

The Power of Self-Motivation

By

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There is a story about a little boy who was walking along the beach at low tide, where countless numbers of small sea creatures, having been washed up, were stranded and destined to die in the scorching heat of the midday sun. A man watched as the boy picked up individual creatures and took them back to the water. "I can see you're being very kind," said the man to the boy, "but there must be millions of them; it can't possibly make any difference." The little boy, returning from the water's edge replied, "it will for that one."

Have you ever thought about what motivates you to do what you do? To get up in the morning and start the day? To get to work and do a good job? To take the children to school? To look after your family? To do things you like to do? To do the things you have to do? The driving force that propels us towards all kinds of decisions, actions, and behaviours is called motivation.

To return to the story, saving a few sea creatures was enough motivation for the little boy to spend his time going to and fro to the water's edge. For the adult watching the boy it was a waste of time because for him, it did not make a difference. These two individuals had different driving forces.

Where does motivation come from? To answer this question without referring to the notorious psychologist Abraham Maslow is like trying to fly without wings. Maslow claimed that our motivation is based on the satisfaction of need. As we meet our needs we move up to higher levels of motivation. For instance, Maslow says that a hungry person's main motivation would be to find food for survival. This is the most basic of needs. A person with a satisfied stomach might begin to think about job satisfaction as a source of motivation!

In other words, as we get our most basic needs satisfied, we begin to focus on other needs such as the need to belong, to achieve, to self-actualise. We can also reach a point where we can actually deprive ourselves of basic needs in order to achieve a greater cause. Such is the case with Ghandi, Mandela, Mother Theresa, and other great people who inspire us with their lives.

Successful and effective leaders are often in touch with their inner motivations and are very clear about the values that these motives project. They then make sure that life mission and direction is congruent with their deeply held values. According to Stephen Covey, author of "the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", it is very important for each of us to have a personal mission that guides our short-term and long-term living. This is how a successful businesswoman formulated hers.

I will seek to balance career and family as best I can since both are effective to me. My home will be a place where I and my family, friends, and guests find joy, comfort, peace and happiness. Still I will seek to create a clean and orderly environment yet livable and comfortable. I will exercise wisdom in what we

choose to eat, read, see, and do at home. I especially want to teach my children to love, to learn, and to laugh – and to work and develop their unique talents. I value the rights, freedoms, and responsibilities of our democratic society. I will be a concerned and informed citizen, involved in the political process to make sure my voice is heard and my vote is counted.

I will be a self-starting individual who exercises initiative in accomplishing my life's goals. I will act on situations and opportunities rather than be acted upon. I will always try to keep myself free from addictive and destructive habits. I will develop habits that free me from old labels and limits and expand my capabilities and choices.

My money will be my servant, not my master. I will seek financial independence over time. My wants will be subject to my needs and my means. I will spend less than I earn and regularly save or invest part of my income.

Moreover I will use what money and talents I have to make life more enjoyable for others through service and charitable giving.

(Covey, 1999, p.107).

This woman formulated clear guidelines on what to base her life on. If she constantly evaluates her actions, choices, and priorities according to her personal mission statement she will go a long way towards achieving it and fulfilling herself. The main thing is that by living according to her beliefs and values, she can motivate herself internally to keep going in tough times and persist in times of challenge. The following are some helpful tips that enable us to motivate ourselves.

1. **Have clear values that translate into specific goals, objectives, and priorities.** This is the first step in making sure that your efforts are well spent. This is where a personal mission statement is important. It is the guiding light that determines where we spend our energy and focus our lives.
2. **Live creatively and avoid getting stuck in a rut.** Try new things and open up to new ideas. Experiment with life. New opportunities generate energy and enthusiasm, which are in themselves motivating.
3. **Be a life-long learner.** Whatever age you are, and however clever you may be, there is always a lot more to learn. Children are natural learners. They are hungry to learn, experiment, explore. They are curious about everything under the sun. This attitude can remain with us till our last breath. A man on his deathbed during his last breathing moments once remarked, "So this is what it's like".
4. **Believe in the power of your dreams.** Rob Parsons in his book *The Heart of Success* says, "The problem with most business people is that they have stopped dreaming. It was their dreams that inspired them but now their businesses are established. Their friends may admire them, and their bank managers may send them diaries at Christmas, but they have stopped dreaming. They are now administrators" (Parsons, 2002, p. 98).

5. **Be an eternal optimist while remaining realistic.** The ability to appreciate the positive things in our life and focus on them is a choice we can all make. This does not mean ignoring problems or difficulties but regarding them as an inevitable part of life that need can be dealt with proactively.
6. **Seek a mentor.** People cross our paths every day. If we keep our minds and hearts open some people will touch us in a way that tells us that they can be trusted for their honesty and wisdom. These are the best people to seek for honest feedback and direction, without depending on them.
7. **Be organized.** Some people live in a permanent state of chaos. They spend their lives dealing with crisis created by their own procrastination. This can be very tiring and frustrating for them and the people around them. Being organized means, planning, prioritizing, managing time, being disciplined, and most of all doing what you have to do so that you have time to do what you want to do.
8. **Stay in touch with your emotions and intuitions.** Some people live in their head. They move mechanically from one thing to the next without savouring the taste of life lived emotionally and intuitively. There is no logical answer for everything. Many things in life remain a mystery.....and that's O.K. It is the core of most spiritualities that are based in experience and not necessarily scientific fact. Balancing rationality with feeling, and fact with a mature intuition, makes our decisions and actions more human and more complete.
9. **Love yourself and others.** We live in a society where we have gone from one extreme to another. Self-love, self-actualisation, self-knowledge, self this and self that and what about the other? We live in a narcissistic age, where individualism has been glorified at the expense of others, the environment, the economy, and ultimately the nation and the world. A healthy and real love of self, will lead to a balance between self-nurturing and self-giving. This is a very strong motivating factor.
10. **Seek occasional solitude.** When we create the space to come in touch with ourselves, many strong feelings may emerge. That is why so many people avoid solitude like the plague. Constructive solitude is a place where we can be with ourselves and take stock of our direction in life. What we are doing and most of all how we are doing it. To do this we need to remove the clutter from our minds and hearts. Parsons suggests that we do not strive for success but for significance. At the end of the day it is the quality of our lives that will give us the strongest motivation to live and the peaceful letting go at the end.

Although we do need to take account of the world around us the emphasis needs to be on our inner resources in order to maintain our self-motivation

“To know how other people behave takes intelligence, but to know myself takes wisdom. To manage other people’s lives takes strength, but to manage my own takes true power. Anon.

Patrick J. Psaila M.Ed. (UBC) and Katie Birch PhD. (UEA) will be giving a public seminar about the power of self-motivation on the 24th of April 2004. This is part of a two year programme organized by the reach BEYOND (Malta) Foundation. For details e-mail pjpsaila@workassistmalta.com