

# LEAP INTO 2020!

Experts explain how to harness the elusive energy of motivation—and ride it all the way to your goal.

BY NICOLE BLADES



**NEW YEAR, NEW YOU—RIGHT?** You've chosen your goal. Heck, you even declared it on social media. And you're convinced the change you're about to make will be life-altering.

There's just one problem: While you may commit for a few weeks, you already know that in the not-too-distant future, your enthusiasm battery will sink to zero percent. Of course, you're not the first person to lose her motivation; the wax and wane is an all-too-familiar experience, especially around this time of year. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, some 80 percent of New Year's resolutions are abandoned by February.

Just what is it about our psyche that makes motivation so hard to hold on to? "Evolutionarily, our brains are wired to run on autopilot and repeat set behaviors, since that uses up less energy," explains Jasleen Chhatwal, MD, associate medical director at Sierra Tucson, a behavioral health treatment center in Tucson, Arizona. In other words, your brain is naturally inclined to avoid change—which makes it a big old buzzkill. No wonder your ambition can go from full-throttle to sluggish in just a short amount of time.

But there are ways to stoke your drive and keep it humming until your challenge is complete—and beyond. The first step is to make sure you've chosen your goal for the right reason. Let's get to it.

### Look Within

Start with a quick gut check. Consider a few questions about your plan, like: "Why am I really doing this?" And "Is it something I would do if no one else noticed?"

The idea is to identify your deep-down motive, says Jessy Warner-Cohen, PhD, a senior psychologist at the Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell in Lake Success, New York. This step is key because it

turns out that the rationale behind your goal can either set you up for success or sabotage you from the get-go.

It's easy to fall for a "wrong why," says Michelle Segar, PhD, director of the University of Michigan's Sport, Health, and Activity Research and Policy Center and author of *No Sweat: How the Simple Science of Motivation Can Bring You a Lifetime of Fitness*. By this, she means a motive that originates outside yourself—or, as researchers

call it, extrinsic motivation. This could mean vowing to get fit to please your family, or joining a political campaign to impress your friends, or striving to keep your home as neat and tidy as your mother-in-law's to earn her respect. If you set a goal to satisfy other people's expectations, it can become a chore—something you feel you "should" do, which inevitably leads to feelings of failure when you slack off or falter. And as Segar points out, when you feel bad about yourself, you may end up throwing in the towel.

There's also the possibility that the reward you seek—say, praise from your partner or the admiration of your peers—won't pan out or be as gratifying as you hope. If that incentive fades, so can your motivation.

This phenomenon was documented in a classic psychology experiment back in 1971 by researcher Edward L. Deci, PhD. For the study, two groups of students were tasked with solving puzzles over the course of three sessions. Neither group was paid during the first session, but in the second session, students in one group were paid for each completed puzzle. Before the third session began,

### MY MANTRA:

Health staffers share the words they tell themselves to get or stay motivated.

**"Choose the harder right, not the easier wrong."**

—Monica Weiss, account manager

**"This is only temporary."**

—Heather Muir Maffei, beauty director

**"Take three deep breaths, and refill your water bottle."**

—Maggie O'Neill, assistant editor, Health.com

## FINE-TUNE YOUR TARGET

"Motivation tends to fade when we choose goals that are too large or too vague," says

Warner-Cohen. She recommends using the acronym SMART as a guide—which means your goal should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant (or meaningful to you), and Time-bound. And, ideally, the end date should be two weeks to one month from the start date.

At that point, you can check in with yourself: Was this a reasonable goal to set? Does it need to be tweaked—or can I keep going for another month? "This short-term strategy sets the stage for long-lasting change," she says.



the students who had been paid were told they would not be paid again. Midway through that session, the experimenter left the room for a while. The students who hadn't received payments in session 2 tended to continue working on the puzzles, but those who had been paid in session 2 were more likely to pick up a magazine instead. In the absence of an external reward, they had lost their drive.

Experts say you have a better chance of sticking with your goal long-term if it's fueled by intrinsic motivation—or a motive that's inherently meaningful to you and that matches your own personal values.

"Intrinsic goals are more sustainable because they're coming from you," says Warner-Cohen. For example, if you've committed to ditching plastic bags because you feel passionately about protecting our oceans, that enthusiasm is unlikely to waver; and odds are, you'll still be carrying canvas totes come 2021.

It's also helpful if the reasoning behind your goal is rooted in positivity, adds Dr. Chhatwal. Negative motivation "rests on what you have to lose by not changing," she says; whereas positive motivation "is when you're focusing on what you have to gain from the change you're making." Let's say you've decided to cut back on added sugar. To boost your determination when cravings strike, run through a mental list of the perks that lie ahead—more energy, less inflammation, a stronger heart, brighter skin, and the list goes on. It's tough for a cookie to compete with all that.

### Building Steam

Still feeling hesitant at the start line? Or maybe you've stalled

### MY MANTRA

**"No change, no growth."**

—Tara Rotondo, associate marketing director

**"You can do this."**

—Meesha Diaz Haddad, editorial general manager

**"A year from now, you will wish you started today."**

—Anneke Knot, assistant beauty editor

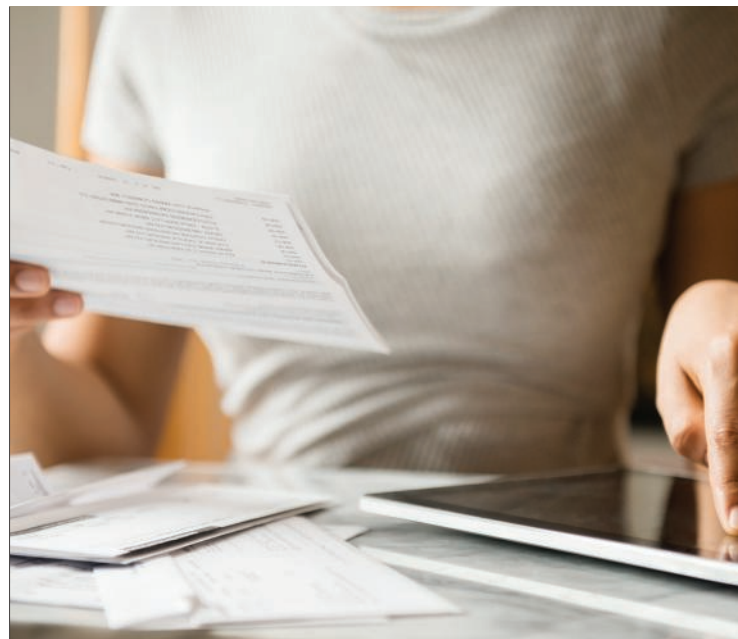
**"Look good, feel good."**

—Emily Harris, designer

**"I am filled with gratitude."**

(An anxiety reducer: Some say it's impossible to be anxious and grateful at the same time.)

—Catherine DiBenedetto, features director



### MONEY

## Goal: Get Your Finances Under Control

#### YOU'VE VOWED TO TIGHTEN YOUR BELT...

**Tweak a habit:** Your favorite online retailers make it a little too easy to go from browsing to splurging (ahem, Amazon 1-Click). Try deleting your stored payment info, says Katie Waters, founder of the financial planning firm Stable Waters Financial. The hassle of having to enter your credit card info (over and over) may be enough to halt future impulse buys.

**Go big:** Research shows people are willing to spend more when they plunk down plastic than when they pay with cash. You can use that insight to your advantage: Commit to paying for everyday expenses—from coffee to cat food—with cash, and you'll likely curb your spending naturally.

#### YOU'RE READY TO REDUCE YOUR DEBT...

**Tweak a habit:** Pursuing your debt-free dreams means getting frugal. But avoid using the phrase

"I can't afford that," suggests Waters. It may stir up feelings of deprivation and FOMO. Instead, tell yourself, "That's not in my budget right now"—which underscores your financial integrity and keeps the focus on your end goal.

**Go big:** Is housing eating up more than 30 percent of your income? A financial pro would probably recommend downsizing. Relocating to a smaller space or cheaper neighborhood can free up serious moola for repayments. Now isn't the time to move? Reevaluate your transportation. Car-sharing services (like Zipcar) and ride-share apps (like Lyft) make it easier than ever to get by without a vehicle. And you could save more than your monthly payment: Fuel, repairs, insurance, and other expenses can add up to more than \$8,000 a year.

#### YOU WANT TO GROW YOUR SAVINGS...

**Tweak a habit:** Financial advisers suggest saving at least

15 percent of your income for retirement. But putting 16 percent—just 1 percent more—into a tax-advantaged plan can make a big difference. (Fidelity calculates that a 35-year-old making \$60K could rack up an extra \$85,492 by the time she's 67.) Even better: Sign up for annual automatic 1 percent increases in your 401(k) contribution. If you're getting occasional raises, you may not even feel the pinch in your paychecks.

**Go big:** Some people are diligent about depositing money into their savings, only to nibble away at it later. Sound familiar? Consider moving your savings to a different bank. That way you won't see the funds every time you log into your checking account (out of sight, out of mind!), and you'll have to jump through an extra hoop to withdraw them. "Adding another step before you access an account can really deter you from using it," says Waters. —Kate Rockwood

JGI/Jamie Grill/Getty Images

halfway to your target. Do something—anything, says Martin Newman, MD, a psychiatrist and the founder of Destiny Springs Healthcare in Surprise, Arizona. "Motivation is often the result of action, not the cause of it," he explains. "Taking action, even in very small ways, naturally produces momentum."

Say you're aiming to form a new habit, schedule it in your calendar like all of your other commitments. (For example, 9 p.m., Monday–Friday: Read for pleasure.) Trying to save up for a vacation? Start recording your expenses, so you'll have the data you need when you're ready to make a budget. Tired of your same old gym routine? Sign up for a hip-hop class. Just get the ball rolling.

And don't underestimate the power of connection to keep you fired up, says Dr. Chhatwal. Look for a friend or coworker—

### MY MANTRA

**"Face it till you make it."**

—Hannah Harper, editorial assistant

**"Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."**

—Jenna Helwig, food director

## GET PSYCHED

Here, three surprising ways to kick-start some inner drive when you need it most.

### BE YOUR OWN CHEERLEADER.

Research from the University of Michigan showed that talking to yourself in the second person was a powerful way to motivate.

Rather than "I really shouldn't drink that soda," try "You're going to feel so much better if you have bubbly water instead!"

### TAKE A BREATHER.

Imagine you're writing a blog post and you're stuck on a tricky transition. Walk away, says Dr. Chhatwal. If you keep pushing, you risk sinking into disappointment and critical thoughts like "I'm failing." Take a break, and do something that gives you a feeling of accomplishment (like organizing your junk drawer, or deleting emails)—and come back to your keyboard when you're in a more positive mood.

### HAVE SOME DARK CHOCOLATE.

It may affect your neurochemistry in a way that gets you all fired up: The sweet stuff has been shown to raise levels of the happiness chemical serotonin and also trigger the release of dopamine, which is known for sparking motivation.

### FITNESS

## Goal: Finally, Fit in Workouts—Apps Make It Easy (Well, Easier)



#### IF YOU BOUNCE FROM ONE BOUTIQUE STUDIO TO THE NEXT...

**JetSweat** (\$20/month; jetsweatfitness.com)

This platform pairs you with exercise routines from some top boutique fitness studios (such as Solace, ModelFIT, Xtend Barre, and Sky Ting Yoga), without the hefty price tag (or transportation time!) that comes with those trendy training locales.

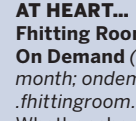


#### IF YOU ARE A CARDIO QUEEN...

**Peloton App**

(\$20/month; onepeloton.com)

Not a Peloton Bike or Tread user? No problem. This handy platform, which updates content daily, still grants access to myriad cycling and running workouts, as well as boot camp, strength, and yoga classes—both live and on demand.



#### IF YOU'RE A HIIT GIRL AT HEART...

**Fitting Room**

On Demand (\$27/month; ondemand.fittingroom.com)

Whether choosing a preconfigured workout or crafting your own by identifying the best warm-up, strength, interval, finisher, and cool-down components for your goals, this app, which adds content weekly, sees you through interval training that ups your heart rate and calorie burn. You can also choose between equipment or no equipment, depending on where you are and what you've got on hand.



#### IF YOU PREFER AN AT-HOME PRACTICE...

**The Underbelly** (\$10; theunderbelly.com)

With three tracks to choose from—Air (connect to your breath), Earth (work on foundational poses), and Fire (link your breath to postures), yogi Jessamyn Stanley aims to make mat time accessible and inclusive while guiding you on your quest to get bendy.



#### IF YOU CONSTANTLY LIKE TO SWITCH IT UP...

**NEOU** (\$15/month; neoufitness.com)

What do we love most about this streaming service? Its variety. With more than 60 fitness concepts (ConBody, WiderSTRONG, and Forzag Fitness, to name a few), plus nutritional and wellness content, it's almost impossible to find yourself in an exercise rut. —Rozalynn S. Frazier

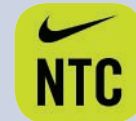


#### IF YOU WISH YOU HAD A CELEB TRAINER...

**Kira Stokes Fit**

(\$15/month; ondemand.kirastokes.com)

Stars like Shay Mitchell and Ashley Graham



#### IF YOU WANT A DEDICATED TRAINING PLAN...

**Nike Training Club Premium**

(\$15; nike.com)

One-off workouts are cool, but this upgraded version of the Swoosh's NTC, which features top



## TECHNOLOGY

## Goal: Develop a Healthier Relationship with Your Phone

### 1. GET BUSY

Is your phone your favorite zoning-out tool? Well, if you're serious about cutting back on screen time, you're going to need an activity to fill the void so you're not just sitting there twiddling your thumbs. Tanya Goodin, founder of the digital-detox movement Time to Log Off and author of *Off: Your Digital Detox for a Better Life*, suggests scheduling in something you used to love doing, even as a kid—drawing, painting, dancing, cooking—or maybe a new hobby you've been wanting to try. Whatever you choose, putting it on the calendar is crucial, so it becomes a legit appointment.

### 2. CREATE SACRED SPACES

"I never have a smartphone visible when I'm meeting with another person," Goodin says. It doesn't matter if it's a work or social situation. She references a 2017 study, which concluded that even if your phone is facedown

in front of you and switched off, it still greatly impacts your ability to focus. Think about if you were trying to cut down on sugar but carried a chocolate bar in your pocket all day—it would be pretty hard not to take a bite, no? When you don't want to use your phone, leave it inside your bag either on airplane mode or totally shut off to lessen the urge.

Ready to take things to the next level? Try a tech-free lunch break during the week and leave all things digital at your desk (we promise you can survive the salad line!). Freeing up that time allows you to connect more deeply to others or, if you're alone, lets your mind wander in the small moments, opening up room for way more creativity and ideation.

### 3. START YOUR MORNINGS TECH-FREE

Goodin doesn't even look at her phone until she's eaten breakfast. This means she wakes up, meditates, showers, gets ready

for work, and enjoys a healthy meal all before glancing at a screen. Not only will you feel better in the morning but you also can use the extra minutes for anything you're trying to add into your routine—working out, journaling, etc. She recommends winding down at night the same way: by shutting your phone off, putting it in a different room from where you sleep, and, yes, using an old-fashioned alarm clock.

### 4. LOOK AT WHAT YOU'RE GAINING

Perhaps the most important point to remember is that your mind-set needs to be No. 1. If you only think about what you're giving up, you're setting yourself up for failure. Instead, focus on your bigger goals. Maybe it's improving relationships, exercising more, or creating a better sleep environment. "If we start with what we're trying to gain, the whole process suddenly becomes a lot easier," she says. —Alexandra Abel

### MY MANTRA

**"One pitch at a time."**

(*Pitch* is a rock-climbing term.)

—Lisa Kay Greissinger, research editor

**"Whether you are right or wrong, always be sure."**

—Michael McCormick, creative director

**"Don't wish for it, work for it."**

—Jenni Renzi, account manager

**"Let go of what no longer serves you."**

—Lauren Witonsky, social media assistant, Health.com

**"Que será, será."**

—Lisa DeSantis, beauty editor

or a whole club full of people—pursuing the same goal you are. Being around other people's energy can help keep your own drive steady, Dr. Chhatwal says.

Another element that buoys intrinsic motivation is what psychologists call perceived competence. It's the feeling that your efforts to date have led to positive results, explains Dr. Chhatwal. "For instance, if I took singing lessons, practiced, gave a successful performance, and received positive feedback about it, that will keep me motivated to continue singing." But you don't need an audience to celebrate what you've achieved. You can gauge your own progress by setting mini goals on the path to your target, and marking those milestones as you hit them.

Now what about when you slip up and begin to slide into a slump? With any goal, you're bound to stumble occasionally. How do you get yourself back on the wagon?

"The best way to remotivate is to not think of it as falling off the wagon in the first place," Segar says. "Behavior change is a learning process, and it takes time. People need to treat themselves with more compassion and less judgment."

Rather than beating yourself up over a setback, ask questions like "What got in my way?" And "How can I prevent this from happening again?"

Warner-Cohen agrees: "Try to focus on learning lessons from the setback instead of wallowing in your frustration." And, she adds, take the opportunity to reflect on all that you have accomplished. ✪