- Motivation (Psychology)

IN FOCUS

8 Ways to AMP UP Your Motivation

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NOW THAT YOU KNOW WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK, try one or two of these expert-approved strategies to help you shore up your motivation to accomplish any goal.

Implement a policy.

Try using implementation intentions, which are "If/then" statements that give you clear guidelines for what to do in certain situations.

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For example, if you want to fit in more physical activity, tell yourself, "If it's Monday at 7 a.m., I walk outside"; "If it's Tuesday at 8 a.m., I go to the gym"; or "If I go into a building with stairs and an elevator, I will take the stairs." "You specify an action and a time or circumstances, so instead of asking, 'Is this a good day to exercise?' you will already have instructions in place," says Grolnick. "It takes the question of motivation out of the moment."

Identify practical barriers.

■ Figure out what's keeping you from doing what you have to do and address that, says Elizabeth Grace Saunders, a time-management coach and the author of *The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment*. For instance, maybe you've been putting off hanging new curtains because you don't know how. Once you take a moment to realize that and acknowledge that you may just need to watch a YouTube video or text a friend for help, hanging the curtains should feel more manageable.

Focus on the first step.

■ If the task is vacuuming, maybe the first step is dragging out the vacuum, says Tim Pychyl, Ph.D., the author of *Solving the Procrastination Puzzle*. If the task is going for a run, maybe the first step is changing into your running shoes and workout clothes. Don't think past the first step; by focusing just on the initial step, you're setting your mind and body up to act.

Spend your (limited) time wisely.

■ Pay attention to how you're spending your time—it is, after all, a precious resource. For example, if you discover that you're doom-scrolling on your phone for an hour a day, consciously give yourself 15 minutes to do it—set a timer if it helps!—and then plan to spend 30 minutes exercising. This will allow you to reallocate your time so you can achieve something productive, says Grolnick.

Give yourself choices.

■ Lack of motivation often arises from the feeling that we don't have a choice and are being "forced" to do something. To make a task more enticing (even when it's an activity that must be completed, such as cleaning out your parents' house or making a difficult phone

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call), remind yourself that you have some autonomy and can choose how and when you'll do it. If you hate the idea of devoting the next three weekends to cleaning out the house, perhaps you'd rather use five personal days to power through the full chore in a week. Maybe you can make the call from your office, where you'll have an excuse to get off the phone. "When you feel you have a choice, it's easier to get behind an activity," says Grolnick.

Tap into your existing values.

Figure out a way to make a compelling case that the task or new habit deserves to be a priority in your life, says Bryan. Say, for example, you dread cleaning the basement but want to create a game room there for your family to spend time in together. Asking yourself how your efforts can lead to your having the type of family life you want may be the push you need to get moving.



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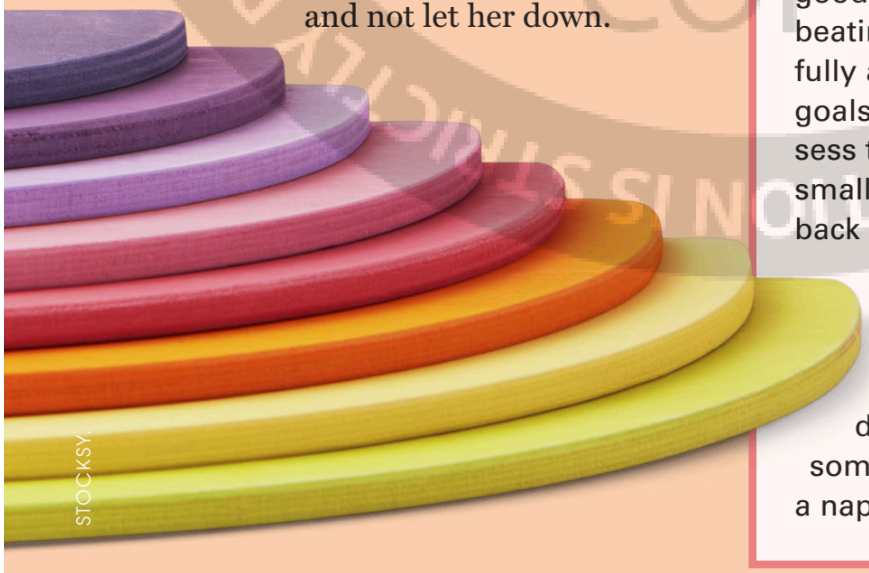
Reflect on your wins.

Just being grateful to yourself for accomplishing something can be motivating, says Gable. Look back at a time when you completed a goal and say "Yay, me!" or "I'm so proud of myself for doing [X]." Examine what worked to make it happen, whether it was distracting yourself from a junk-food craving by texting a friend or exercising more by taking your dog for longer walks.

Involve others.

You may not always feel intrinsically motivated to do something, but you can give yourself external reasons, Pychyl says. Let's say your goal is to exercise more: Make a commitment to work out with a friend. Beyond personal reasons for exercising, now you also have the motivation of feeling obligated to show up for your buddy and not let her down.



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GIVE YOURSELF SOME GRACE

Some tasks, such as haggling with an insurance company and spending a Saturday morning sorting old clothes for donation, could sap anyone's motivation. If you're feeling particularly unmotivated, it's OK to give yourself a pass and call it a self-care day. "Don't start berating yourself for being lazy. That's not helpful," says Grolnick.

Pausing while you're progressing toward a goal is totally normal, Hardesty says. And sometimes "good enough" is, well, good enough. Instead of beating yourself up for not fully accomplishing your goals, take a breather, reassess the situation, celebrate small wins, and then get back on track. Having one lapse (or even many lapses) doesn't mean that you can't be successful. "When you do feel overwhelmed, sometimes you just need a nap," says Hardesty.

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