

How to Use the Theories of Motivation to Keep Yourself Uplifted

Have you ever wondered why you are motivated in some instances and not in others? More importantly, have you considered what effect this has on your life in general?

Research has revealed numerous theories of motivation. They all have their merits and can work especially well as a mix. But what is motivation really, and what effect does this have on the reality we create for ourselves?

What is Motivation?

Motivation generally includes an experience of desire or aversion. This means we either desire something we want, or we have the desire to avoid something.

This explains why we might find it easy to take action on some things and procrastinate on others. As you likely know, procrastination can really cause us to get in our own way.

Furthermore, we are all motivated in different ways, which makes this even more complex. We are led to believe that it's just about setting a goal, and that that will be enough to motivate us. However, it's not always that simple because setting a goal without other important elements can decrease motivation.

The good news is that with more knowledge, we can gain insights on what motivates us personally. It's just a matter of understanding the theories that relate to us and then consciously utilizing them.

3 Theories of Motivation

Through experience and research, I have identified what I consider to be the three most useful theories of motivation.

1. Locke's Goal Setting Theory

In 1968 Edward E. Locke published his groundbreaking Goal Setting Theory.

This has claimed to be unique and has withstood the test of time. It has been some 50 years since the first goal-setting experiments were conducted and 28 years since the first statement of the theory.

Certainly, in my own personal experience and working with clients, goal setting has been a powerful motivator. When we have a goal that we desire, it motivates us to move towards it. This makes us more focused and less inclined to procrastinate.

Here's the thing though: goal setting only works effectively when certain criteria are met, so it's essential to know what those criteria are.

Here are the important elements of Locke's theory:^[1]

Goals Must Be Challenging and Attainable

If a goal is too easy or perceived as too difficult then we will lack motivation. This means goals must be both realistic and stretch us a little.

Goals Must Be Specific and Measurable

This gives us a much clearer direction and helps us measure progress as we reach milestones.

Commitment to the Goal

A firm decision must be made to commit to the goal. If there is no commitment, it will be easy to not put in the effort.

Strategies

His suggested strategies to achieve this could include participation in the goal-setting process, the use of extrinsic rewards (bonuses), and encouraging intrinsic motivation through providing feedback about goal attainment.

Support Elements

Support elements need to be provided. For example, encouragement, needed materials and resources, and moral support can be included.

Quantifiability

Goals need to be quantifiable, and there needs to be feedback.

These criteria are mainly designed for the workplace and are effective as a member of a team. But what about working alone?

Using Locke's Theory When You Work Alone

The SMART model contains important criteria, which I believe relate to Locke's theory. This model will help you write a good goal statement.

SMART is an acronym and means making goals specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed.

Commitment can also be a challenge when working on goals alone. Because of this, it's important to find some way to hold yourself accountable.

A good way to do this is to confide your goal in a trusted friend and ask for accountability. If you are feeling very brave, you could even announce it on social media.

Setting up your own reward system can act as an external motivator. However, a reward you will receive in 12 months time may not be enough to drive you.

A reward system works best when your goals are broken down into shorter-term goals. Giving yourself a reward at each milestone will give you a sense of achievement earlier, and this creates more desire.

If you need help coming up with some useful rewards and punishments to achieve your goals, this article may be able to help.

Essential Resources

One of the elements of a well-formed goal is that you must have the required resources or a way of obtaining them. If you set a goal without these essential elements, you can often find motivation is lacking.

Resources can include physical materials, information, and people.

If you have confided your goal with a trusted friend, also ask that friend for support and encouragement. Identify where you may need training and seek out a course or the support of a mentor or coach. Do your own research to make sure these vital resources are available to you before setting your goal.

Feedback is another essential element that could be a problem when working alone because feedback is often received from others. In this instance, it's important to acknowledge that everything we do each day gives us feedback in itself. This is delivered in the results we get.

If our results disappoint us, then we receive essential feedback that we need to change something.

Regular reflection is an effective way to receive feedback and look at what needs to change. When this process is utilized in a positive way, it has the potential to positively impact the first of these three theories of motivation.

2. McClelland's Achievement and Required Needs Theory

David McClelland wrote about his theory of motivation in his book 'The Achieving Society' in 1961. It explains why certain individuals are more motivated to achieve than others.

This theory is based on two psychological principles: the motive of an individual to achieve success and the motive of an individual to avoid failure.^[2]

Some people have an intense desire to succeed and are more motivated to move towards what they want. This means they will take action even if they are attempting something challenging.

Others are afraid of failure and so are more motivated to move away from what they don't want. This means they will procrastinate on doing challenging things where there is a risk of failure. They are less inclined to set goals for the same reason.

This also fits with Anthony Robbins insights that we will do more to avoid pain than we will to feel pleasure. If we believe we might fail and perceive failure as painful, we will do nothing because it feels better.

How to Change Your Perception of Pain

When you know that you avoid pain, it gives you the power to work with it. You can do this quite simply by turning your perception of pain around.

If you are resisting a step that will help you achieve something, explore why you are procrastinating. Ask yourself what you are afraid of.

Place yourself in the future and imagine what will happen if you don't take the step. Notice how it will impact your goal negatively. Imagine how you will feel when you don't achieve it and notice how painful that will be.

Now create pleasure around the thing you have been avoiding. Imagine how much closer that will bring you to achieving your goal, and notice how you will feel as you celebrate the achievement.

This change tool has been extremely effective with a number of my clients. As you use it, you will notice your procrastination morphing into motivation.

3. Hull's Drive Reduction Theory

This theory was first proposed by American Psychologist Clark Hull in 1943. It centres round the premise that humans are motivated to take action where there are disturbances to homeostasis.^[3]

Homeostasis means to maintain stability and stay the same, referring to our overall health.

Many things in our external environment can affect our overall health. This includes our ability to put food on our table, a roof over our head, and money that enables us to provide those things. If our stability is threatened in any way, we are more inclined to take action.

This also means that if we feel our stability is threatened by taking action, we will do nothing.

I see this theory play out a lot with business owners. They avoid things they feel uncomfortable doing, like networking or follow-up calls — at least until their income levels drop. When this happens, they find the motivation they had been lacking and pull out all stops.

This motivational theory also resonates with the physiological level of Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs. ^[4]

The base level is also referred to as the need for certainty in Tony Robbins six core needs. Robbins describes them as fundamental needs, which we fulfil unconsciously.

Here's the thing: if we are motivated by this need alone, then we tend to do nothing new, and when faced with a situation that is uncertain, we can freeze.

Therefore, it's important to find the motivation to move past this base need, even in the space of uncertainty and challenge.

Components to Handle Uncertainty

Dr. John Demartini, an international educator in human behavior specializing in the area of values, says that motivation is not external. True motivation is inspiration and found when we experience our values.^[5]

This means if we set goals that are aligned with our values and focus on that, we can feel internally motivated. As we feel this, we are more inclined to take action on those goals, even when faced with something challenging.

Values are unconscious beliefs, which means many of us aren't aware of what they are. When you bring your values into conscious awareness, it gives you the ability to use them as motivational tools.

Your values can easily be elicited by working with a coach, but you can also inquire into it alone. Explore which aspects of life are important to you and what you put the most time, energy, or money into. These are aspects that you value.

When you set goals around your values, you will notice your motivation levels become much more consistent.

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