

Motivation

The Source of Motivation

*Just a few minutes each day will keep you motivated
and will make you a more positive person.*

There are many quick fixes which can get you out the door or a mile down the road. I actually like to have, as a last resort, some of these “dirty tricks” ready when the primary motivation elements are not working. But it’s actually quite easy to stay motivated by expressing the positive thoughts, feelings and momentum you receive from your exercise. Just a few minutes each day will help you understand the process of staying motivated and will make you a more positive person. You’ll find a range of concepts and techniques here which have helped thousands of exercisers find the spark inside to meet any challenge, starting with rolling out of bed when the alarm goes off.

Following are a series of tips for getting motivated, staying motivated and breaking through barriers. Throughout, you’ll discover successful strategies for maximizing use of the creative and intuitive right side of the brain. Once you realize how to keep the left side under control, you’ll be able to do what you’re capable of doing. All of us have much more potential than we usually allow ourselves to explore. It is my mission to help you tap into those strength areas inside you so that you can head toward the accomplishment you desire—including getting more enjoyment out of life.

Yes, you can train yourself to be motivated, stay motivated and, then break through barriers. The same principle applies: regularity of practice doing exercises which realistically simulate the problems you will face. But before we talk about the exercises, let’s look at the bigger picture and, at the same time, find ways to have more fun as we exercise.

The left side of our brain tries to hold us back

Inside the left hemisphere at the top of your head is the center of logic. The left brain solves math problems, organizes and nitpicks, and conducts the structured cognitive activities during your workday.

One of the primary missions of the left brain is to steer you in the direction of pleasure and away from discomfort. Any form of stress or perceived stress will stimulate this negative center of logic to produce a stream of messages to “slow down!” or “quit!” or to question your sanity: “Why are you doing this?”

Because we rely upon the left side for logical guidance, we listen to these messages. If we’re weak or tired, we’re very likely to give in to the messages and compromise our goal. Certainly we must always monitor the real dangers which could produce health problems (heat buildup, traffic, overfatigue) and take action when there is due cause. Most of the time, however, our left brain overreacts in warning us long before we are in real danger. Motivation training desensitizes us to the extraneous negative messages and the left brain’s nagging style. You can also set up a positive mental response to the negative left side that will reduce its effect and allow you to head toward your goal at a speed that is within your capabilities.

The right brain

Your creative and intuitive center is in the right side of your brain. Running and walking are two of the best ways to tap into this resource, as long as you’re going slowly enough to stay within your capabilities. This right side is a reservoir of creative solutions to just about any problem, challenge or obstacle. Through pacing, walk/shuffle breaks and blood sugar-boosting, you can cut down dramatically on stress, reducing the negative left brain messages so that you stay on the right (brain) track. Later in this section, I’ll go over some proven methods of stimulating right brain activity. To maximize time in the wonderful world of the right brain, become sensitive to the stress buildup of your workouts and the race itself. Only you have the complete power to reduce the intensity and disconnect the negative speaker of the left brain before it makes your exercise seem like work.

Fun

Before we go any further we must bring in the magic ingredient which keeps you motivated under just about any situation. When you find ways to have fun during exercise, you open the door for the right brain to take over and work its creative magic. You may begin it by reading a funny story before the start or visiting a coffee shop with interesting characters. It also helps to run with a person or group or exercise on a favorite trail. Don't stop with my suggestions. The best ones are those that allow you to enjoy parts of a workout or the whole thing. Anything that makes your training session special and interesting to you should be included in your bag of fun tricks.

Vision and Focus

No one stays totally motivated all of the time. Those who are more successful sometimes seem to be always fired up, but they have down times like everyone else. By concentrating on the positive aspects of your exercise, several times a day, you become focused on something that makes you feel good. It only takes a few seconds every two hours or so and you'll be motivated to get out there and collect your endorphins.

The vision exercise

You only need to spend a few relaxed moments each day to collect your positive thoughts about exercise and what makes you feel confident, looking forward to the next workout. Do a quick reality check with your vision to see how your present position relates to the larger vision you have for the next six to 12 months. Those who don't spend these few moments to stay focused often are guided by dreams and illusions which lead in one direction and then, in no direction at all.

The difference between a dream and a vision

A dream is not connected to reality. It's easy to dream that you'll run below two hours in the marathon. Yes, you can dream far beyond your capabilities and set yourself up for great disappointment. At the instant of your dream, you may be exhilarated. But without a plan and the reality checks along the way, motivation is lost very quickly. Even when dreams are within your capabilities, without a well-structured training program and regular mental contact with your vision, dreams are seldom realized. In contrast, a vision is a series of images that can be molded over

several months into a realistic behavioral plan that is put into action every week. In effect, you're a sculptor who molds an elusive image into a series of real experiences that have all of the elements that prepare you for and lead you to a goal that is realistic, fulfilling and engaging.

"I'm looking forward to my run"

- The physical exertion will feel good.
- My legs want to go.
- The increased blood circulation makes me feel more alive.
- I love the way I feel afterward: relaxed and focused, with a great attitude.
- My family appreciates the way I am after exercise.
- It's so great to work out in the morning, getting the mind and spirit mobilized and focused for the day.
- My afternoon run/walk takes away the stress, getting me ready to enjoy my family.
- During the second half of my workout and afterward, I'm in another world, swimming in endorphins.

A vision is a realistic future behavioral experience that you can prepare for by specific physical and mental exercises. To truly fulfill a vision, you must chart out these exercises, constantly adjusting and fine-tuning them to make the vision more complete and meaningful to you. Then, you end up with a final product that is much better than the one you started with. With each adjustment, you get more involved in the process and become more motivated.

Transforming the vision into a mission sustains motivation

Adding the behavioral elements to your vision starts with the writing of the date of your specific goal event (marathon, half marathon, etc.) on a calendar. Actually, the process often starts weeks or months before. It may be the snapshot of an overweight friend finishing a marathon. "If Suzi can do it, I can too," you say. You enter a half marathon and write the date on your kitchen calendar. The mission begins with your first run/walk, a three-miler. During each long one you will solve new problems, make adjustments and apply the revised vision to the mental

rehearsal of the next long one. All the way through the program, you're making your vision more realistic as you stay on track all the way to the finish, wearing a big smile.

It starts with a date on the calendar

A significant mission, such as a half or full marathon, will get your attention and motivate you to do things you haven't done in years. Instead of rolling over, you'll get out of bed an hour early and cover the miles, feeling better for it. After those "bad days" at work, you'll find a way to get on the roads because you have that race scribbled on your kitchen calendar. You're rewarded by an erasure of most of the stress of the day. There's something powerful about the act of giving yourself a deadline that pushes you down the road on days when you'd just as soon cut the run short.

Regularity is important

While it is possible to miss several workouts and still survive the race, most exercisers who try this drop out of the program. The longer you wait to return to exercise, the more negative messages you receive, which can keep you from getting out there. If this is your problem, put "regularity" at the top of your list of commitments. Hint: On the "bad" days, just get out for 10 minutes.

An extended focus

As you notice changes in yourself, you extend the positive effects into other areas of life. You have a better attitude at home, enjoying the time with your spouse and the kids much more. Stress doesn't bother you as it did before. You can deal with problems more directly, and you maintain focus to the finish of your work projects. Everything in your life can be better when you exercise regularly.

Staying Motivated

*A body on the couch wants to stay there.
But once a body is in motion, it wants to continue in motion.*

Just as any motivated exerciser will have low motivation to start some days, everyone reaches plateaus. This section is dedicated to helping you continue individual workouts when you want to stop. Also included are some of my secrets for staying on a schedule when you hit the natural motivation lulls.

Forward motion exercise is motivating in itself

If you start your workout slowly enough, it only takes a minute or two to be rewarded by the flow of relaxing endorphins and attitude enhancing mental hormones. You may need to walk very often, but moving forward is naturally pleasurable to the body and mind when done at an easy pace.

Get a mission and write it on the calendar

When you pick a challenge like a half or full marathon and write the date on your calendar, you're more likely to be motivated on those hot, muggy days or when looking at snowflakes falling. Everyone knows that an event as long as, say, 13.1 or 26.2 miles, requires preparation. This pulls you out of bed when the temperature outside is in the 90°s or 10° below, and it keeps you going when you get the urge to cut the workout short.

A mid-workout motivation crisis is almost always the result of going too fast, for you, on that day

The more stress you place on yourself, the more negative messages you'll receive from the left brain, which will lead to a desire to quit. Ease up, take more walk or shuffle breaks, and you'll get through most of these "walls." If the weather presents you with too much heat/humidity and/or you went too fast in the beginning or the middle, it may be too late to do anything but walk slowly. Learn from this, and back off early the next time.

It could be low blood sugar

Your preferred blood sugar food can pull you out of motivational lulls. Everyone will experience a blood sugar crash at some distance. By consuming products like energy gels or energy bars (with water), almost all exercisers will be able to keep blood sugar (and motivation) at a high level. These products also help on short sessions if you haven't eaten enough prior to the start.

Be sure that you're not having a medical problem

It's extremely rare, but there are a few times when you should not push through barriers. If you have or suspect a medical emergency—stress fracture, cardiovascular problem, heat disease, etc., stop immediately and get help. In fact, this is approximately a million-to-one occurrence. Even though this is a very unlikely event, it's always better to be safe than sorry. If there are good reasons why your ache or pain can lead to significant health risks, it's always better to quit early and talk to a doctor.

A second level of medical alert relates to overtraining and injury. Some aches and pains are early warning signs of injuries or excessive fatigue. Experienced exercisers become very sensitive to the weak links: those knees, tendons, muscles that become injured most often. By backing off early or taking an extra day off, you may avoid weeks or months of layoff later—because you tried to push through an early-stage injury.

On the very tough or fast ones

Almost every exerciser has at least one tough workout every month. Whether it occurs during a tour around the block or during a 23-miler or speed session, here are my tricks for continuing:

1. Slow down and allow the body and mind to get a break. Take more walk or shuffle breaks as need-

- ed, take more rest between intervals in a speed session, and start back into the workout slower than before. The earlier you make an adjustment, the better quality you'll be able to salvage from that workout.
2. Break up the remaining distance into segments that you know you can do. Take a walk break (or a shuffle break) every 1 to 3 minutes. You know that you can go another minute, right? If 1 minute is too long, try 30 seconds. Your workout is a series of these segments to the finish line.
 3. Use distractions. Look ahead to the next mailbox, stop sign, fast food restaurant, water stop, etc., and tell yourself that you can take a break there. Make sure the segment is short enough so that you feel confident in getting there.
 4. Focus on the person ahead of the person in front of you. By looking ahead, you can be pulled past the person in front of you if you're in a group or a race. Stay mentally attached to that person, noting the outfit, the printing, the hat, etc. If you're only looking at details, you'll at least be preoccupying the left brain so that it won't zing you as badly or as often.
 5. Use a mantra. There are various types of words and phrases which will do more than distract you. Practice these and develop your own to put yourself into a positive trance. See the below for more suggestions.
 6. Don't give up. If you respond to each thought of quitting with the internal resolve that you are going to finish, you will! Positive mental attitude alone can pull you through many difficult situations.

Mantras for Staying Motivated (to be said over and over)

Strength mantras will connect into your hidden resources that keep you going when tired. The specific words you choose will help to make subconscious and intuitive connections with muscles and your inner resolve. As you learn to tap into the right brain, you'll coin phrases that continue drawing on mental or spiritual resources. The following have been used when under physical and mental stress, but use these only as a primer. The best ones will be your own mantras that relate to your experiences with words that work. Action phrases not only keep you going but also help you perform as you find ways to dig deeper into your resources.

Feet—stay light and quick, keep moving

My legs are strong
My heart is pumping better
More blood in the muscles
Lactic acid, go away
More oxygen, lungs
The strength is in there, I'm feeling it
Talk crazy to me, right brain
I'm feeling creative—I'm making adjustments
I feel comfortable—I'm in control
I feel good—I feel strong
I'm floating
Come to me—endorphins
I'm having fun

Distraction Mantras start by preoccupying your left brain so that it won't send you so many negative messages. After saying these over many times, you may be able to shift into the right brain.

Look at that store, car, building, sign, etc.
Look at that person, hair, outfit, hat, T-shirt design, etc.
One more step, one more step
One more block, telephone pole, stop light, etc.
Baby steps, baby steps, baby steps

Mantras for Staying Motivated (cont.)

Vision Mantras help you feel that you're getting where you want to be.

I can see the next mile marker
I can feel the pull of the finish line
I can feel being pulled along by the runners ahead
I can feel myself getting stronger
I'm pushing through the wall
I'm moving at the right pace to finish with strength

Funny Mantras get you to laugh, which is a right brain activity.

I feel like a clown, ballerina, football player, stooge
Float like an anchor, sting like a sponge
Where's the bounce, glide

Creative Mantras

I'm building a house, railroad, community, bookcase, etc.
What type of novel could that person ahead of me have written?
What type of crime could that person on the sidewalk be plotting?
What type of movie could be staged here?

If your goal isn't motivating any more

Having gone through more than 130 marathon training programs, I've experienced many motivation letdowns. On most of these, I've rebounded, but on a few, I didn't. Burnout and dropout are mental injuries. If you back off and adjust early, you can avoid major burnout later.

Getting Beyond the Mid-Goal Wall

1. Reduce mileage and cut your workout days to three. Put a lot of easy walking into those.
2. Run or walk in scenic areas, places that really motivate you.
3. Schedule a social run with a friend or a group of friends. Tell him, her or them that you need help. Have a good time and meet afterward for a snack or meal.
4. Do anything necessary to add more fun to your program: after-workout rewards, special outfits or shoes after specific long ones, etc.
5. Adjust your goal event so that it is more motivating. Stay at a special hotel, get some friends to meet you there, or schedule weekend activities with your family (at events such as the Breast Cancer Marathon).
6. Sometimes it helps to choose another goal event and adjust your training accordingly.