

5 things to try when you're struggling to stay motivated

You still have tasks to do and deadlines to meet, even on days when you feel depleted and like you can't keep pressing on. Here are some small ways to give yourself a lift to get through the day — and maybe even help you feel excited about your work.

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"I like it - it's bold!"

1. Acknowledge and accept how you're feeling.

Maybe you're a master at sucking it up to do unpleasant tasks or cheerlead for your teammates, even when you don't feel like it. But trying to ignore or bury uncomfortable feelings like sadness, emptiness, and apathy rarely makes them go away. Rather, it can keep them lurking beneath the surface, following you into every meeting and interaction and sapping your energy even more.

Instead, give yourself space to notice and recognize how you're feeling. This may feel intense in the moment, but doing so can help you move on and feel more ready to take action. Here's how:

- **Pause to identify difficult emotions.** Whenever you feel uncomfortable, take a few minutes to ask yourself, *What am I feeling right now?* Give that feeling a label, even a belittling one (e.g., "just anxiety again"). Labelling it can help you separate what you're feeling from your sense of self — a first step in moving past your emotions.
- **Take a few deep breaths and notice the sensations in your body.** Mindfulness experts call this "sitting" with your feelings. You don't stew in them or engage with thoughts as they arise. Rather, you notice how each emotion *feels*: Where do you feel it in your body? Where does it begin and where does it end? Does it feel small and solid? Heavy and liquid? Warm or cold? Can you give it a color? Often, a few minutes of this practice is all it takes for the emotion to feel less powerful.
- **Write down what you can and cannot control right now.** Making these two lists can help you separate what you need to try to accept or at least not dwell on (e.g., the fact that your company is changing strategy) and what you can take action on (e.g., seeking more information from your manager about what the shifting strategy means for you). Once you have a list of things to act on, actually taking those steps can feel more doable.

For more, see [4 effective ways to manage the emotions holding you back at work](#).

2. Share that you're having a hard time.

You may feel uncomfortable sharing that you're struggling, but you'll find that, especially these days, you're not alone. Sharing your challenges with others can help you — and them — feel more comfortable speaking up and leaning on one another.

And your exchanges may provide you with a lift, especially if you hear ideas to try from others who have stayed engaged. Or, if you're able to offer your experience to someone else who is struggling, you might feel better just having helped. To share productively:

- **Choose one or two things sapping your motivation to share.** What's at the root of your demotivation — a heavier-than-normal workload, budget cuts, too many changes at work, cancelled spring plans, working from home, the news? Just pick one or two things — you don't want to unload all your problems on someone else.
- **Determine the best person or people to share your thoughts with.** Depending on the challenge and your relationship, you might share with a friend or family member, a peer or colleague inside or outside the company, or even your team in a meeting. Sharing what you find challenging with your colleagues can help them feel more comfortable speaking up, too. Of course, make sure that what you share is appropriate (e.g., not the details of your divorce or a gripe about your boss).
- **Be honest about your feelings.** Try to keep your sharing productive (rather than pessimistic or discouraging). Encourage the other person to share back and thank them for the conversation. For example, if you're sharing with a peer, *"I've been struggling with all the change lately. I know you're going through it, too. How have you been doing? Have you found ways to stay positive?"*

Caution: If your company culture is highly competitive or discourages showing vulnerability, tread carefully. You may be better off sharing with a friend or someone outside the company.

3. Celebrate anything that *is* working.

There may be plenty of things sapping your energy right now, but not everything is. When you actively look for things that are working or don't feel difficult, you may find reasons to be optimistic. You'll also prime yourself to spot opportunities in your present situation.

So look for things to call out during your workday. Did your team make significant progress on a tough project or finish one on time? Shout out that win in your next team meeting. Did you have a great idea session with a teammate? Tell them that you enjoyed it, and build on that momentum (e.g., *"That was fun — those kinds of discussions about what might be possible are really energizing. Thank you!"*). Did you get a nice note from a customer? Share it in your team's chat channel along with a bit of your own commentary (e.g., *"It's so gratifying to see how we're helping customers"*).

For more, see [5 totally doable ways to be happier at work](#).

4. Reconnect with what motivates you about work.

What excites you about your work? What made you say yes when you were first offered this job? When times are tough, it's easy to lose sight of why you're working so hard.

Remembering what you find most meaningful about your work can be a powerful motivator — and give you the energy to power through the next difficult conversation, the next long day, or the next string of virtual meetings. To do it:

- **Write down what specifically motivates you about your work.** Is it the chance to make a difference in others' lives? The opportunity to work with talented people? The financial benefit to your family?
- **Reframe your current workload from the perspective of those motivators.** No matter what's on your plate, work is more exciting when you see it as a step toward achieving your goals. For example, if you're covering for a colleague who's out caring for a sick relative and one of your main motivators is making a difference, you might reframe the work as *I'm helping this person get through an incredibly difficult time*.
- **Give yourself a visual reminder.** To help you stay motivated, set up something you'll see every day. For example, if you're motivated by helping people, you could hang a customer testimonial on your wall. Or, if you're motivated by earning money, you could make a chart to track your progress toward a financial goal.

5. Give in (at least for a little bit).

If you try to conjure up motivation and come up short, consider it useful information: Your "motivation ATM" is empty, preventing you from making further withdrawals. It might be time to accept that you need a break to replenish. Try to block off some time on your calendar to be unavailable. Take an hour or two off of work to do something fun. Schedule a long weekend or a vacation. Or even talk to your organization about the possibility of taking a leave.

When you do these kinds of things for yourself, you aren't letting your team or company down. You're demonstrating that self-care is important and that you want to improve your well-being so you can do your best work. Just be sure to:

- **Communicate your intentions ahead of time.** Make sure that your boss, team, and others know how long you plan to be unavailable, when you'll be back, and what to do if there's an emergency while you're out.
- **Commit to recharging.** Consider doing things that inspire and invigorate you, like reconnecting with friends or a favorite hobby. You won't do yourself or your colleagues any favors if you spend your time off doing things that could demotivate you, like checking work messages or being glued to the news or social media.

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