

HOW TO GET MOTIVATED AND TAKE ACTION

Tips on how to get motivated and stop waiting for inspiration to strike.

11 minute read • by Mark Manson

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ACTION AND MOTIVATION

Action isn't just the effect of motivation, but also the cause of it.

Most people only commit to action if they feel a certain level of motivation. And they only feel motivation when they feel an emotional inspiration.

People only become motivated to study for the exam when they're afraid of the consequences. People only pick up and learn that instrument when they feel

inspired by the people they can play for.

And we've all slacked off for lack of motivation before. Especially in times where we shouldn't.

We feel lethargic and apathetic towards a certain goal that we've set for ourselves because we lack the motivation and we lack the motivation because we don't feel any overarching emotional desire to accomplish something.

We typically think motivation works something like this:

Emotional Inspiration → Motivation → Desirable Action

But there's a problem with operating under this framework: often the changes and actions we most need in our lives are inspired by negative emotions that simultaneously hinder us from taking action.

If someone wants to fix their relationship with their mother, the emotions of the situation (hurt, resentment, avoidance) completely go against the necessary action to fix it (confrontation, honesty, communication).

If someone wants to lose weight but experiences massive amounts of shame about their body, then the act of going to the gym is apt to inspire in them the exact emotions that kept them at home on the couch in the first place.

Past traumas, negative expectations, and feelings of guilt, shame, and fear often motivate us away from the actions necessary to overcome those very traumas, negative expectations, and negative emotions.

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HOW TO GET MOTIVATED: THE “DO SOMETHING” PRINCIPLE

It's a Catch-22 of sorts. But the thing about the motivation chain is that it's not only a three-part chain but an endless loop:



Your actions create further emotional reactions and inspirations and move on to motivate your future actions. Taking advantage of this knowledge, we can actually re-orient our mindset in the following way:

Action → Inspiration → Motivation

The conclusion is that if you lack the motivation to make an **important change in your life**, then *do something*, anything really, and then harness the reaction to that action as a way to begin motivating yourself.

I call this *The “Do Something” Principle*. And I developed it on accident back in my years as a consultant, helping people who were otherwise immobilized by fears, rationalizations, and apathy to take action.

It began out of simple pragmatism: you paid me to be here so you might as well do something. I don't care, do anything!

What I found is that often once they did something, even the smallest of actions, it would soon give them the **inspiration and motivation** to do something else. They had sent a signal to themselves, “OK, I did that, I guess I can do more.” And slowly we could take it from there.

Over the years, I've applied The “Do Something” Principle in my own life as well.

The most obvious example is running this website and my business ventures online. I work for myself. I don't have a boss telling me what to do and not to do. I also often have to take major calculated risks in which I'm personally invested, both financially and emotionally.

It's been nerve-wracking at times, and major feelings of **doubt and uncertainty arise**. And when no one is around to push you, sitting around and watching TV reruns all day can quickly become the more appealing option.

The first couple of years I worked for myself, entire weeks would go by without accomplishing much for no other reason than I was anxious and stressed about what I had to do, so it was too easy to put it off.

I quickly learned that forcing myself to do something, even the most menial of tasks, quickly made the larger tasks seem much easier.

If I had to redesign an entire website, then I'd force myself to sit down and would say, "OK, I'll just design the header right now." But after the header was done, I'd find myself moving on to other parts of it. And before I knew it, I'd be energized and engaged in the project.

If I'm about to tackle a large project that I'm anxious about, or if I'm in a [new country](#) and I need to give myself a little push to get out and meet people, I apply the "Do Something" Principle. Instead of expecting the moon, I just decide, "OK, I'll start on the outline," or "OK, I'll just go out and have a beer and see what's going on." The mere action of doing this almost always spurs me on.

Inevitably, the appropriate action occurs at some point or another. The motivation is natural. The inspiration is genuine. It's an overall far more pleasant way of [accomplishing my goals](#).

You may recognize this concept among other writings in different guises. I've seen it mentioned in terms such as "failing forward" or "ready, fire, aim."

But no matter how you frame it to yourself, it's an extremely useful mindset and habit to adopt. The more time goes on, the more I realize that success in anything is tied less to knowledge or talent, and tied more to action supplemented by knowledge and talent.

You can become successful at something [without knowing what you're doing](#). You can become successful at something without having much particular talent at it. But you can never become successful at anything without taking action. Ever.

A FEW TIPS ON STAYING MOTIVATED

Willpower is finite. Motivation comes and goes. Inspiration can strike when you least expect it and leave you high and dry when you need it the most.

So whatever you call it—motivation, willpower, inspiration, your “muse”—you need to regularly nourish and replenish your supply.

The “Do Something” Principle is one such way to do this since it helps you get the ball rolling over and over again. You focus on *starting*, and that’s it.

Below are a few more tips on implementing *staying* motivated in the long run.

DEVELOP A RITUAL

You might think that doing the same thing over and over again, day in and day out, sounds not only incredibly boring but incredibly limiting. But you’d be dead wrong.

Rituals put The “Do Something” Principle in overdrive. You designate a behavior or set of behaviors to perform at a predetermined place or time—or ideally, both—in order to get you moving toward your desired behavior. It won’t take long and until all you have to do is simply set the ritual in motion—using the “Do Something” Principle, of course—and let inertia do the rest.

Then, something magical happens: The ritual soon takes on a life of its own. It becomes a sacred space and time and often just as important as your target behavior itself. Performing the desired action starts to feel empty without performing the ritual and vice versa.

Now, be careful not to get too caught up in exactly what your ritual is. A lot of people see someone who's successful doing something like eating or wearing the same thing every day or working out at exactly 5:27 AM every morning because some study said it's the best time to do it and blah blah blah and they think they need to do *exactly the same thing as them*.

But you don't. The important thing is simply having a ritual—any ritual—that gets you started in the right direction.

The rest will follow.

MORE RESOURCES ON HABITS AND RITUALS

- [If Self-Discipline Feels Difficult, Then You're Doing It Wrong](#)
- [How to 80/20 Your Life](#)
- [The Most Important Skill in Life](#) (Subscribers Only)
- [Analysis Paralysis](#) (Subscribers Only)
- [Your Goals Are Overrated](#)
- [How to Stop Procrastinating](#)
- [How to Become a Better Learner](#) (Subscribers Only)
- [How to Be Patient in an Impatient World](#)

RUTHLESSLY CUT DISTRACTIONS OUT OF YOUR LIFE

Instagram memes. Email from the boss. Unread group texts from last night. Nine notifications on Facebook! Snap your oatmeal acai breakfast bowl (but forget that burger and fries you had for lunch yesterday). Odd DM from that weird girl in high school you friended 6 years ago...pyramid scheme. Leave on read—LOL! Group text is heating up again. Stacey and Jared need to break up. What is that kid doing on TikTok? Also, what is TikTok? Shocker: politician says something stupid again. What's the weather today? And tomorrow...and next Thursday? Oooo, match on Tinder! Oh... dick pic. Guh, Brexit! Am I right?!?!

I apologize if you find it creepy that I just described the first 30 minutes of every day of your life for the past four years or more.

I wrote an article called [The Attention Diet](#) that struck a chord with a lot of people. And that's because we're all collectively coming around to the reality that all this wonderful technology we use [has a dark side with very real consequences](#).

Part of that dark side is distraction. Now, this might seem like a little harmless fun, but distractions like these are rarely harmless.

The distractions of the digital age hack the vulnerabilities of our psychology. They give us little microbursts of dopamine that *feel good in the moment*, but

amount to very little in the grand scheme of things.

Meanwhile, they're sapping our motivation to do other things that *don't always feel good in the moment* but add up to something much grander and more meaningful in the long run.

Calling your friend who's having a bad day is more uncomfortable than texting them a winky smiley kissy-face with a "thinking of you" tacked on for good measure, but it's much more helpful for them and your relationship.

Going for a silent walk through the park is much more demanding than scrolling through feeds with your thumb on one hand and mainlining a mocha latte quad shot swirly frappa caramel whip cream with the other, but—well, Jesus, do I have to explain that one?

So yeah, if you struggle with distraction in your life, start to get a grip on it by checking out some of the following resources.

RESOURCES TO GET YOUR ATTENTION AND TIME BACK

Articles

- [The Attention Diet](#)
- [In The Future, Our Attention Will Be Sold](#)
- [Smartphones Are the New Cigarettes](#)
- [The World Is Fucked and I'm Pretty Sure It's the Internet's Fault](#)
- [#FakeFreedom](#)
- [Why You Should Quit the News](#)
- [The Great "Meaning" Trend \(Subscribers Only\)](#)
- [How Your Insecurity Is Bought and Sold](#)
- [The American Dream Is Killing Us](#)
- [Living In The Age of Outrage](#)

- [Is It Just Me, Or Is the World Going Crazy?](#)

Books

- [Indistractable](#) by Nir Eyal
- [Digital Minimalism](#) by Cal Newport
- [Stillness Is the Key](#) by Ryan Holiday

UNCOVER THE REAL REASONS FOR YOUR LACK OF MOTIVATION

If you're still having trouble staying motivated after all of that, it's time to take a good, hard look at your life and figure out what might be the proverbial piss in your cornflakes all the time.

If you consistently have no motivation to be productive at work, maybe you hate your job and it's time to [get serious about a new career](#).

If you're having a hard time fitting regular exercise into your day, it might be time to examine your beliefs around your body, what you think a healthy lifestyle is,

and whether or not you're doing exercise that you find enjoyable and worthwhile.

If you find it difficult to want to [work on your relationship](#) with your partner, maybe it's time to get brutally honest with each other and figure out a way forward, which could mean [breaking up](#) if it's for the best.

Notice all of these situations require you to address some uncomfortable emotions.

But I've argued for years now that facing uncomfortable emotions is precisely [what makes us grow as individuals](#), that traumatic events, as horrible as they are, can [spur positive change in our lives](#), that being happy all the time isn't just impossible, it [wouldn't even be good for us](#), and that the [demons we all try to hide](#) are actually just the other side of our better angels.

So these are the moments you have to not only face, but embrace. Rather than turning away from discomfort, you turn towards it as a source of motivation itself.

And that's when shit gets real, my friend.