



11 June 2010

## MOTIVATION: LATEST RESEARCH THROWS NEW LIGHT ON OLD SECRETS

### Motivating yourself towards success

1. State your goal precisely, along with your end date and timetable.
2. Make a detailed plan and gather all the resources you'll need (including your support team!).
3. Make it hard to back out by going public and making your new behaviours part of your routine.
4. Remind yourself constantly about how your goal fits with your core values and beliefs.
5. Check there's no hidden conflict between competing goals. If necessary, reduce the number of goals you focus on at any one time.
6. Accept that setbacks and failures are inevitable. See what you can learn, make adjustments and get back on track. Persistence is key!
7. Set your sights on the future. Successful people have a future oriented disposition. Identify the positive longer term implications of your current actions and constantly remind yourself of them.
8. Remember – at the heart of self-esteem and self-confidence is goal setting!

### *Motivation - the vital ingredient for a great life*

What do successful entrepreneurs, elite athletes, top executives, or those who've lost weight, passed tricky exams, brought up great kids, kept strong relationships alive through thick and thin or overcome amazing obstacles all have in common? Clearly, they're very motivated people, since we know it takes strong personal focus and willpower to achieve anything difficult in life.

Yet if motivation matters so much, why is studying it so neglected? Many of our UGM coaching clients come to us with an image of the destination they have in mind but also with some nagging self doubts about their ability to get there, or no dynamic plan to support them on the challenging road ahead.

In a future newsletter, we'll come back to the vexed question of choosing the right goals – ones that deeply motivate you and resonate with your inner sense of purpose. But right now, let's assume you have a worthwhile goal in mind. Maybe you want to succeed in your profession, secure that elusive promotion, nail public speaking, pass your MBA, lose weight or realign your life after some big transition. For most of us, at any one time, we juggle a heady mix of personal and professional goals that we believe will help us chart a course towards the life we truly want to live.

What insights can the latest research on motivation offer us and how can we distil these into practical action plans that really work?

### *Change is at the heart of motivation*

At the heart of motivation is personal change. The studies show that it's likely you'll have to become a different person in order to secure the goals that matter so much to you. Essentially, this means thinking through in some detail the sort of person who would be able to reach the destination you have in mind. Yet it seems most of us focus on the end result (the dream) and seriously neglect what it's going to take to get there!

In contrast, the psychology journals stress the journey: what you need to pack and how you're going to travel. From a roundup of the best research studies, we've selected our top tips. They're proving to be a great support to our coaching clients and we think you'll find them useful too.

### *Goal clarity*

Get as precise as possible about your goals. Define them clearly. Set a completion date too. This puts some useful pressure on yourself and limits your options. From this end date, work backwards to the present in order to establish your timetable and milestones along the way.

Tracking your progress through a sequence of smaller target goals will give you regular feedback and show where you may need to adjust your strategy, if things are not working.

### *Mobilise support*

What resources will you need? Some of these might be physical (a fridge full of healthy food, if you plan to lose weight), or human (a tutor to help you through that tough MBA module), or emotional (a coach or some close friends in your corner). Telling others about your goal also makes it harder for you to back out and motivates you to stay the course.

### *Embed goals in your routine*

For many people, an early setback leads to total failure, so the more you can weave your new behaviours into your routine, daily habits, the more likely you are to stay on track. Likewise, becoming an expert on your goal helps it to become part of the way you think about things. Research the area. Get informed. This step has the extra benefit of helping to reinforce your sense of purpose: why you're doing this and the benefits it will bring. We're more likely to be motivated towards goals that resonate with our core values.

### *Goal conflict is a killer!*

The research highlights that goal conflict is often the cause of losing motivation. This is where a subsidiary goal undermines a primary goal. For instance, a goal to improve your social life might conflict with a goal to finish off your MBA in the next 3 months. Reflect on all your current goals. Are they mutually reinforcing? Are there any conflicts? If necessary, reduce the number of goals you have and focus on the top 2 or 3 only.

### *Maintaining motivation*

Studies stress the need to see small failures as inevitable steps along the road to eventual success. The key thing is persistence. Keep yourself on track by writing a goal diary. Be willing to adjust your plan if circumstances change. Take a break occasionally and be kind to yourself. Find an inspirational role model who overcame setbacks. It seems that successful people tend to have a personality that is future-oriented. So look into the future towards the positive long term consequences of your present actions. For some of us, the other side of this same coin is also a useful motivator: reminding ourselves of the negative consequences if we *don't* take these actions now!

A key finding from all the studies is that change and challenge are at the heart of a fulfilled and happy life. We feel best about ourselves, when we've achieved something that matters to us. People without goals are headed for unhappiness!□