

When the Going Gets Tough: Motivating Oneself in Times of Change

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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.

Where does motivation come from? To answer this question we inevitably refer to the renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow who 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 states 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 individuals are in touch with their inner motivations and are very clear about the values that these motives project. They then make sure that their 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. The main thing is that by living according to our beliefs and values, we can motivate ourselves internally to keep going in tough times and persist in times of challenge.

Such is the case when we are faced with significant changes that alter the way we are used to doing things, our life style, our standard of living, and most of all our security. These changes can be very stressful and may be perceived as seriously threatening our well-being. This is especially the case when our livelihood is at stake. The difficult but rewarding approach to such situations is to regard them as challenging opportunities to learn from that eventually help us become stronger and wiser persons.

The following are some recommendations that may enable us to stay motivated in times of change.

1. **Have clear values that translate into specific goals, objectives, and priorities.** This is the first step in making sure that our 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. A personal mission statement is an expression of who we want to be and what we want to do with our life, in other words our most deeply held beliefs and values. It also expresses the ways in which our life is going to be a manifestation of these beliefs and values. This includes work, relationships, lifestyle, our spirituality, and any plans that we make for ourselves in the future.

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. Sometimes change makes us try out things we would never have dreamt of trying under usual circumstances. This can open up new possibilities and opportunities.
3. **Be a life-long learner.** Whatever age we are, and however clever we 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 throughout our life. Take an attitude of a permanent “student of the university of life”, always curious about new ideas, options, skills, etc. The worst kind of ignorance is not lack of knowledge or skills as these can be learnt. It is the lack of desire to learn.
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 can be dealt with proactively. It is not necessarily circumstances that determine our life but our interpretation of events and consequently our response to them.
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. A good mentor will not tell us what to do, but will help us understand ourselves better as well as provide guidance and support along the journey of change.

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 we have to do so that we have time to do what we want to do. It also saves us a lot of unnecessary stress and waste of energy.
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.
11. **Live proactively.** A proactive response to change means we take new initiatives as the change happens or better still in anticipation of change. This is how many businesses survive and thrive during economic changes. Proactivity involves a through analysis of the situation, an organized and well thought out plan of action, implementation of that plan, evaluation of the action with the necessary changes, and trying again with renewed strength and wisdom.
12. **Take care of yourself.** Finally, all the above efforts require that we also take good care of ourselves by making sure that we avoid burn out. It is important that during stressful times of change we get enough rest and

sleep, exercise regularly, eat healthily, and engage in some kind of relaxing activity on a regular basis.

Change is inevitable. It is one of the few predictable and consistent elements in life and yet we often resist it, expecting things to remain as they are. This is especially true when things are going well for us. It is a natural human tendency to hold on to what is good wanting it to remain forever.

Unfortunately this is an unrealistic and static attitude towards life that will not help us to live proactively. Change will happen with or without us so we might as well hop on board the journey of life and participate fully. To do this we need to constantly take into account the world around us while developing our inner resources in order to maintain our self-motivation.