

# The Three Most Powerful Motivations

We all have times when we're not sticking to our plans, not feeling psyched about what we're supposed to be doing, and when we know we just need to get some motivation to get moving.

The usual motivational tips aren't always very helpful.

But there are three motivations that I've found to be truly powerful.

1. **Death meditation:** remembering that your days are limited.
2. **Loved one meditation:** remembering the hearts of who you're doing this for.
3. **Play exploration:** just being curious, having fun, finding adventure and exploration.

If you can bring in a combination of all three, you'll be unstoppable. You'll walk through walls.

Let's dig into how to bring these tools to bear.

## Remember That Your Days Are Limited

The Buddhists, the Stoics and the samurai all meditated on death, and it is a powerful thing to meditate on. It reminds you that time is fleeting, that ultimately we have a limited number of days, and that we must let go of the unimportant and get our butts moving!

*"Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily. Every day when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate upon being ripped apart by arrows, rifles, spears and swords, being carried away by surging waves, being thrown into the midst of a great fire, being struck by lightning, being shaken to death by a great earthquake, falling from thousand-foot cliffs, dying of disease or committing seppuku at the death of one's master. And every day without fail one should consider himself as dead." ~ **Hagakure: Book of the Samurai***

Now, meditation on death might sound gruesome and depressing, but in truth, it's liberating and incredibly motivating. If you knew that you only had a month to live, you'd cut out all the distractions and time-wasting crap, and get down to what's truly important

to you. What if you only had a year to live? What if you had five years? What would change for you?

It could also just be as simple as remembering that this night, our days are diminished by one. An evening Zen chant goes as follows:

*Let me respectfully remind you Life and death are of supreme importance. Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost. Each of us should strive to awaken. Awaken. Take heed. This night your days are diminished by one. Do not squander your life. - **Zen evening gatha (chant)***

Imagine reminding yourself of this every evening. Some Buddhists meditate on death, imagining what their death would be like and visualizing their decaying corpses, five times a day.

For me, it's as simple as remembering:

1. I will die, inevitably. This is just something to accept, and is a liberation once I've practiced that acceptance.
2. My days are limited. What do I want to do with them?
3. I could die right now. How do I want to live, how do I want to treat others, so that I can feel peace if I died in the next moment?

It helps me to be better to others, because that's how I want to live. And it helps me to focus on the meaningful work I care most deeply about, because I know that's more important than my own comfort and distractions.

## Meditation on Loved Ones

There are lots of possible motivations for doing our work — from money to living the life you want to making yourself more comfortable or happy to serving the world in some bigger way. And many more possibilities. In fact, each act you do might have multiple motivations.

But I've found that doing it for people you care deeply about is incredibly powerful. And meditating on those people can really get you moving.

Why do I do any of the work I do? For money or praise? No, I do my work for a couple important reasons:

1. **My family:** I want to be the man that my wife and kids look up to, a model in the world that they can use as they think about how to live. That doesn't mean I have to be perfect, but it does mean I'm not going to shy away from fear or discomfort, or if I do, I can strive to learn from that experience. I don't have to be superhuman, but I can strive to be loving toward myself, courageous, trustworthy. I think about my wife and kids and realize that I would do anything for them, and that they are more important to me than worrying about a little discomfort. They are worth pushing into uncertainty when I feel like procrastinating.
2. **My readers:** You guys. I think about you all the time, about how you are struggling with motivation and changes and chaos and difficulty, just like me. When I meditate on your joys and heartbreaks, struggles and loving hearts ... it makes me feel connected to you. We are in this together. And so I want nothing less than to do this work for you, out of love for you.

Meditate on those you care deeply about. Find a place in your heart where you feel a deep love for them. Find a devotion in your heart that is more powerful than your inertia, or feelings of being stuck, or not wanting to do anything right now. They deserve for you to rise up, and meditating on their hearts regularly will be an incredible motivator.

## Play & Exploration

Meditating on death can sound incredibly serious. Meditating on the hearts of your loved ones can feel moving but still pretty serious.

It's important to lighten it up with a little play and adventure!

I've found that most things are impossible to sustain for very long if they're only serious, if they're boring, if they feel like a chore. You might be stuck right now in a project that feels like a chore.

What transforms that activity is turning it into something filled with some mix of:

- exploration
- curiosity
- excitement
- discovery
- adventure
- fun
- humor
- challenge
- play

Now, not everything is going to be fun and exciting. But you can bring play and curiosity and exploration to most tasks.

For example:

- **Email and messages:** Make it a game to zap as many emails from your inbox as possible. For 20 minutes max! Then move on to some other game. You might also bring a sense of humor and playfulness to how you write your emails, when appropriate.
- **Finances:** Make it a game to get your debt as low as possible. Or your investments as big as possible. Or your expenses down below a certain threshold. Post the current number somewhere visible, and then get excited about trying to move the needle.
- **Writing a book:** See it as an exploration of the unknown, an adventure where you are taking yourself (and your reader) into new territory, discovering, finding deep curiosity, learning about yourself as you emerge in the writing process.
- **Your todo list:** Instead of looking at it as a list of chores, can you see each item on the list as a new challenge, an opportunity to grow and show up in a new way, a new adventure or exploration? Can you be curious and open-minded about each one?

As you can see, bringing a sense of playfulness and exploration, curiosity and adventure, to anything you do can transform that activity. It makes it into something more fun, more about learning and stomping around in the woods. That's something you're much more likely to want to wake up to do each day than boring chores.

### Four Additional Powerful Tips

The three powerful motivations above are life-changing, in my experience. But there are a few additional tips that really help:

1. **Get rest.** If you're exhausted, it's hard to get motivation. Stop staying up late on your computer or watching TV, and instead give yourself some loving rest. You will be much more motivated from this place of rest.
2. **Find stillness.** If your life is busyness and constant motion, constant doing ... you will have a hard time going deep with anything, or pushing into discomfort when your habit is running to distraction all the time. Instead, pull yourself away, and find a place of quietude. Or even just sit still in the middle of busy motion, like on a subway train or in the middle of your city or office space. I found stillness in the middle of a mall the other day. This stillness and inner quiet that you cultivate by being still ... it helps you to refresh yourself and come to your tasks with an intention that you can't bring if you're always rushing.
3. **Start very small.** If you want to walk up a mountain, don't try to tackle the entire mountain at once. Just take the first step. It can feel very obvious to take a tiny first step, but don't discount the power of this. Have a whole book to write? Try just writing

one paragraph. You'll see what shifts once you do that.

4. **Create powerful accountability.** Can't stick to your intention of creating this new project or business? Get a sacred board of directors to hold your intention, to keep you on track. Meet with them weekly. Be honest about what you're afraid of, what's been holding you back, what you did to move forward, what your intentions are for this coming week. Tell them to not let you fail. Tell them to hold your feet to the fire, lovingly.

If you implement these motivations and additional tips, I have no doubt in the world that you can move mountains and walk through walls. If it all feels like too much, just start small, and take the tiniest first step. It's a beautiful one.