

It is not uncommon for people to believe that motivation is the driver towards obtaining a goal. Motivation can and often does provide the initial impetus towards a goal, but usually wanes after a short period of time. Motivation is something which tends to come in short bursts. A common example might be, think of a New Years Eve resolution which did not culminate in the completion of a goal. Typically, there is high motivation at the outset, but hours, days, weeks or months later the attempt to obtain the goal dwindles from existence.

Motivation is often the spark which drives the initial energy in obtaining an aim. It is often an essential step in progressing towards a goal. But what most people do not understand is that motivation can vary greatly from one day to the next. This is largely due to motivation being driven by emotional impulses which nearly always must be on 'high' to function.

When times get tougher and low points appear in life, then motivation tends to wane.

Motivation is fantastic for kicking things off, but poor at keeping things going. Enter discipline. Discipline is important because it allows us to keep going even when we don't feel like it. It has the tendency to keep us going when the initial wave of motivation begins to taper off.

Many people adopt the belief that discipline is something you either have or do not.

However, it is useful and more accurate to conceptualize discipline as a variable which can be adjusted. It can be grown and developed over time. In fact, discipline is often about adapting our behaviours to the vicissitudes of life which means that discipline is not set in stone. A good approach to discipline is to think of it as a muscle which needs to be exercised in order to be stronger.

Sometimes this means starting from scratch where we need to build our own self-discipline. For instance, if the goal is to run a half-marathon, we might find ourselves floundering with the routine required to get fit. Rather than think about ways to get fit, it might be better for the person to start thinking about ways to develop self-discipline. Here are some science-based tips for developing self-discipline:

One of the more productive ways to develop self-discipline is to look at life as producing the opportunities to strengthen discipline. For instance, while the goal may be to run a half marathon, we might look at our lives and practice random acts of discipline. We might reduce our meal portions by 10% or have one less glass of a fizzy sugar laden drink. A ten-minute walk may be integrated, or we might practice gratitude for five minutes before sleep each night. How we practice discipline does not have to be specifically related to the goal which might seem counter-intuitive. But in actual practice it is the development of discipline in which our focus is switching to.

The above then ties into our own self talk which is another important facet of developing self-discipline. We want to build our own confidence in obtaining a goal. One of the benefits of focussing upon various small opportunities to develop discipline, we start to develop a mind set of success rather than one of failure. When we fail at a goal, it is often accompanied by a barrage of negative self-talk. The negative self-talk is a destructive recipe for future failure. We are weakening our will for self-discipline rather than building it.

When we have a small success at self-discipline, we metaphorically should be patting ourselves on the back. As much as anything this is to thwart our propensity for negativity as its short circuits that cycle of berating and putting ourselves down. Be generous with your self-praise even for the smallest success. Overtime and with continued practice it helps build our resolve which in turn strengthens our capacity for discipline.



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Another important area to pay attention to, is to put the big goal on the back burner and to have small obtainable goals at the forefront. For instance, rather than having our entire attention on running a half-marathon, we focus on the daily goal which might be to go for a 2k run. If we can't manage a 2k run, then we make it a 1k run. If we cannot manage a 1k run, we begin with a 10-minute walk. We break down something into small achievable pieces. It is not that we lose sight of the big picture, it's just that we begin to pay attention to the smaller pieces which are part of the bigger picture. We often find that once we start

it is often easier to keep going. Start with something small then build on it over time. A good area to research is what is called micro-habits, Google it and read up on it.

Consider that there will likely be setbacks along the way - <https://edwardtraversa.com/the-change-cycle/>. Obtaining a worthwhile goal is rarely a straight line towards success. Not only should we understand this, but we also should be very strategic in how we are going to overcome the setbacks. A firm actionable plan to counter the inevitable setbacks goes a long way to developing self-discipline. Sometimes this may simply mean getting back on the horse after falling, but other times a more sophisticated strategy might be called for. It is also important to not fall into a pattern of continually falling and then getting back up again. A general rule of thumb to follow is that it should be two steps forward and one step back. Or perhaps three steps forward and two steps back and so on. Over time there should be a clear path forward even though there may be times which interrupt the progress. A cycle of continually moving backwards and forward with no clear progression over time is not what we are after. We should be looking to integrate something which moves us forward even if the forward movement is inching towards a goal.

In a previous article I talked about how the unconscious has far more power than our conscious processes <https://edwardtraversa.com/what-is-the-unconscious/>. Very few people consider unconscious processes and how they might affect self-discipline. To illustrate consider this example from my own life; For most of my life I was a smoker and quite a heavy one at that. It was difficult, strenuous and anxiety provoking and to be frank I just could not do it. On more than one occasion I attempted to give up smoking and failed - this was failing at its finest. Then on the final attempt I not only gave up once and for all but found that the whole process was one of the easier things I had done in my life. What had changed? I was ready or another way of saying it is that my unconscious agreed that I was ready.

The notion that the unconscious also must be ready may be taken as an out or an excuse to do nothing. But that's not the case. In fact, what had occurred over a period was that I had to convince a deeper aspect of self of the reality of smoking. I also had to ensure that the unconscious perceived giving up smoking as a real possibility that could and would happen. I had to experientially notice that I was not enjoying smoking even though consciously I would tell myself and others that I enjoyed it. I recognized times in my life where I had displayed discipline and recognized I could tap into similar processes when it came to give up smoking. The process of getting all the ducks to line up in a row took time. Most of it was just a process of consistently chipping away at the structure which held up smoking, until such a time as I was fully ready, and the rest was history.

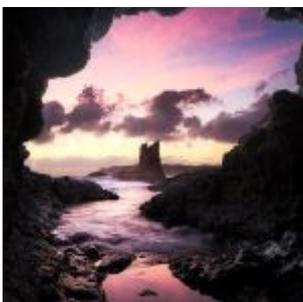
It is important to recognize that the unconscious does not operate in the same time frame as the conscious mind. So even though we might get it consciously, it sometimes takes more time for the unconscious to get it. The delay often is because we relate to ourselves as if the whole of us operates on logical rational lines of thinking. But the unconscious has different lines of communication, systems and processes occurring which are not analogous to our conscious ways of operating in the world. One way in which to help the unconscious get it, is to look at the pure experience of things. Here we are trying to know ourselves from a more visceral perspective than our pure intellect. Experiential data is often a great way for the unconscious mind to get it.

To end with, try and be patient in developing self-discipline. It often takes time and a great deal of persistence to develop the necessary self-discipline to achieve our goals.

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