

Getting and staying motivated this summer

Summer — the most wonderful time of the year (sorry, Santa!). You'd be hard pressed to find a Manitoban out there who doesn't love summer. Even with the creatures that shall remain nameless (but rhyme with taquitos), the summer months are glorious. More time outside can do wonders for our mental and physical health. The only trouble is something keeps getting in the way — work.

Work is not all bad — it has its own list of benefits, not least of which is money to pay bills, but also a sense of purpose, socialization and it helps to form our identity. But finding the energy and motivation to work when all you want to do is bask in the sun and enjoy a cool drink can be difficult for anyone.

It's natural for motivation to ebb and flow, and the summer months are no exception. It can also sometimes feel like a struggle to get work done when so many colleagues or partners are taking breaks — timelines get longer, emails are not returned as quickly and projects are delayed. So how do we maintain our motivation during all this?

All-or-nothing thinking

Often, our worst enemy is all-or-nothing thinking. This idea that we must do everything, and if that's not possible, then we do nothing. During the summer months, this can increase as we find it difficult to get answers to questions when people are away or as things are stalling out.

“All or nothing thinking can create obstacles to getting on with it! We are more likely to procrastinate if the only way we

believe we can tackle a task is to do it all at one time,” says Lucille Meisner, a social worker with a master's in social work and an Employee Assistance Program counsellor with Manitoba Blue Cross.

“We can end up in an avoidance loop that creates more anxiety rather than lessening it. We have all put things off until we are backed against the wall,” says Meisner.

To get past this loop, Meisner recommends asking yourself, “If I took the next best action, what might that be right now?” This can take us out of emotion and into thinking. It lets you focus on the tasks at hand and what is achievable. That age-old advice of “break it down into



manageable parts” can help to facilitate motivation. Even starting with one action that can get us closer to our end goal can help inspire us to keep moving.

“Motivation follows action – waiting for the feeling to be right is futile,” says Meisner. “If motivation was based on having to ‘feel like doing it,’ we would not have many of the role models we admire.”

Instead of waiting for that “right moment,” you need to create it yourself.

Visualize the end goal

Focusing on the end goal can help to create that moment and increase our motivation to achieve the desired outcome. It’s the “why” behind doing something, whether it be a big assignment at work, a home project or meeting a personal milestone, such as an exercise goal. Focusing on what matters to us, our reason and our values can boost inspiration and increase motivation and productivity.

“Knowing our ‘why’ is critical, particularly when doing a task or an unpleasant chore,” says Meisner. “Our motivation increases as we respond to an email or help a colleague with our ‘why’ in mind. ‘Why do I work here? What matters to me? What is my intention?’ Motivation to act comes more easily when we weave the task into the bigger picture.”

Creating a “path” may be helpful. This is the “begin with the end in mind” concept and it works. Write down your end goal and then work backwards noting each step or task and any milestones it takes to achieve that goal until you are at the first step that you need to take today. This can build up your desire to get there, allowing you to see the goal line and each step that will get you across it.

To increase motivation, Meisner recommends that when you look at the list, always look at the goal first, and then at the next task on the list that leads you to that goal. This keeps your focus on your “why.”

Get the tedious work out of the way

It can also be helpful to get the tedious work done first. The important thing is to reward yourself after. So, if you do 20 minutes of dull work that must be done but just doesn’t excite you, follow up with a 20-minute walk or have a coffee break with a colleague.

“When we get in the planned habit of doing the less interesting tasks that we are not motivated to do then rewarding ourselves, we have a higher chance of sticking with it,” says Meisner.

Finding compassion

Above all, it’s important to have compassion for yourself, as well as your colleagues, friends and loved ones. Having compassion through self-doubt, self-criticism and the avoidance loop can gently guide us to find our motivation and determine the next best action, says Meisner.

And sometimes that next best action is simply stepping away from your desk or taking a walk, says Meisner. “Turning inward first and then turning toward our tasks can bring a grounded presence that allows motivation to rise from the inside out. Perhaps now more than ever, this is a good practice.”

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