something. There may be times, for example, when you don't feel like getting up early, and in those times you may seriously just want to sleep in (not that there's anything wrong with that). But if you have a reason to want to get up early, something you really really want to do, you'll jump up out of bed with excitement.

The best motivation, then, is a way for you to really want something, to get excited about it, to be passionate about it. Remember that, as there are many other types of motivation (especially negative), but in my experience, this is the kind that works the best.

There is only so long that you can go trying to motivate yourself to do something you don't like to do, something you don't want to do. But if you find ways to really want to do something, you can sustain your effort for much, much longer.

8 Ways to Motivate Yourself From the Beginning

I've found that it's important to start out with the right motivation, because a good start can build momentum that you can sustain for a long time. If you start out right, you have a much better chance of succeeding. Here are some tips for starting out:

1. **Start small.** I've said this before, but that's because it's one of the most important tips in motivating yourself toward a goal. Don't start out big! Start out with a ridiculously easy goal, and then grow from there. If you want to exercise, for example, you may be thinking that you have to do these intense workouts 5 days a week. No - instead, do small, tiny, baby steps. Just do 2 minutes of exercise. I know, that sounds wimpy. But it works. Commit to 2 minutes of exercise for one week. You may want to do more, but just stick to 2 minutes. It's so easy, you can't fail. Do it at the same time, every day. Just some crunches, 2 pushups, and some jogging in place. Once you've done 2 minutes a day for a week, increase it to 5, and stick with that for a week. In a month, you'll be doing 15-20. Want to wake up early? Don't think about waking at 5 a.m. Instead, think about waking 10 minutes earlier for a week. That's all. Once you've done that, wake 10 minutes earlier than that. Baby steps.
2. **One goal.** Too many people start with too many goals at once, and try to do too much. And it saps energy and motivation. It's probably the most common mistake that people make. You cannot maintain energy and focus (the two most important things in accomplishing a goal) if you are trying to do two or more goals at once. It's not possible - I've tried it many times. You have to choose one goal, for now, and focus on it completely. I know, that's hard. Still, I speak from experience. You can always do your other goals when you've accomplished your One Goal.
3. **Examine your motivation.** Know your reasons. Give them some thought . and write them down. If you have loved ones, and you are doing it for them, that is more powerful than just doing it for self-interest. Doing it for yourself is good too, but you should do it for something that you REALLY REALLY want to happen, for really good reasons.
4. **Really, really want it.** This is essentially the same as the above tip, but I want to emphasize it: it's not enough to think it would be cool to achieve something. It has to be something you're passionate about, something you're super excited about, something you want deeply. Make sure that your goal meets these criteria, or you won't stick with it for long.
5. **Commit publicly.** None of us likes to look bad in front of others. We will go the extra mile to do something we've said publicly. For example, when I wanted to run my first marathon, I started writing a column about it in my local daily newspaper. The entire island of Guam (pop. 160K) knew about my goal. I couldn't back down, and even though my motivation came and went, I stuck with it and completed it. Now, you don't have to commit to your goal in your daily newspaper, but you can do it with friends and family and co-workers, and you can do it on your blog if you have one. And hold yourself accountable - don't just commit once, but commit to giving progress updates to everyone every week or so.
6. **Get excited.** Well, it starts with inspiration from others (see above), but you have to take that excitement and build on it. For me, I've learned that by talking to my wife about it, and to others, and reading as much about it as possible, and visualizing what it would be like to be successful (seeing the benefits of the goal in my head), I get excited about a goal. Once I've done that, it's just a matter of carrying that energy forward and keeping it going.

7. **Build anticipation.** This will sound hard, and many people will skip this tip. But it really works. It helped me quit smoking after many failed attempts. If you find inspiration and want to do a goal, don't start right away. Many of us will get excited and want to start today. That's a mistake. Set a date in the future - a week or two, or even a month - and make that your Start Date. Mark it on the calendar. Get excited about that date. Make it the most important date in your life. In the meantime, start writing out a plan. And do some of the steps below. Because by delaying your start, you are building anticipation, and increasing your focus and energy for your goal.
8. **Print it out, post it up.** Print out your goal in big words. Make your goal just a few words long, like a mantra ("Exercise 15 mins. Daily"), and post it up on your wall or refrigerator. Post it at home and work. Put it on your computer desktop. You want to have big reminders about your goal, to keep your focus and keep your excitement going. A picture of your goal (like a model with sexy abs, for example) also helps.

20 Ways to Sustain Motivation When You're Struggling

The second half of motivation is to keep yourself going when you don't feel the same excitement as you did in the beginning. Perhaps something new has come into your life and your old goal isn't as much of a priority anymore. Perhaps you skipped a day or two and now you can't get back into it. Perhaps you screwed up and got discouraged.

If you can get yourself excited again, and keep going, you'll get there eventually. But if you give up, you won't. It's your choice - accomplish the goal, or quit. Here's how you can stop from quitting, and get to your goal:

1. **Hold yourself back.** When I start with a new exercise program, or any new goal really, I am rarin' to go. I am full of excitement, and my enthusiasm knows no boundaries. Nor does my sense of self-limitation. I think I can do anything. It's not long before I learn that I do have limitations, and my enthusiasm begins to wane. Well, a great motivator that I've learned is that when you have so much energy at the beginning of a program, and want to go all out - HOLD BACK. Don't let yourself do everything you want to do. Only let yourself do 50-75 percent of what you want to do. And plan out a course of action where you slowly increase over time. For example, if I want to go running, I might think I can run 3 miles at first. But instead of letting myself do that, I start by only running a mile. When I'm doing that mile, I'll be telling myself that I can do more! But I don't let myself. After that workout, I'll be looking forward to the next workout, when I'll let myself do 1.5 miles. I keep that energy reined in, harness it, so that I can ride it even further.
2. **Just start.** There are some days when you don't feel like heading out the door for a run, or figuring out your budget, or whatever it is you're supposed to do that day for your goal. Well, instead of thinking about how hard it is, and how long it will take, tell yourself that you just have to start. I have a rule that I just have to put on my running shoes and close the door behind me. After that, it all flows naturally. It's when you're sitting in your house, thinking about running and feeling tired, that it seems hard. Once you start, it is never as hard as you thought it would be. This tip works for me every time..
3. **Stay accountable.** If you committed yourself publicly, through an online forum, on a blog, in email, or in person . stay accountable to that group of people. Commit to report back to them daily, or something like that, and stick to it! That accountability will help you to want to do well, because you don't want to report that you've failed.
4. **Squash negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones.** This is one of the most important motivation skills, and I suggest you practice it daily. It's important to start monitoring your thoughts, and to recognize negative self-talk. Just spend a few days becoming aware of every negative thought. Then, after a

few days, try squashing those negative thoughts like a bug, and then replacing them with a corresponding positive thought. Squash, "This is too hard!" and replace it with, "I can do this! If that wimp Leo can do it, so can I!" It sounds corny, but it works. Really.

5. **Think about the benefits.** Thinking about how hard something is is a big problem for most people. Waking early sounds so hard! Just thinking about it makes you tired. But instead of thinking about how hard something is, think about what you will get out of it. For example, instead of thinking about how hard it is to wake early, focus on how good you'll feel when you're done, and how your day will be so much better. The benefits of something will help energize you.
6. **Get excited again!** Think about why you lost your excitement . then think about why you were excited in the first place. Can you get that back? What made you want to do the goal? What made you passionate about it? Try to build that up again, refocus yourself, get energized.
7. **Read about it.** When I lose motivation, I just read a book or blog about my goal. It inspires me and reinvigorates me. For some reason, reading helps motivate and focus you on whatever you're reading about. So read about your goal every day, if you can, especially when you're not feeling motivated.
8. **Find like-minded friends.** Staying motivated on your own is tough. But if you find someone with similar goals (running, dieting, finances, etc.), see if they'd like to partner with you. Or partner with your spouse, sibling or best friend on whatever goals they're trying to achieve. You don't have to be going after the same goals - as long as you are both pushing and encouraging each other to succeed. Other good options are groups in your area (I'm part of a running club, for example) or online forums where you can find people to talk to about your goals.
9. **Read inspiring stories.** Inspiration, for me, comes from others who have achieved what I want to achieve, or who are currently doing it. I read other blogs, books, magazines. I Google my goal, and read success stories. Zen Habits is just one place for inspiration, not only from me but from many readers who have achieved amazing things. I love, love, love reading success stories too.
10. **Build on your successes.** Every little step along the way is a success - celebrate the fact that you even started! And then did it for two days! Celebrate every little milestone. Then take that successful feeling and build on it, with another baby step. Add 2-3 minutes to your exercise routine, for example. With each step (and each step should last about a week), you will feel even more successful. Make each step really, really small, and you won't fail. After a couple of months, your tiny steps will add up to a lot of progress and a lot of success.
11. **Just get through the low points.** Motivation is not a constant thing that is always there for you. It comes and goes, and comes and goes again, like the tide. But realize that while it may go away, it doesn't do so permanently. It will come back. Just stick it out and wait for that motivation to come back. In the meantime, read about your goal, ask for help, and do some of the other things listed here until your motivation comes back.
12. **Get help.** It's hard to accomplish something alone. When I decided to run my marathon, I had the help of friends and family, and I had a great running community on Guam who encouraged me at 5K races and did long runs with me. When I decided to quit smoking, I joined an online forum and that helped tremendously. And of course, my wife Eva helped every step of the way. I couldn't have done these goals without her, or without the others who supported me. Find your support network, either in the real world or online, or both.
13. **Chart your progress.** This can be as simple as marking an X on your calendar, or creating a simple spreadsheet, or logging your goal using online software. But it can be vastly rewarding to look back on your progress and to see how far you've come, and it can help you to keep going - you don't want to have too many days without an X! Now, you will have some bad marks on your chart. That's OK. Don't let a few bad marks stop you from continuing. Strive instead to get the good marks next time.

14. **Reward yourself often.** For every little step along the way, celebrate your success, and give yourself a reward. It helps to write down appropriate rewards for each step, so that you can look forward to those rewards. By appropriate, I mean 1) it's proportionate to the size of the goal (don't reward going on a 1-mile run with a luxury cruise in the Bahamas); and 2) it doesn't ruin your goal - if you are trying to lose weight, don't reward a day of healthy eating with a dessert binge. It's self-defeating.
15. **Go for mini-goals.** Sometimes large or longer-term goals can be overwhelming. After a couple weeks, we may lose motivation, because we still have several months or a year or more left to accomplish the goal. It's hard to maintain motivation for a single goal for such a long time. Solution: have smaller goals along the way.
16. **Get a coach or take a class.** These will motivate you to at least show up, and to take action. It can be applied to any goal. This might be one of the more expensive ways of motivating yourself, but it works. And if you do some research, you might find some cheap classes in your area, or you might know a friend who will provide coaching or counseling for free.
17. **Never skip two days in a row.** This rule takes into account our natural tendency to miss days now and then. We are not perfect. So, you missed one day . now the second day is upon you and you are feeling lazy . tell yourself NO! You will not miss two days in a row!
18. **Use visualization.** Visualize your successful outcome in great detail. Close your eyes, and think about exactly how your successful outcome will look, will feel, will smell and taste and sound like. Where are you when you become successful? How do you look? What are you wearing? Form as clear a mental picture as possible. Now here's the next key: do it every day. For at least a few minutes each day. This is the only way to keep that motivation going over a long period of time.
19. **Be aware of your urges to quit, and overcome them.** We all have urges to stop, but they are mostly unconscious. One of the most powerful things you can do is to start being more conscious of those urges. A good exercise is to go through the day with a little piece of paper and put a tally mark for each time you get an urge. It simply makes you aware of the urges. Then have a plan for when those urges hit, and plan for it beforehand, and write down your plan, because once those urges hit, you will not feel like coming up with a plan.
20. **Find pleasure again.** No one can stick to something for long if they find it unpleasant, and are only rewarded after months of toil. There has to be fun, pleasure, joy in it, every day, or you won't want to do it. Find those pleasurable things - the beauty of a morning run, for example, or the satisfaction in reporting to people that you finished another step along the way, or the deliciousness of a healthy meal.

"Never, never, never, never give up." - **Winston Churchill**

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