

On Motivation

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Motivation is tricky. If you're reading this sentence, you obviously don't lack it completely. Most people will read no more than is required for survival and/or sex. This essay enhances your odds at neither. Thus, reader, you are already ahead of your peers.

However, not all motivations are the same. Among the people who are now reading *this* sentence, most are merely motivated by a desire to succeed. They want to achieve goals. They have something specific in mind and they'd very much like to accomplish it.

In terms of physical goals, they want to lose body fat, get "toned", gain muscle, become stronger, perform better at some sport, maybe postpone the deterioration brought on by aging... whatever.

The motivation that drives most people is the desire to accomplish these things.

Unfortunately, having this motivation behind the wheel will not actually deliver you to your destination.

These taxis are all over the road and they're vehicles for no one's success. No goal has ever been accomplished by buckling into those seats. Nothing has ever been facilitated but guilt and disappointment upon the inevitable failure at which you arrive.

So when I said "you are already ahead of your peers", I was just being nice. I didn't want to lose my readers in the first paragraph by being honest.

Honesty looks like this:

Just about everyone alive has that motivation. And they usually have a lot of it. Tons. It takes a serious amount of brain damage to disassociate one's desires from all hopes of accomplishment. Life has to be pretty hard on people before they begin to loosen their grip on ridiculously grandiose delusions.

Everyone who has managed to avoid extremely severe brain damage (e.g., genetic defects, trauma at birth, etc.) has goals. And those goals are never "I want to be a gelatinous, unsexy slob." Rather, if their goals are given a voice, that voice reveals an unrealistic amount of optimism.

In consideration of this optimism (and its ubiquity), how many of your peers have actually accomplished all of their goals?

Simply asking the question is as good as answering it.

Having a desire to achieve an outcome does not translate to the achievement of that outcome.

The motivation that actually matters is the motivation to *train* to achieve your goals. The motivation in the actual *doing* rather than the result.

My point: try to frame your goals around participation and the process rather than an outcome. Focusing on behaviors is what leads to progression and progression is what leads to success.

But don't confuse the brevity of that advice with the ease of putting it into circulation.

It's hard to follow.

At least chronically it's hard. Acutely, it's very easy.

Anyone can go to the gym and be a total animal for a week. This doesn't impress me.

If that animal is in the same phylum on the Monday of week *seventy*, I'll be ready to applaud.

Until then, I don't care how loudly you boast your ambition, I'm belying my expectations.

In the words of Oscar Wilde (circa 1894), "ambition is the last refuge of the failure." Nothing broadcasts the wrong motivation quite like the declaration of "ambition."

If I'm aware of what you hope to accomplish, you're going to be pretty disappointed in yourself come week seventy.