The best kind of motivation is self-motivation.

To demonstrate this point, let’s consider two scenarios you’ve likely experienced:

1. You have something you *have to do*. You’re not excited or passionate about it, but you know you need to get it done. This feeling of obligation motivates you to work hard to complete the task;
2. You have something you*get to do*. You’re interested in your task—you might have even assigned this task for yourself rather than receiving it from someone else—and you are happy to put in the time and effort to complete it.

In which scenario are you more effective? In which scenario are you more efficient? And, in which scenario do you feel the most fulfilled?

I’m willing to bet that your answer to each of those questions is Scenario 2.

It likely won’t come as a surprise that doing something for its own sake and for your own purposes is likely to be more fulfilling, enjoyable, and successful than doing something to meet external standards or to please others.

The feeling described in Scenario 2 is that of being *self-motivated*. Read on to learn more about self-motivation and why it’s the most effective kind of motivation.

Before you continue, we thought you might like to [download our three Goal Achievement Exercises for free](https://pro.positivepsychology.com/opt-in/3-free-goals-tools/). These detailed, science-based exercises will help you or your clients create actionable goals and master techniques to create lasting behavior change.

**This Article Contains:**

* [What Is the Meaning of Self-Motivation?](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#what-self-motivation)
* [3 Examples of Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#examples-self-motivation)
* [The Psychology of Self-Motivation: How Are Self-Efficacy and Motivation Related?](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#psychology-self-motivation)
* [The Importance of Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#importance-self-motivation)
* [Is Self-Motivation a Skill and Can It Be Developed Through Training?](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#skill-self-motivation)
* [How to Foster Self-Motivation in the Workplace](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#workplace-self-motivation)
* [Research on Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#research-self-motivation)
* [17 Activities, Exercises, and Worksheets for Self-Motivation (PDF)](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#activities-self-motivation)
* [5 Meditations to Promote Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#meditations-self-motivation)
* [Self-Motivation Quizzes, Questionnaires, and Tests](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#tests-self-motivation)
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* [6 Images to Inspire Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#images-self-motivation)
* [15 Recommended Movies to Get Yourself Motivated](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#movies-self-motivation)
* [TED Talks, Speeches, and Videos on Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#ted-self-motivation)
* [7 Books on Self-Motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#books-self-motivation)
* [A Take-Home Message](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#home)
* [References](https://positivepsychology.com/self-motivation/#references)

**What is the Meaning of Self-Motivation?**

Above, we explored a basic example of self-motivation, but here’s a succinct definition of the concept:

*“Self-motivation is, in its simplest form, the force that drives you to do things”*

(Skills You Need, n.d.).

It’s the drive you have to work toward your goals, to put effort into self-development, and to achieve personal fulfillment.

It’s important to note here that self-motivation is generally driven by intrinsic motivation, a kind of motivation that comes from sincerely wanting to achieve and desiring the inherent rewards associated with it.

Self-motivation can also be driven by extrinsic motivation, the drive to achieve that comes from wanting the external rewards (like money, power, status, or recognition), although it’s clear that intrinsic motivation is usually a more effective and fulfilling drive.

**Self-Motivation and Emotional Intelligence**

According to emotional intelligence expert Daniel Goleman, self-motivation is a key component of [emotional intelligence](https://positivepsychology.com/emotional-intelligence-eq/). Emotional intelligence is the measure of one’s ability to recognize and manage his or her own emotions and the emotions of other people.

Self-motivation’s relevance to emotional intelligence highlights its role within our ability to understand ourselves, relate to others, and succeed in [reaching our goals](https://positivepsychology.com/goal-setting/).

Goleman states that there are four components of motivation:

1. Achievement drive, or the personal drive to achieve, improve, and meet certain standards;
2. Commitment to your own personal goals;
3. Initiative, or the “readiness to act on opportunities”;
4. Optimism, or the tendency to look ahead and persevere with the belief that you can reach your goals (Skills You Need, n.d.).

**3 Examples of Self-Motivation**

Self-motivation is easy to understand when you consider some examples that contrast it with other kinds of motivation:

1. A man who goes to work every only as a means to pay the bills, keep his family off his back, and please his boss is not self-motivated, while a man who needs no external forces to make the trek into work every day and finds fulfillment in what he does is self-motivated;
2. The student who only completes her homework because her parents remind her or nag her, or because they ground her when she fails to complete it is not self-motivated, but the student who completes her homework with no prodding because she wants to learn and succeed in school is self-motivated;
3. The woman who only goes to the gym when her friends drag her there or because her doctor is adamant that she needs to exercise to get healthy is not self-motivated, but the woman who likes the way exercise makes her feel and schedules time at the gym whether or not anyone encourages her is self-motivated.

As you can see, self-motivation is all about where your drive comes from; if your motivation comes from within and pushes you to achieve for your own personal reasons, it can be considered self-motivation.

If you are only motivated to achieve standards set by someone else and not for your own internal satisfaction, you are probably not self-motivated.

It’s possible to be self-motivated in some areas and not in others. For example, if the man from the first example is not internally motivated to go to work but is sure to make time for his marathon training, he is not self-motivated when it comes to work but might be self-motivated to run.



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These detailed, science-based exercises will help you or your clients create actionable goals and master techniques for lasting behavior change.

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**The Psychology of Self-Motivation: How Are Self-Efficacy and Motivation Related?**

Psychologist Scott Geller is at the forefront of research on self-motivation, and he explains that there are three questions you can use to determine whether you (or someone in your life) is self-motivated:

1. Can you do it?
2. Will it work?
3. Is it worth it?

If you answered “yes” to each question, you are likely self-motivated.

If you believe you can do it, you have [self-efficacy](https://positivepsychology.com/self-efficacy/). If you believe it will work, you have response efficacy—belief that the action you are taking will lead to the outcome you want. And if you believe it is worth it, you have weighed the cost against the consequences and decided the consequences outweigh the cost (Geller, 2016).

Speaking of consequences, Geller considers “consequences” to be one of four vital “C” words that underpin self-motivation:

1. Consequences: To be self-motivated, you sincerely have to want the consequences associated with the actions you take rather than simply doing something to avoid negative consequences;
2. Competence: If you answer all three of the questions above with a “yes,” you will feel competent in your ability to get things done;
3. Choice: Having a sense of autonomy over your actions encourages self-motivation;
4. Community: Having social support and connections with others is critical for feeling motivated and believing in yourself and your power to achieve (Geller, 2016).

Much of Geller’s work on self-motivation is grounded in the research of psychologist and self-efficacy researcher [Albert Bandura](https://positivepsychology.com/bandura-self-efficacy/). In 1981, Bandura set the stage for Geller’s current conceptualization of self-motivation with this description:

*“Self-motivation . . . requires personal standards against which to evaluate ongoing performance. By making self-satisfaction conditional on a certain level of performance, individuals create self-inducements to persist in their efforts until their performances match internal standards. Both the anticipated satisfactions for matching attainments and the dissatisfactions with insufficient ones provide incentives for self-directed actions”*

(Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

From this quote, you can see where Geller’s three questions come from. Believing that you can do it, that it will work, and that it is worth it will drive you to match the internal standards you set for yourself.

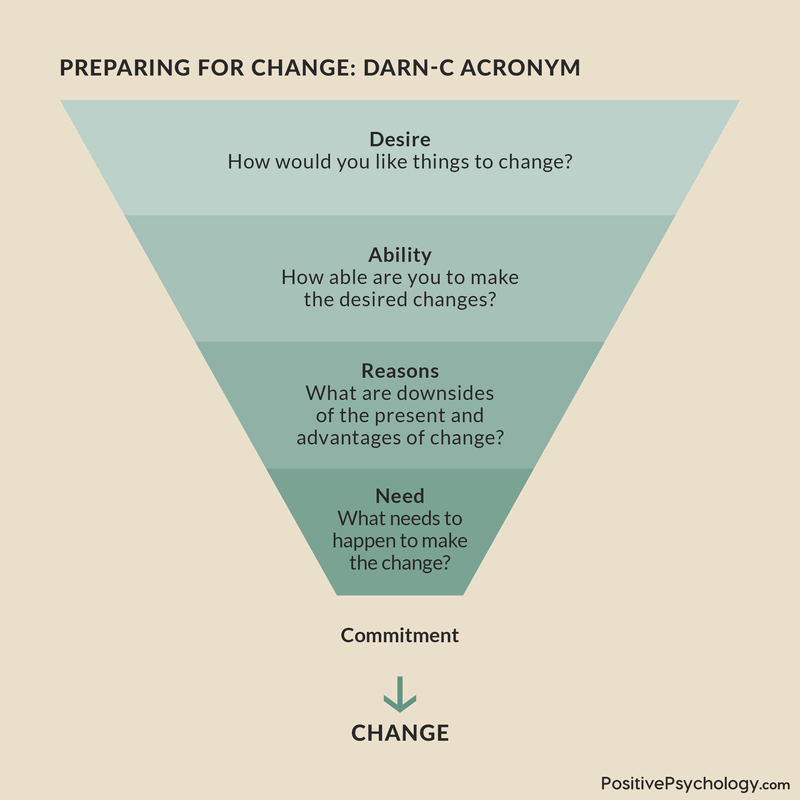
We explore this further in [The Science of Self-Acceptance Masterclass©](https://pro.positivepsychology.com/product/the-science-of-self-acceptance/).

**DARN-C Acronym**

The DARN-C acronym is a commonly used tool in motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a directive, client-centered treatment that enhances intrinsic motivation to make positive life changes (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).

The DARN-C acronym stands for *desire*, *ability*, *reason*, *need*, and *commitment*, which builds the basis of change talk.

1. *Desire* indicates precisely what the client wants and wishes for. This desire is the motivating factor for change.  
2. The *ability* component of motivation is necessary because clients must believe that they can change, so a realistic perspective on how achievable this change can be is needed.  
3. The *reason* for the change can be motivated by current pitfalls, benefits of a changed future, or aspects of both.  
4. The *need* indicates the urgency of the change without specifying the underlying reason. The needs that arise during motivational interviewing questions reflect the importance of the shift to the individual.  
5. Lastly, *commitment* is about specific actions that the client will take to change, an understanding of how to convert intentions into concrete action plans.



* 1
* 2

**The Importance of Self-Motivation**

As you have likely already guessed, self-motivation is an important concept. While pleasing others and meeting external standards can certainly motivate us to get things done, such efforts aren’t exactly labors of love.

In other words, doing things because we feel we have to do them or to gain some external reward is enough in many cases, but it doesn’t invoke the passion needed to drive innovation and excellence.

It’s fine to use external sources to motivate you in some areas, but external motivation is less likely to leave you feeling personally fulfilled and finding deeper [meaning in your life](https://positivepsychology.com/meaning-of-life-positive-psychology/).

Not only do we generally do better work when we are self-motivated, but we are also better able to cope with stress and are simply happier when we are doing what we want to be doing.

**Is Self-Motivation a Skill and Can It Be Developed Through Training?**

Given the benefits of being self-motivation, your next question might be, Can I become more self-motivated?

The answer is a definite “yes.”

Self-motivation is driven by a set of skills that are within your control. Read on to learn how to use this to your advantage.

**12 Tips and Skills to Motivate Yourself Today**

The Skills You Need website lists six vital skills that form the foundation of self-motivation, and they are all skills that you can develop through sustained effort:

1. Setting high but realistic goals (e.g., SMART goals);
2. Taking the right level of risk;
3. Constantly seeking feedback to figure out how to improve;
4. Being committed to personal and/or organizational goals and going the extra mile to achieve them;
5. Actively seeking out opportunities and seizing them when they occur;
6. Being able to deal with setbacks and continue to pursue your goals despite obstacles (i.e., resilience).

Further, there are six things you can do to maintain your self-motivation:

1. Continue learning and acquiring knowledge (i.e., develop a love of learning);
2. Spend time with motivated, enthusiastic, and supportive people;
3. Cultivate a [positive mindset](https://positivepsychology.com/positive-mindset/) and build your optimism and resilience;
4. Identify your strengths and weaknesses, and work on them;
5. Avoid procrastination and work on your time management skills;
6. Get help when you need it, and be willing to help others succeed (Skills You Need, n.d.).

**14 Strategies for Students to Increase Their Self-Motivation to Study**

Students are particularly well-suited to reap the benefits of self-motivation, but it can be hard to be self-motivated in the current educational environment.

Luckily, there are some things you can do as teachers, parents, and adult mentors to help students become self-motivated. In addition, there are plenty of strategies that students can apply themselves.

Here are some ideas for [how to encourage self-motivation](https://positivepsychology.com/how-to-motivate-someone-or-yourself/) in students:

1. Provide students with as much autonomy and freedom of choice as possible (e.g., give students a choice in their seating arrangements or a range of options for their final project, and implement problem-based learning);
2. Provide useful feedback, praise hard work, and deliver critical feedback using words like “and” and “what if” instead of “but” to encourage student competence;
3. Cultivate a high-quality relationship with your students by taking a genuine interest in them, acting friendly, staying flexible, keeping your focus on the end goal of learning, and not giving up on them;
4. Encourage your students to think about, write about, and discuss how what they are learning is relevant to their own lives (Ferlazzo, 2015).

And, here are some ways that students can bolster their own self-motivation:

1. Attach meaning to your studies and take personal ownership over your knowledge and learning;
2. Create a plan: Map out your semester, your month, your week, and even your day;
3. Build a routine and apply time management skills to become more organized and productive;
4. Identify several comfortable study environments (they should be quiet and have few distractions);
5. Get enough sleep, eat nutritious food, and exercise regularly to stay healthy;
6. Tame “time monsters” like the internet, video games, or unproductive time spent with friends;
7. Avoid multitasking by choosing one subject or task to work on at a time and focusing all of your attention on it;
8. Take planned—and well-earned—breaks to stay refreshed and motivated;
9. Connect with a support system of friends and family who will encourage you to do your best;
10. Talk positively to yourself (Buckle, 2013).

**How to Foster Self-Motivation in the Workplace**

You may find it much easier to encourage self-motivation in the workplace than in school.

After all, everyone in the workplace is there because they chose to be there, not because they’re required to be there by the law or by their parents. Employees might have vastly disparate reasons for being at work, but it’s unlikely they were compelled to work for their specific organization against their will.

As a manager, there are many ways to foster self-motivation in the workplace, including:

1. Giving your employees one-on-one attention, feedback, and recognition;
2. Ensure your employees have opportunities for meaningful advancement as well as training and education opportunities;
3. Set the example in terms of tone, work ethic, and [values](https://positivepsychology.com/values-clarification/). Be a role model for positivity, optimism, and hard work;
4. Cultivate an uplifting and motivating culture that encourages employees to want to do their best;
5. Foster socialization through [teamwork](https://positivepsychology.com/psychology-teamwork/) and team-based activities, projects, and events;
6. Stay as transparent as possible and open yourself up to questions, concerns, and ideas from your employees. Implement an open-door policy to ensure your employees feel heard (DeMers, 2015).

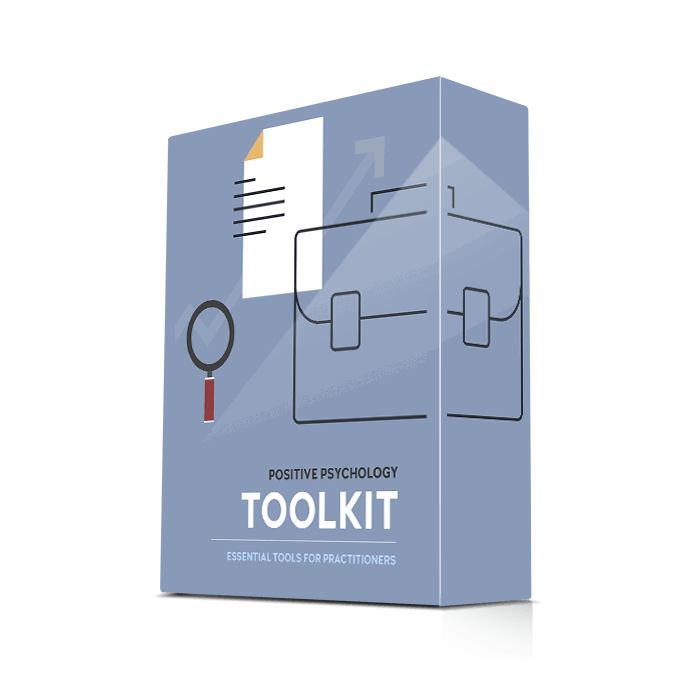
Writers Nick Nanton and J. W. Dicks at Fast Company offer some further strategies to ensure that both you and your employees stay motivated:

1. Sell your mission statement to your team as you would to an investor. Ensure the people working to meet that mission understand it and buy into it;
2. Foster a culture in which each employee has a specific job and a specific role with the organization, and give them room to grow and opportunities to implement ambitious new ideas;
3. Focus on inspiring your staff instead of just motivating them. Inspired employees will inherently be motivated;
4. Show your team recognition and appreciation for the hard work they do;
5. Share your passion with your team and lead from the front by developing a positive mindset and displaying a positive attitude (2015).

**Techniques to Motivate Yourself at Work**

You can also take control of your own self-motivation at work. Some good techniques for becoming more self-motivated at work include:

1. Finding work that interests you (This is a vital tip—it’s much easier to be self-motivated when you are passionate about what you do and fully engaged in it.);
2. Request feedback from your boss or colleagues to learn about where you can improve and to enhance role clarity;
3. Learn a new skill that is relevant to your role (or your desired role);
4. Ask for a raise. Financial incentives are generally considered extrinsic motivation, but if you’re happy with your position, being paid what you think you are worth can be very self-motivating;
5. Remind yourself of your “why,” the reason you do the work you do. When you are doing meaningful work, you are more likely to find fulfillment and stay self-motivated;
6. Volunteer your services to others (This is especially helpful if you have trouble defining your “why.”);
7. Take a vacation to allow yourself to rest, recharge, and come back refreshed and ready to work (Stahl, 2016).



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**Research on Self-Motivation**

The research on self-motivation clarifies its vital role in helping us achieve our goals. Check out the findings on two important and related topics below.

**Self-Discipline and Self-Motivation**

While self-discipline and self-motivation are two distinct concepts, self-discipline is vital to maintaining self-motivation. It’s not enough simply to be self-motivated—to achieve your goals, you need to couple self-motivation with self-discipline.

A study of online learners showed that even though they might all be considered self-motivated (since they are all taking a voluntary course with the goal of learning), those with self-discipline were the most likely to succeed.

Those who were highly self-disciplined displayed higher competence at the end of the course, fulfilled more external tasks, and were more effective in achieving their goals (Gorbunovs, Kapenieks, & Cakula, 2016).

**Self-Motivation and Weight Loss**

Very often, self-motivation is a key component of weight loss. Research on the connection between the two is quite clear.

In multiple studies, researchers found that participants who reported greater autonomy support and self-determined motivation were more effective in losing weight, more likely to keep the weight off for longer periods of time, and more positive about their weight loss journey (Teixeira, Silva, Mata, Palmeira, & Markland, 2012).

When we have our own closely held reasons for wanting to lose weight—and these reasons are based on personal fulfillment rather than meeting external standards—we are much more likely to find success.

**16 Activities, Exercises, and Worksheets for Self-Motivation (PDFs)**

If you are looking for more specific and practical ways to improve self-motivation, you’ll be happy to know that there are tons of resources out there for you.

Check out the activities, exercises, and worksheets below to find ways to enhance your self-motivation. Or, share these resources with your clients to help them get self-motivated.

**Quick and Easy Motivation Techniques**

Some techniques and exercises are more difficult than others. If you’re looking for a quick and easy exercise or activity to boost your self-motivation, try these:

1. Listen to motivational music, like:  
   a. Bill Conti’s *Gonna Fly Now*;  
   b. Paul Engemann’s *Push it to the Limit*;  
   c. Queen’s *We Will Rock You*;  
   d. Kenny Loggins’ *Danger Zone*;  
   e. ACDC’s *Thunderstruck*.
2. Watch a motivational movie, like:  
   a. *Forrest Gump*;  
   b. *The Pursuit of Happyness*;  
   c. *Life is Beautiful*;  
   d. *Rain Man*;  
   e*. The Family Man*.
3. Read books that boost motivation from authors like:  
   a. Napoleon Hill;  
   b. Brian Tracy;  
   c. Tony Robbins;  
   d. Jim Rohn (Mueller, 2012).

**Stronger Motivational Techniques**

If you need techniques with a bit more power, you can try these:

* Set wisely chosen and deeply personal goals that you are excited about working toward;
* Schedule rewards for yourself when you accomplish your goals (or when you make steps toward your goals, for the larger ones);
* Visualize yourself achieving and fulfilling these goals;
* Create a vision board with your goals, aims, and dreams in mind, and post it somewhere you will see it often;
* Pay attention to your “hierarchy of needs” (à la Abraham Maslow) and ensure you are meeting your lower-level needs (including physiological needs like food and sleep, safety needs, social needs, and esteem needs);
* Consider using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), the study linking neurology, language, and programming to understand human experience and motivation;
* Envision what could happen when you reach your goals, as well as what could happen when you fail to reach your goals;
* Incorporate things you are interested in and engage your curiosity when setting and working toward your goals;
* Make a commitment to someone or something to ensure your future self will find it difficult to change plans or put things off (Mueller, 2012).

**Self-Motivation Workbook (PDF)**

[This workbook](https://www.plr.me/content/motivation-passion/worksheets/self-motivation-workbook/6063) is an excellent resource for anyone who wants to develop self-motivation.

It contains 23 pages of self-motivation information, activities, and exercises to help you find the drive within yourself that’s needed to achieve your goals.

You’ll find sections like:

* What Makes People Self-Motivated?;
* Lack of Energy or Self-Motivation?;
* Making Decisions;
* Don’t Make Excuses;
* Be Clear About Your Decisions;
* The Three Decisions That Will Shape Your Life;
* The NAC Concept of Pain and Pleasure;
* Transforming Yourself.

Please note that you will need to register with [www.plr.me](https://www.plr.me/) to download this workbook. You can find more free [motivation tools and worksheets here](https://positivepsychology.com/motivation-tools-worksheets-activities/).

**Exercise: Build Self-Efficacy**

Building self-efficacy is one of the best ways to develop your self-motivation. It might sound difficult or complex, but there are three simple activities you can do that help get you there:

1. Ensure early success by choosing activities or steps that you know you can do;
2. Watch others succeed in the activity you want to try—this is particularly effective if the person you are observing is similar to you and/or close to you;
3. Find a supportive voice, like a coach, counselor, friendly manager, or mentor to encourage you and give you feedback (Mantell, 2012).

**Set SMART Goals**

As noted earlier, setting SMART goals is a great way to enhance your self-motivation.

When you set these goals, make sure they are:

* Specific;
* Measurable;
* Attainable;
* Realistic;
* Timely.

Creating goals for yourself is one of the best things you can do to build a foundation for self-motivation. And if your goals are SMART, you are much more likely to find it easy to motivate yourself.

**Getting Motivated to Change**

This PDF from Texas Christian University’s Institute of Behavior Research offers many useful handouts and worksheets on motivation, along with some instructions for how to use them and suggestions for implementing change-focused counseling and coaching (Bartholomew, Dansereau, & Simpson, 2006).

It breaks things down into four parts:

1. Motivation 101;
2. The Art of Self-Motivation;
3. Staying Motivated;
4. Making It Second Nature.

All four parts contain great resources, but the Art of Self-Motivation section includes some really useful handouts and worksheets, including:

* Motivation and Change handout (page 28);
* Taking a Hard Look – Pros and Cons (page 29);
* Target Log (page 30).

Some of the resources in this PDF are targeted to people who are recovering from addiction, but it’s easy enough to alter and adapt them for more general use.

Click [here](http://ibr.tcu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TMA06Sept-mot.pdf) to access this 63-page resource.

**5 Meditations to Promote Self-Motivation**

Meditation can be a great way to help maintain your self-motivation.

Try these meditations to help you stay self-motivated:

* Mountain Refuge’s *Meditation for Self-Motivation* ([20-minute guided meditation](https://www.meditainment.com/mountain-refuge-meditation-motivation) from Meditainment);
* *Meditation to Help Stop Procrastination* (guided meditation from Jason Stephenson that’s about one half-hour);