



MOTIVATION TO CHANGE

1 July 2015

There is nothing our minds like quite so much as the familiar. Even if we complain and groan about our horrible job, our useless manager, our uncaring friend, and so on, we tend not to do much to change it, because it is what we are used to; it is what we are familiar with. We carry on and complain and moan. That is, until it just becomes too awful to bear any more. Most people change, and most businesses change, because the status quo just cannot remain as it is. The situation becomes simply unbearable and it is no longer an option for things to stay as they are. We change when the pain of staying where we are becomes too much.

All motivation is self-motivation. No one can motivate you. They might exhort or threaten you to do something, but then you are not motivated. You are responding from fear. People can influence you, but that means they are touching something that triggers something that motivates you. They however cannot motivate you. Motivation is something that has to come from you. At its most basic level all motivation is linked to pain and pleasure. When we spot something that we associate with pain, we tend to run away from it. That is, we are motivated to get away from it as fast as we can. And that pain can be a burning coal, a lion chasing after us, a human approaching us in a dark alley, or the possibility of failure, the possibility of rejection, and a whole host of other things which we have learned to link pain to. And there are a whole lot of situations, objects and experiences that we have learned to link pain to. Some will be common for most people. Others will depend on our own unique experiences. Some people link pain to physical exercise and others find it pleasurable. Some people find talking to large groups of people painful and others enjoy it. Any time you spot an object, person, situation, or event that you have learned leads to pain, you are going to be motivated to leave that object, person, situation or event as fast as you can.

Anything that you have learned brings you pleasure you tend to move towards. You are motivated to get it. And once again much of this is learned. If you have learned that being submissive, or being challenged, or working excessive hours brings you pleasure (you were rewarded for it at some stage), you will be motivated to do that. What we have learned brings us pleasure we tend to move towards, and what brings us pain we tend to run away from. Avoiding pain is usually the stronger drive because of our survival instincts. And then of course there are things that bring us both. You might go for a job interview and really want the job but your prospective manager reminds you of some really mean person you have encountered in your life before and so you have both pain and pleasure going on. That is typically when people get very confused and sometimes self-sabotage without knowing why.

So if you want to change there needs to be enough pain in your life for you to decide things cannot stay as they are. If a business wants to change, there must be enough pain in the business for it to have to change.

And this leads us into one of the ways in which you can speed up the perception of the need for change. The more you can get yourself to perceive that your current state is really and truly horrible and will bring so much pain to you now and in the future, the more you are going to be motivated to change. You don't need lots of willpower which will eventually fail because we run out of it. You just need to link lots of pain to where you are right now. And one of the ways to do this is to ask yourself the following question.

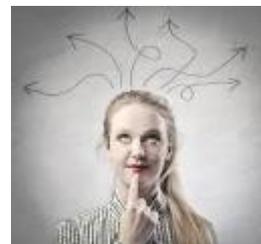
What will I lose out on if I stay where I am?

Let us say that what you need to do is find a better job. If you stay where you are what will you lose?

Now you are going to think of every possible negative consequence of staying in your current situation:

- I will be unhappy in my job - and I spend most of my life at work - so most of my life will be unhappy
- I will earn less, and over ten to fifteen years I will lose out on income of more than R500k. Actually work this one out and think about what you could lose out on
- I will be grumpy and my relationships will suffer. My kids and spouse will call me grumpy old man and not in an endearing way. They will avoid spending time with me.
- My friendships will suffer because I will be complaining and moaning and they will get sick of me
- Because I am so unhappy I will eat too much of the wrong foods and so my health will suffer and my medical expenses will increase

Write down every possible thing you can think of and add up all the costs until reading a list of what you are losing out on through not changing really, really, makes you feel terrible.



That is only half the equation though. There is also the pleasure side. And this side is important because if you only focus on what causes you pain - the negative side - people tend to get stuck. If all we can see is doom and gloom, and more doom and gloom, people lose hope. It is effective to highlight what is wrong, only if people also get a chance to see something better in the future. So you can't just focus on what is negative, you also have to focus on what lies ahead that is better. People lose hope and give up without a vision. And this vision of the future once we

have made the change, needs to be linked to what brings pleasure, because we are motivated to move towards what is pleasurable.

If you are looking to make change in your life, then link pleasure to the future changes. If you want to stop drinking then write down all the ways in which your life will be better once you stop drinking. If you are looking to make changes in your business, then your employees need to see something better for them in the future. A company that still exists and provides a job is one benefit. However better processes, more effective products and services, more autonomy can also be benefits. If you want to finish a degree in the future then don't link pain to studying, link pleasure. If you link pain, for instance you go over and over in your mind about how you will miss out on your social life and how you hate studying, you have just linked pain to studying. And guess what? You are going to be motivated to do everything but study and get your degree. When it comes time to study you will find a reason to do everything else but study. If you link pleasure to getting your degree - for instance the better jobs you will get, the increased confidence you will have, the more income you can earn, etc. the more you will be motivated to study and so the more you will study and get your degree, and get all those good things you wanted that come with it.

The question to invoke the pleasure side is to ask yourself:

What are the benefits to me of doing this?

And then list every single one.

Let us go back to the new job example:

- I develop new skills
- I earn more money which over time adds up to.....
- I become more marketable because I am learning new skills and have more experience
- I increase my professional network through meeting new colleagues and increase my opportunities for future contacts and work
- I do a job I enjoy and so work is a much happier time for me
- I am fun to be around and my family enjoy being with me
- I am more positive and because I am more positive I notice more opportunities for me to learn and grow in the new company
- I eat healthier
- I am able to afford better education for my kids
- Etc.

As human beings we have the capacity to control what we link pain and pleasure to, so we have a lot of control over our motivation. You can learn to link pain to certain objects, people, events, and situations, and you can learn to link pleasure to other objects, people, events, and situations. If you want to stop doing something, then link the action to pain. If you want to do something, then link the action to pleasure. That is, you purposely create links in your mind between what you want to stop doing and pain, and what you want to start doing and pleasure. And to be effective these need to be strong links, so you have to repeatedly remind yourself of your links. This can be done by repeatedly looking at your answers to the questions posed above, and reminding yourself of what is being lost and what can be gained.