

# Motivation

By Suze Hargraves

After a meeting on Sunday, I mentioned to a friend that I was off to the gym. She commented that I had great discipline. I chuckled inside thinking, “Me? Discipline? Obsessive compulsiveness is more like it.” Going to the gym is on my list of things to do today. If I don’t do it will drive me nuts. It’s on the list. That got me to thinking about motivation. I’m usually driven by a need to complete lists I create to help keep me on track daily. My lists are my motivational tool, but how exactly does this motivation thing work? How does a person get motivated?

We’ve all most likely been exposed to motivational posters, books, lectures or videos at some point. They’re great tools. But they are only tools. Like all tools, you have to choose to use them. Just because you read self-help books doesn’t mean you’re magically “fixed”. Going to a motivational seminar probably won’t do you much good unless you listen and work the information received into your life. Getting and staying motivated isn’t about absorbing information and letting it lie dormant. It doesn’t matter if you’re trying to change the way you live, relationships, eating habits, exercise routines or you want to change your overall health. Good information isn’t going to help you if you let it flop around your head like a hapless haddock. You’ve got to take action to assimilate the information into active, conscious actions and thoughts in your life.

So how do we assimilate motivational information and techniques into our lives?

1. Absorb the information coming from the motivational source. This might be a professional, a book, a video, a lecture, a teacher, a friend, a parent or other relative. Really listen. Try your best not to get defensive of your current beliefs or past actions. You’re just listening at this point. Repeat the information back to the speaker or write notes that help you remember what you heard.
2. Make a list of what you’ve taken away from the motivational experience. What points hit home with you? What didn’t make sense? What doubts do you have about achieving your goals through this motivational source? What actions can you take that will make what you have learned a genuine part of the way you think and act? In A-la-non they teach you to “take what you need and leave the rest”. I’ve found that to be an incredibly good way to approach things. You don’t need to commit to 100% of anyone else’s ideas, but you can take the positive ones that will work for you and incorporate them into your life in an active way.
3. Address each of the points on your list one at a time. Don’t rush. It takes time to absorb new information and it takes time to change. Motivation to change usually does not happen overnight nor does change itself. Give yourself adequate time to commit and to internalize your motivation by making it a part of who you are and how you think.

A good example of the process is my lists. Staying organized isn’t easy for me. Over the years I’ve learned that lists are great motivators for me. I’m driven to complete them. That’s my personality. I’ve learned this from a teacher who had a similar personality. My lists have not only my daily tasks on them, but also things like “say something positive” and “eat two pieces of fruit”. When I check off items I get a feeling of satisfaction and completion which my personality type really needs. Every once in a while I realize that something that used to be on my list is now a regular positive part of my life.

Another friend is motivated to go to the gym because she “rearranged” her thought process about it. Instead of her previous habit of guiltting herself into action, she has, through listening to a fitness guru she admires, reinterpreted her gym time as “me time”. That half hour is her time alone with her thoughts and to get in tune with her physical body. By using the tools she was given to motivate herself she was able to change her thinking from a negative to a positive and she now looks forward to going to the gym.

Motivation is not external. It comes from within. Sources of motivation are tools, but unless we decide to use those tools, they’ll just sit on the shelf and collect dust. If you’re trying to change; body, mind or soul, take a look at the motivational sources available to you and accept them as tools to use to change and motivate yourself toward a more productive, positive and healthy life.

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