

How To Motivate Yourself to Reach Your Goals

Setting goals is an important part of accomplishing what you want to in life, but how do you stay motivated? In December, for example, plenty of people resolve that come January 1, they are going to start a diet and exercise program. Others say they want to quit smoking or go back to college or learn a new skill. A few weeks later, their enthusiasm is gone and the goal is soon forgotten. How do you stay motivated so that you can accomplish those goals that are so important?

Here are some tips.

Identify your goals and state them in a way that will motivate you.

The best goals are fully defined visions of how you want things to be.

The more specific, measurable, and challenging goals are, the more motivated people are to attain them.

Good goals have these five elements:

- They are expressed using action verbs.
- They are written with specific language.
- They specify measurable outcomes.
- They challenge you without being unreachable.
- They specify completion dates.

See "Motivate Yourself With Goals" for more information.

Identify sub-goals.

Break a goal into smaller, more manageable chunks. Each chunk is a sub-goal that will help you reach the larger goal. Like your large goal, make the sub-goals specific and spell out the deadlines.

Make a complete plan of action.

Decide what you are going to do and when. Write it on your calendar and review it regularly.

Take the first step, however small.

- This is very important. If your goal is to weigh 130 pounds by June 1 and your sub-goal is to join Weight Watchers, your first step could be to find out when the next meeting near you will be held and write it on your calendar.
- Find a partner. If you have a friend, coworker, or neighbor who is working toward the same goal and you enjoy the person's company, ask him or her to be your buddy. If your

goal is to complete your college education, ask your buddy to come to the Adult Education Open House next Tuesday.

- Or if your goal is to get more exercise, round up a group of neighbors to walk through the neighborhood three evenings each week.
- Visualize yourself having achieved each of your goals. The more real you can make your visualization, the better. Here are some tips:

"The more specific, measurable, and challenging goals are, the more motivated people are to attain them".

Find a quiet place where you can relax undisturbed. Sit in a comfortable chair, close your eyes, and imagine yourself doing the thing you want to do. If your goal is to lose weight, visualize yourself at your target weight. Notice what kind of clothes you are wearing and how you are feeling. See others looking at you and imagine what they are saying. Let yourself enjoy the feeling. After you open your eyes, write about the experience.

Go through some magazines and cut out pictures that represent your goal. If you want to save enough money to buy a house, look for photos of the kind of houses you are looking for. If your goal is to get a degree from a certain university, put up a banner, bumper sticker, or other school-related items around your house. Put these items in places where you can see them, such as on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror. Anytime you feel like giving up or not working so hard toward your goal, look at this reminder of what you are working for.

Put it in writing.

- The act of writing down what you are going to do and actually making a contract with yourself is a strong motivator. If your goal and plan are not written down, they are more likely to remain vague and are less likely to become reality.
- Your contract with yourself should include a goal statement and the steps you will take to reach your goal. It should also include what your reward will be for achieving the goal. Read the contract at least daily—better yet, read it each morning and each night. This process will help you be more committed to your goal as each day passes.

List the benefits of achieving your goal.

Knowing exactly what you will gain from reaching your goal is a strong motivator. For example, let's say you are a woman weighing 170 pounds. You have gradually put on weight since you finished school and have gained 50 pounds over the years. Your goal is to weigh 130 pounds, which is realistic for a woman of your height and age. The benefits of achieving your goal might include these:

- You can wear more fashionable clothes.
- You will look better.
- Knowing exactly what you will gain from reaching your goal is a strong motivator.
- You will be proud of yourself and of how you look.
- You won't be embarrassed about seeing old friends and acquaintances.
- You will feel better.

- Your health will be better.

Describe your ideal life in the future: 1 year, 5 years, 10 years. Write a few paragraphs describing what you have accomplished and how your life is better as a result. Use the present tense, as if it were happening right here, right now. This is another way of making your vision real.

Make a list of the obstacles that stand in the way of your chances for success.

It is important to think of everything that might block you from being successful. Using the weight loss example, you might list things like this:

- I lack willpower when I am tired, hungry, and depressed.
- It is difficult for me to resist high-calorie foods when I attend a party or business dinner.
- Everyone in the office goes to the cafeteria for lunch. There are few healthy food choices available there.
- I am tired when I get home and often don't want to cook.

Decide what you can do about each obstacle. Design a plan to reduce the influence of each obstacle and increase the chances that you will be successful in reaching your goal.

Learn what you need to learn.

- If lack of information or skill is blocking you from reaching your goals, make a plan to fill in the gaps. Build this into your action plan.
- Be willing to study and work hard to reach your goals. Think about how much time and effort will be required and decide whether you are really willing and able to do what is necessary. Perhaps you will need to adjust your goals or your timeline. It's better to do that than to go ahead with a plan that is unrealistic.
- Look for role models—people who have already achieved the goals you seek to reach. If you can, ask them for advice and suggestions. Ask them how they did it. Incorporate what you learn into your plan.

Get organized.

- When you are prepared and organized, you will feel better about your ability to reach your goals. Having information scattered in too many places makes you feel out of control and undermines motivation. Set up the filing system, set aside your workout clothes, pull together the college catalogs—what you need to do will depend on what your goal is.
- "Having information scattered in too many places makes you feel out of control and undermines motivation."
- Reward yourself each step of the way. Think about what would give you a lift as you accomplish each of your sub-goals. The rewards don't have to be expensive; in fact, they don't have to cost anything at all. For example, if your goal is to lose 30 pounds, you might decide to do something special for yourself after each 10-pound loss. It could be

buying one piece of clothing in a smaller size, buying yourself an inexpensive bunch of flowers for your desk at work, or spending a day at your favorite museum.

This list of ideas should contain at least a few things that will help you motivate yourself and stay motivated as you work toward a better life for yourself.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Blair, Gary Ryan. *Goal Setting Forms: Tools to Help You Get Ready, Get Set, and Go for Your Goals.* Palm Harbor, FL: The Goals Guy, 2000.

Blair, Gary Ryan. *Goal Setting 101: How to Set and Achieve a Goal.* Palm Harbor, FL: The Goals Guy, 2000.

Smith, Douglas. *Make Success Measurable: A Mindbook- Workbook for Setting Goals and Taking Action.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999.