

PERSONAL *TRANSFORMATION*

MASTERY



- Master your brain
- Overcome fear
- Build confidence
- Get motivated
- Know your life purpose
- Develop a healthier you
- Build good habits
- Get focused

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GUIDE 1:

HOW TO GET AND STAY MOTIVATED

There are plenty of articles, books and blog posts on motivation that tell you how to become more motivated. Often, they give tips like ‘getting more sleep’ and ‘introducing new habits slowly’.

These ideas are all useful to an extent but they ultimately fall short. If you struggle with motivation and can’t keep yourself focused on new tasks, then a tip like this isn’t going to transform your ability to focus overnight.

And if you struggle to motivate yourself, how are you expected to keep up the changes that lead to greater motivation? It’s something of a vicious circle don’t you think?

If you really want to see changes, then you need to look a little deeper. You need to focus on the actual neuroscience that underpins our ability to get and stay motivated. In this report, you’ll learn exactly how motivation actually works on a biologically level and more importantly, you’ll discover how you can manipulate that process to your own ends...

INTRODUCING THE SALIENCE NETWORK

What we’re interested in here is what neuroscientists and psychologists refer to as ‘attentional control’ or ‘executive attention’. This describes the ability we have to direct our attention

and hold it – the control we have over what we choose to focus on and what we choose to ignore.

So how does this work? It comes down to several frontal regions within the brain that control this function. Perhaps most notable is the anterior cingulate cortex which has been the result of a fair amount of research.

In fact though, attention is controlled by two separate networks of brain regions in the brain: areas that work together in order to get the desired result. Specifically, these networks are referred to as the ‘dorsal attention network’ which includes brain regions that run along the top of the brain (dorsal means ‘top’ in biology – hence ‘dorsal fin’) and the ‘ventral attention network’ (which runs along the bottom).

Understanding these two different attention networks is key because they have different purposes that clue us in on how to get superior attention. The dorsal attention network is concerned with our intentional attention (bit of a tongue twister). In other words, when you decide that you want to focus on a book for a while, or you choose to check the time, you are using the dorsal network.

The ventral attention network meanwhile is used when our attention is directed beyond our control in a reflexive manner. In

other words, when you hear a loud bang and you turn to look at it, that is your ventral attention network.

But your ventral attention network can also be distracted by a range of other biological clues. If you are hungry for instance, then your ventral attention network will begin to direct your attention toward getting food and if you are tired, then your ventral attention network will direct your attention that way.

So, if you're trying to get work done and things keep stealing your attention away, then it is going to be hard for you to maintain your attention!

The next question we need to ask is how the brain knows what to pay attention to. The answer comes down to yet another neural network called the 'salience network'. This network tells us what is important and what isn't and it appears to be very closely connected to our ability to motivate ourselves.

In other words, those with the ability to tell their brain what is really important will be able to stay focussed on work, they'll be able to run longer distances and they'll be able to stay intensely focussed during competition.

But if you weren't born with a powerful salience network, then what can you do to fix the situation?

TAKING BACK CONTROL

How does the salience network work? What does it deem as important?

The answer comes down to our evolutionary history. Every aspect of our psychology evolved the way it did in order to help us survive. Traits that proved conducive to our long-term survival would be passed on to our offspring and those that did not, would eventually die out.

Thus, the job of this network is to alert us to things that are important for our survival – which is based on biological signals from the body and our associations. If you see a lion, then your salience network will identify this as important, it will trigger the ventral attention network and this will direct your attention there.

The result will be that your parasympathetic nervous system kicks in and triggers a hormonal and neurochemical response: you'll produce adrenaline, dopamine, cortisol and norepinephrine and these chemicals will raise the heartrate contract your muscles and narrow your attention to that one thing.

To a lesser extent, this happens if you're hungry, too hot, too cold, or if you are stressed about something else whether that be debt, your relationship or anything else.

The first thing you need to do then to improve your ability to focus and stay motivated, is to ensure that you remove these distractions that can override your dorsal attention network. This means you need to create a working environment that will be free from distractions and that makes you as comfortable as possible.

Any loud noise, any discomfort, any hunger or any lingering stress can potentially make it hard for you to maintain your focus.

One trick that you can use in order to encourage a more focussed state of mind to this end, comes from WordPress creator Matt Mullenweg. He described to Tim Ferriss during a podcast interview, how he would listen to music he knew well on repeat. The music would play over and over again and he would become immensely familiar with it. As a result, the brain would then start to phase that music out. In other words, it would become desensitized to it, just as you eventually stop hearing the ticking of the clock. Only if you are listening to that music through headphones, it will drown out all other sound.

This effectively creates a kind of sensory deprivation. The only sound there is, is completely blocked out by the brain. You can achieve something similar by using white noise and this is something that many people will use in order to focus while working. Similar to white noise are other innocuous sounds, such as the rain or background chatter. Rainymood.com and coffitivity.com are both sites that provide these kinds of looping

sounds for you to block out your surroundings. Similarly, using a widescreen monitor can help you to stay more focussed on work. Studies show that widescreen monitors can increase productivity by up to 30%!

But the most important thing you can do is to try and remove all other stress from your mind. That means that you need to try and stop worrying about your debt and even about the other work you have to do that day. If you are worrying about those things, then your brain will keep being distracted away from what you need to do. So, try to learn to block out feelings of stress and anxiety and to just focus on the task that is in hand. This may take practice, but this works much like a muscle – the more you train your mind, the greater the control you will get over it.

JEDI MIND TRICKS

But we need to go further than this if we're going to take complete control over our motivation. Ideally, we need to ensure that our ventral and dorsal attention networks are aligned. How do we do this?

The answer lies with the reason that we are distracted in the first place. The reality is not just that we think other things are more important, but also that we feel that what we should be doing isn't important. You might know consciously that you need to clean the house, go to the gym or tidy up. That's your dorsal network doing its work.

But your body doesn't know that. To your body, this is an unstimulating activity that isn't serving any of your prime directives. One thing our brain needs is stimulation and that corresponds with neural activity that comes from doing something that seems biologically important. This is why we find it easy to focus on computer games or films – they simulate exciting, important events happening, all charged with emotion.

Entering information into a spreadsheet though? Not so much.

But our human intelligence comes from our ability to focus not just on what is biologically important right now but on what we need to be doing in the distant future. In other words, it's our ability to extrapolate, plan and predict that has made us so highly effective.

This comes from our working memory, which is our ability to store information in our 'mind's eye' as it were. We can focus on things that have happened or that we think are going to happen and this causes the brain to light up as though they are happening. This is what our visualization really is – we're internalizing our experience so as to be able to manipulate the variables.

One way to give yourself more motivation then, is to learn to link the boring event or the thing you don't want to do, to the worthwhile and important goal that you hope to achieve.

In other words, you need to remind your brain why you are doing this using visualization. If you're sat typing out a spreadsheet, then visualize how this is going to eventually lead to you being wealthier, more successful in your career and less stressed tonight. Consider what will happen if you don't do it – you will be behind with work and you won't be able to accomplish the goals you're aiming for!

If you're struggling to motivate yourself to go to the gym, then imagine what it will be like to have rippling abs and a 10% body fat. Seem worth it now?

Another tip is to make whatever you're doing more interesting and more fun if you can, which makes it more salient to your brain. I always say that the best cure for writer's block in particular is to make the scene or the paragraph you're writing more interesting. If it's not interesting enough to write, then it likely won't be interesting to read!

If you're doing data entry, then make it a little more rewarding by putting some TV on in the background on silent – as long as it isn't too distracting to prevent you from paying attention to what you're doing. A good option is to watch people play computer games on YouTube, as this has no plot but still provides stimulation.

Oh, and once you get into the flow – make sure that there is nothing there to break that concentration. Put your phone on silent.

THE POWER OF MEDITATION

Another trick is to practice meditation. Meditation is nothing mystical, it is all about focusing the mind and taking control of your attention. When you meditate, you practice clearing the mind of distracting thoughts and focusing on nothing. This is literally a way to train your salience network just as you might train your muscles in the gym and it can build great focus and discipline.

What's more, is that meditation teaches you to detach from those distracting stressors and to let go of things that might be playing on your mind.

Meditation can provide perhaps the biggest upgrade to your wellbeing, productivity and focus – so it is something that everyone should be doing.

The only problem? Meditation is hard to take up if you have low motivation! My tip then is to start out with just small 5 minute sessions and to try tacking this onto a habit that is already a part of your routine. If you regularly work out, then try meditating after your gym sessions. Or how about tacking meditation on after each tooth-brushing session?

And if you struggle to know what you're doing while you're meditating, consider using an app like Headspace (www.headspace.com) to guide you through it.