



# Motivation & Sustainability

Mental Health Mastermind

## Motivation

Motivation is the process or reason to start and sustain a behavior. Motivation can be internal (intrinsic motivation) or external (extrinsic motivation). While both can be helpful aspects of maintaining positive habits and behaviors, we are ultimately most fulfilled when we have some degree of intrinsic motivation.

### Positive Influences on Motivation

- How we think we'll feel once we've completed the task or reached the goal.
- Positive emotional states.
- Engagement in the activity itself.
- When we see the meaning or purpose behind our actions.
- When an action helps us feel connected with others.
- When we experience a sense of achievement or accomplishment in the action.
- When we are physically or emotionally thriving in life.
- Receiving acknowledgment or appreciation for our efforts.
- Clarity in what we need to do.
- Belief in our abilities to perform the task.

How does motivation feel to you? What thoughts, feelings, or actions do you associate with motivation?

What do you know about the motivators in your life, whether internal or external?

## Resistance

Resistance is the experience of knowing what you want or need to do but feeling unable to take action. This is the feeling of being stuck, confused, or frozen. We can interpret our resistance as internal (i.e., a reflection of who we are or what we're capable of) or situational (i.e. a reflection of the environment or situation). We tend to feel most empowered when we can identify a combination of internal and external factors without interpreting our resistance as a permanent state or attribute.

### Influences on Resistance

- Disengagement.
- Lack of meaning.
- Confusion about what needs to be done.
- Lack of acknowledgement or positive feedback.
- Pressure.
- Too many competing demands.
- Fear or uncertainty.
- Overwhelming discomfort in taking the required steps.
- Disconnection or fear of disconnection.
- Overwhelm, being "stretched too thin."
- Physical, mental, or emotional exhaustion or burn-out.
- Loss of interest or incompatibility with one's values or priorities.

How does resistance feel to you? What thoughts, feelings, or actions do you associate with resistance?

What do you already know about getting yourself through resistance?

# Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the ability of an action or process to be maintained at a certain rate or level. It also refers to the avoidance of depleting internal or external resources so that an action or process can be maintained.

## Constructive vs. Productive

Our language has an impact on the meaning we attribute to our experiences. Terms like constructive and productive can influence the expectations we place on ourselves and the decisions we make moving forward.

What do productive and constructive mean to you?
What do you know about seemingly “productive” actions that are not constructive for you?
What do you know about seemingly “unproductive” actions that are constructive for you?

# Ways to Boost or Sustain Motivation

**Beginner's Mind:** View a goal or activity as if you're starting fresh with no baggage or backstory. View the end result, the steps required, and even the obstacles along the way with an attitude of openness, curiosity, and acceptance. Remain open to failure and even welcome it as an important part of growth. Remain mindful of your expectations for perfection and soften them where you can.

**Alternate Focusing on the Process with Focusing on the Outcome.** Flow between focusing on the process and focusing on the outcome of your goals. If you feel stuck, notice where you're focused and see if you can take another perspective. For example, if you're overwhelmed with all the steps you'll need to take to complete an assignment, zoom out for a moment and envision yourself and how you'll feel after you've completed the assignment. If, on the other hand, the thought of the end result is paralyzing, focus on the short-term goals you can make along the way.

**Inside or Outside?** Take advantage of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as you work toward your goals.

- *Tools for building intrinsic motivation:* Consider the meaning this goal has in your life. Envision yourself and how you'll feel taking steps in the right direction and upon reaching your goal. Use self-affirmations to acknowledge what your actions say about your values and priorities.
- *Tools for building extrinsic motivation:* Build in small rewards, surround yourself with encouraging people, and notice the external changes that take place as you get close to your goal. Be mindful of your reliance on an external reward in the absence of personal meaning. This can result in loss of motivation, burnout, or disappointment that the goal didn't bring you what you'd hoped.

**Eat the Frog.** Brian Tracy coined the term "eat the frog" as a system for tackling difficult problems ([Eat That Frog: Brian Tracy Explains the Truth About Frogs | Brian Tracy](#)). It goes like this: if you have a big, daunting task ahead of you, one that you would rather put off (like eating a frog), get it out of the way first. The idea is to take action immediately rather than sitting around and contemplating this big task ahead of you. Research on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) backs this up, finding that putting off a decision or task increases our anxiety, whereas deciding to take an action reduces it.

**Surround Yourself with Your Goal's Environment.** If your goal was a living, breathing thing, where would it hang out? Who would it hang out with? What would it talk about? What books would it read? Wherever possible, surround yourself with the people, circumstances, and beliefs that support your goals.

**Consult a Mental Board of Directors.** Make a list of the most influential people, mentors, and teachers in your life, even if you've never met them. Include in your list their main messages and any catchphrases you associate with them. Whenever you struggle with a decision or feel stuck, consult this mental board of directors for guidance. What would they say to do?

**Make it Smaller, Make it Clearer.** Perhaps one of the biggest reasons we feel stalled on a task is that we've made it too big, too confusing, or too demanding. If you've lost motivation on a project or goal, University of Arizona Counseling and Psych Services, Mental Health Mastermind

consider whether your expectations are too specific, unattainable, or lofty. Where you can, make it smaller and clearer. What is the task of the *moment*?

### **Motivation Tune-Up**

What's one goal or area of your life when you're experiencing resistance?

What motivation concept or strategy covered today resonates with you in relation to this goal or area of your life? How can you apply it?