

Self-Motivation Strategies



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The job of "mentor" is often described as someone who motivates others. However, successful motivation from others usually involves a reward or the alleviation of pain. People will form a new habit out of desire for the reward or self-preservation (avoiding the pain). They will work hard so long as they get a bonus or more muscles or the degree. They will work hard to avoid losing money, friends or health. If the reward or punishment is removed, however, often the behavior stops. As mentors, we want to move beyond external rewards/punishments to internal motivation based on values, vision and personal victory. Here are some suggestions for helping students learn to motivate themselves to form habits.

Ask yourself "Why?"

Why is forming/changing/breaking a certain habit important to you? Will it bring you joy? Will it unite your family? Will it help you be healthier? Will it serve your purpose? Ask yourself the potential benefits of forming this new habit. How will it improve your life/the life of those you love? And when the 'why' is clear, we are more willing to be motivated. The 'why' is our deep, internal satisfaction that comes from accomplishing a task or growing a virtue!

Create a cue

A cue helps remind you to take action on the new behavior. The easiest cues are those that are already a part of your life—like the alarm clock rings in the morning and it reminds you to meditate before getting out of bed, or you take a shower and you take that time to reflect on the day before it begins. Or, you keep something unusual by the door to remind you to take a walk after dinner.

Change your environment—make it easy to change

It's easier to form a new habit in a new place, on vacation or when you make a physical change in your environment. Think of ways you can alter your living environment so you will find it easier to perform your new habit. The less time between the cue and the new behavior the better! For instance, put your daily reflection journal and a pen next to your bed, so before going to bed, it's easy to pick up the journal and write your day's reflections.

Focus on the long-term vision/consequences

Become more mindful. Often people forget their goals, because they're running on autopilot and not thinking about the things they are doing. If the vision is clear, you move in its direction a little every day, and the internal good feelings are apparent, it's easier to stay positive and stay on track.

How can we help students learn to make cohesive plans?

What does cohesive really mean? Cohesion means unity. All of the parts work together, are well integrated and act as one. The opposite of cohesion is disintegration and chaos. With cohesion, the whole is greater than the parts, but all the parts are important contributors to the whole. United, cohesive, cooperation is the source of irresistible strength.

What is the goal?—Last month we talked about different kinds of goals, including chores, internal, external, behavioral and skills—and each of these has a purpose in a person's vision. To make a plan, the goal must be clear, specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant and have a time frame. If the goal is too far away, it's easy to get discouraged. Encourage students to envision the future, but set short-term goals at intervals along the path to the ultimate goal. In fact, the goal is not the vision. The vision can be lived in the present and happiness can prevail though the goal is in process and not yet achieved.

A plan is a step-by-step path—Nothing is achieved without action. Each action, no matter how small, done with purpose and consistently over time, will lead to the successful outcome of a goal. A cohesive plan includes all of the parts: what needs to be done, who will do it, when, why and where. It will also take into consideration all aspects of a person's life that either contribute to or are affected by the goal.

Imagine that you've had a Happy Hippo Show in a small village and all have decided the following vision and goal:

Example Vision: How can we work together to improve the quality of life in a village?

Example Goal: Improve the moral education of all children ages 5-10.

Possible Plan:

1. Work with a team to make the plan. Meditate on the vision and outcome desired. Decide who will do each part.
2. Do a survey: Find all the children in this age group, and the contact information for parents/guardians.
3. Invite all of the adults to a meeting to explain the class (Ask for input, their vision of their children's future, etc.)
4. Offer teacher and parenting education to all the adults first.
5. Choose several trained parents, help them organize small neighborhood classes and prepare to begin (Who will get the supplies, find the place, inform the children, plan the activities?)
6. Hold classes and accompany the new teachers as they gain experience.
7. Conduct follow up meetings for further training and to address challenges. (Equality of the genders, etc.)

Next month: How can we decide between acquiring certain knowledge or protecting ourselves from it?