

The Passion Trap

Module 5: The Truth About Motivation

Module five. The truth about motivation.

Remember in the first module when we talked about the passion myth, this idea that there's one thing we're "supposed to be" doing and we have to go out and find it in order to live our true purpose, in order to live the life we're meant to live? Yeah. Motivation is its sibling.

So we not only feel we should have one thing we're meant to do, but we're supposed to want to do it all the time. This is a lot to ask, isn't it? It presumes that we're this machine with an on-off switch and we're just supposed to be on. Always. Think about the way we even talk about motivation, right? It's something we need to get more of. I need more motivation, like I need more toilet paper. We have this idea again that it's out there. Not surprising given that we live in a very consumer oriented culture.

Everything we need to get is out there. But motivation, like passion, is different. It's innate in our wiring. It's not something that's manufactured and it's not something you can buy. It's not that different from how we talk about passion because we think when we find that thing we'll just simply wanna go, go, go firing an all pistons every single day of the week.

Remember that study I told you about a few modules back that was published in Psychological Science? It looked at the difference between people who believed a fixed mindset, that they were born to do one thing and one thing only. And the growth mindset, people who were open to discovering and growing their own skills and talents along the way. Well the people, if you recall, who are the fixed mindset group, the ones who believe there is one thing they're meant to do, they also expected that when they find that thing, they will have boundless motivation. And that's a quote "boundless." That's not a thing. No.

We have to listen to the language you use when we talk to and about ourselves, right? And it's really not that helpful to call ourselves unmotivated to say, oh, I wish I could do that, but I'm just too unmotivated. Like that's very damning, isn't it? Like you're impossible to motivate just cuz you're not motivated right now? Or that there's gaps between moments of pure motivation? That's like saying you're bad at staying full because every few hours you're hungry again. That's how it works!

Our wants and desires, our appetites and drives, they move in phases and stages. All of nature does. But we have somehow come to believe that we operate differently, when we really don't. We just refuse to acknowledge it. Energy, passion, motivation, these things wax and wane. They rise and fall. They are cyclic, and there isn't a human on the planet who doesn't want to feel those things. So when we say things like, oh, I just wish I were motivated. I wish I found my passion. Like there isn't a human walking around who doesn't want their life to mean something and is kind of trying to figure that out. Let's just zoom out for a minute. No one really knows why they're here. We don't really know. So it's part of the human condition that we want to make the time we have here mean something to us, to other people.

But the expectations we have, and I blame hustle culture for this too, that we're supposed to like go, go, go and like run ourselves ragged. That's not a healthy way to live. I'm gonna say this, you'll probably hear me say it more than once, but I'm gonna say it right now and don't forget it. Motivation is wonderful, it's exciting. It's also a luxury. And it may be a luxury that you cannot afford. Can you afford to wait around until you feel like it?

Like passion, motivation is a feeling. It's mutable, changeable, evolving. As I said, it rises and falls like atmospheric pressure. You don't stand outside with a bucket waiting for it to rain. If you want to feel that energy focus flow in your life, you actually need to hook up pipes and capture what you can and then power the rest, so that you have an ongoing source of energy, but not so that you're sort of on every second.

Show me anyone who's doing what they love. Okay? A career they chose that they feel passionate about, that they're thrilled to be doing. Anyone, any industry. And you're gonna tell me they don't wake up and just go, <sigh> ugh. Like part of them doesn't feel that some days or that they don't get tired or frustrated? That's life on the planet. To think that there's this special kingdom where you won't feel those things just isn't true.

As for needing to be passionate or motivated all the time, as I said, to feel you must love a thing in order to do it or to even try doing it. Seth Goden says that that kind of passion, motivation, you know, that's great, but it's also for amateurs. And I don't say that in a derogatory way. Literally amateurs, the word comes from French. It means the lover right? To do the thing you love. Amateurs can do a thing purely because they love it and they can do it when they want. There are things like that in your life, and that you're amateur in, wonderfully happily amateur in, so you can dabble and enjoy it. There's nothing wrong with that. But if you're frustrated that things haven't changed or that you haven't changed because you're waiting to feel a certain way, well that is what an amateur does.

Seth Goen says, it's not a direct quote, but essentially he says that, you know, that's nice if you love what you're doing and you're doing what you love. But for the rest of us, we do the work because the work matters. Action first. Just ask Mel Robbins, I'm sure you know who she is, she's one of the most popular like life coaches and authors and speakers on the planet. And her book, she has two, but the the first one that really broke her onto the scene was "The Five Second Rule." And it's so simple and so usable and so true. Now where she came up with the five second rule, she talks about how she was in a particularly low place in her life. She was lying on the couch, having had a few glasses of wine and was just not thrilled with how her life was at that moment. She had the TV on and she watched this commercial where there was a rocket launch and she was like, that's what I need. I need to literally launch myself, launch myself off this couch, out of bed and into my life. And how do you run a launch? You count down 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. That's how it works.

So this is how the five second rule works for Mel and what she's taught, just hundreds of thousands if not millions of people to do. The moment you have an instinct toward a goal, toward an action, towards something that urged, that quickening feeling that you're like, I I need to do this and I'm going to do this. You count down 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and move. You don't go 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and then sit there. She says, physically move before your brain has a chance to stop you. We think we just live in our heads, but life is a physical venture and when you start moving to do something, it gets done.

Take laundry for instance. You're gonna do that till you're dead. That's just a fact of life. You don't go, I don't know if I feel like doing laundry. Laundry needs to be done. You get up and do it right? I do. Understanding what you wanna do, understanding why you're not doing it, okay? But all of that without action leaves you exactly where you are. The point Mel says over and over, is that thinking is your enemy, action is your friend. Now, what we've been doing in this course is starting to get you to reframe and rethink things, right? Gotta have a fresh perspective.

So I'm not asking you to go do something right this second, but I want you to put that into context of what motivation even is. It's the desire to act and the will to do it. The minute you stop to think about whether you should really do this thing, you're cooked. As for motivation, complete garbage, Mel says. And that's a direct quote, I'll read it. If you want to improve your life, you'll need to get off your rear end and kick your own butt. A rocket launch is a big complicated ordeal. Every action you take doesn't have to be that complicated, but the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 really works. Try it.

What practice lacks in excitement. So you say, it makes up for in power. Robin says, it's not the big moves that define our lives, it's the smallest ones. Let's take another really

popular coach, Marie Forleo. She also had a bestselling book called “Everything is Figureoutable” and she gets the motivation question all the time. She’s answered it probably 50,000 times. And I saw one episode of Marie TV where she answered the question again and I really liked her response. The question was, how do I stay motivated when I feel so stuck? Sound familiar?

There are all things you need to do, which she talks about and you’ve heard. And by the way, you know what they are. That in order to really actually channel energy into things you wanna do, you do have to take care of body and mind. You won’t be able to do it if you’re not sleeping well, or at all, or often. If you’re not eating food that can literally support your systems, if you’re not moving your body. Meditation helps. All the things that are done to, for lack of a better word, manipulate your body into being an energy channeling machine. Those things you know about, you might think I have to do what I need to do or I do these things. No, it’s both. And I know there’s no way I could get done as much as I get done if I didn’t carve out that time to sleep, to eat and to exercise. This isn’t that kind of course we’re not gonna go to your plan about how you’re gonna do that, but trust that it does affect productivity. It doesn’t matter. Like okay, you have weight loss gains and that is not my jam. I don’t, I can’t advise you on that. But what I can say is when I think about what fitness is doing for me and what it takes to move, is because every time I go to work out, I’m not motivated to work out. I just know that between nine and 10 in the morning, I’m ready to shift gears after having done a little work in the morning and I just automatically get up, I go put my workout gear on, I pull the yoga mat out from under the couch, I lay it out. There is my habit. I do this, this, put the thing on, choose the workout and I’m off to the races.

It doesn’t matter what workout really. And then I’ll go sit on the bike and do that for 15 or 30 minutes even. It doesn’t matter if I feel like it, I always feel better after. And the way I think about it is, blood, what I’m doing is getting blood, literally the carrier of our life force, to my brain is why I’m able to do this to you right now. Cause I feel totally calm. I’ve already worked out all of my energy and gotten it up to a level where I can now kind of cascade into the day. You don’t have to do what I do. I’m not saying you should, but there’s gotta be something for you, that makes you feel physically and mentally and emotionally capable of taking on the things that you wanna do.

But back to Marie, there’s a line she says that I think, I don’t know who she was quoting cuz I think I’ve heard it before, but I love it so I can give her credit for it. Ambiguity is the enemy of execution. Remember that line. Ambiguity is the enemy of execution. So what I mean by that is having so many things that you want to do, could do. You can’t tell me that you want to do 15 things and that they’re all a priority. And then wonder why you haven’t made any progress in any one direction. You just gave me the reasons why.

I was just talking to a friend the other day who I said, what are your goals? What are you gonna do? She's like, I wanna work on a book, I wanna work on a podcast. I need to launch this course, I need to do this, I need to write more for this. And these are all I was like, yeah, that sounds, same same. I have all those goals. Like that sounds great. I have the same goals. We're not doing them all this year. Literally this year. You don't do them all. You will do nothing.

How many hours you have when you're literally awake a day when you're not fully engaged in work that you are getting paid to do, taking care of family, children, your parents, whatever it is, there are other things. Now the window has gotten smaller. Now you've gotta take care of yourself, right? Hopefully you did that first, energy things you need to rest, eat, blah, blah, blah. Now you have an even smaller window of energy, right? And attention of when you're awake. <laugh>, you know you only have a few hours when you're awake that you have left over.

Guess how many of those hours are you at your sharpest and most open? Not all the hours. I'm not. No human is. We do not run at the same speed all day. I'm sluggish between two and four. I just am. So when you think, well I'm not motivated, I'm not motivated either at 3:30, no, I don't know too many people who are. But when you think about all the things you wanna do, when you say I'm motivated, I could do them all, but you're not going to.

So what this requires is the choices. And maybe you're saying, I don't even have a list of things I wanna do. I don't even know what it is, but I feel like I wanna explore all these things. That's great! But if you're wondering why things aren't changing and you think you're unmotivated, I beg to differ.

I believe it's a matter of not actually moving in a direction, and you don't have to know what that direction is yet. That's for another course another day. But the question of how do I stay motivated? How do I keep staying motivated to do all these things? Trying to stay motivated is like trying to push like 10 suitcases down a hallway. You literally, it's gonna take you a long time to get down the hallway. How do you push this wall? That's not hard to push. They're not hard to push. No, individually you can do them all. But how fast are you gonna get somewhere with 10 suitcases? Far better to pack one.

You have to decide that you don't need to feel excited and motivated. You might already feel that and just don't know what to do with it. But you have to decide whether doing it matters more than dreaming it. That taking action and risking imperfection, mistakes, flops, is worth doing more than not doing it at all. When we talk about dreamers

sometimes I think dreamers like to dream. Not all dreamers are doers. If you like to dream, that's okay. But then don't be surprised when nothing happens.

Now I told you that feeling a certain way was a luxury, but I also want you to think about this. Sometimes when you really don't feel like doing a thing, you should listen to that feeling. Now, I might not always feel like working out or some days I'll say, I don't feel like doing a weights class. Okay fine, but I'm gonna do something.

But if there's something you're looking at and you're like, oh, I always said I would do this, but I don't really want to, you've gotta ask yourself, do you really want to do that thing? People always said I should write a book or I should do this. Okay, people said, are they gonna write it? No, I don't take homework assignments from people who don't know what it involves. So ask yourself when you feel this motivation and then you feel a go away and then you go, oh my god, I'm not motivated. When you think about the thing that you feel unmotivated about, ask yourself honestly, do I really wanna do this? Is the thing that you think you want to do and maybe you're not sure and you're feeling ambiguous about it, and we know ambiguity is the enemy of execution. You have to say, why do I wanna do it? Is there a critical reason? Is it because well, the truth is this part of my business would earn more?

Okay, well then that might be something to consider. Unless you're earning enough and you don't wanna spend more time working, in which case something else might be more important. Maybe you do wanna take on a creative project without worrying about monetization, but just because you want to do it. I talk to people all the time who will say, I just want to be writing more. They just wanna be. They don't even know what about or what for. And that's okay. You have to think about what would motivate you to keep doing. Because once you get in motion, bodies in motion tend to stay in motion.

Do you like the idea of doing it? Do you like the idea of being able to say you've done it, or is the idea of actually doing it appealing? Because if the actual doing of it does not appeal, I don't know why you would do it unless there's a really good reason. Some people run marathons simply to check a box and to say they ran a marathon. Which as a comic friend of mine points out. You can say you did, whether you've ran it or not. I'm really leery of that.

That's why I talk about bucket lists in my book because I'm very leery of the thing that we, oh, I wanna do that thing someday and I, what do you wanna do now? Forget someday we have now, this is all we have. I'm not trying to kill your dreams <laugh>. You're like, but I always dreamed I would do that. It's not my point. But sometimes we fall in love with or fantasize about things we only kind of wanna actually do. And there is

such tremendous freedom when you let those things go, when you go, I wanna do that, but I should really do this, this, and this. Why? Ask yourself why. When you let go of things you used to want or thought you wanted, oh my gosh, it is an incredible, it's weight that just falls off. It's 10 suitcases you can leave behind. It makes you sort of lighter on your feet so that you can actually move with direction and purpose and momentum towards something you actually wanna do.

That's the challenge, right? Feeling literally not one iota of motivation is a pretty good sign you're not gonna do it. It doesn't mean you should be more motivated. Can you admit to yourself that it's okay to not want to or no longer want to do X?

Sometimes yearning for the thing or saying you'll do a thing or that you wanna do a thing can become part of your identity. And we get so attached to it that to say we're not gonna do that. <gasp> We've lost our compass. Or we think maybe we don't even know who we are anymore. That's often the bigger reason.

Someone who says, oh, I'm gonna be a doctor, I'm gonna go to med school. And they go through schooling and college and then they're in pre-med and they realize I really don't do this. I don't want to do this. This is really not feeling like me. That can be hard because you've been saying I'm gonna be a doctor. Oh, well Susie's gonna be a doctor and blah blah blah. And letting go of that and saying, I'm gonna do something else. It's not a failure. It's a wonderful decision. There are plenty of people who stick with things they never wanted to do and then they just keep doing them and that's what their life is. Does that have to be what your life is?

For instance, who says you have to run or aspire to run an empire, when you're perfectly happy running a small or you know, successful solo business? Or why do you have to monetize something when you're happy just doing it for friends and family? Who says you have to open a bakery just cuz you like making cookies? I'm telling you, open a bakery. You're not gonna be making many cookies at all. You're gonna be doing like payroll.

Could you write a screenplay? Could you start your own business? Could you start a meditation group that you lead? There's a million things you might wanna do. Learn to speak another language. Travel. Of course. But motivation is not trying to gin up the juice to do things because in a parallel universe you thought that you would be doing it.

Let's talk about other things that we think will motivate us. Awards, recognition, accolades. Does that work? Eh. Some people, yeah, but I think the more you dig into that topic and interview a bunch of people or watch a few interviews of people, yeah, it's

a wonderful moment to win an award. It's great to be able to say you won the award, but an award that is sitting on your shelf, it might give you a feeling of pride every time you talk about it or look at it or touch it, that's fine, but that's not, most of your life has not been spent holding the award. That's a moment. The effort is the longer part. It's the part that you will remember.

Most popular columnist, Jeff Hayden, who wrote a book called "The Motivation Myth." So good. He asked Lance's Armstrong what he missed about being a pro cyclist. Was it the fame, the glory, the medals, you know all that attention? No, this is a direct quote that Hayden put in his book from Lance Armstrong. I don't miss the result. He told Hayden, I miss the work. He missed the process, the effort that went into earning that spot on the podium. The work was what mattered.

We tell ourselves, oh, what the day we arrive, I've arrived. You know, let's just say this. My book, when the day this came out, you know, yeah, this the day I got my copy in the mail. You know, it's hard to remember like what was the time the book became real, when I got my copy, when it was sent off to the printer, when I finished writing it, when it was on a shelf? It was really exciting. But holding the book is not exciting. It's like, wow, that was so cool. The creating of it is what really mattered because it ended up with that asset, with that outcome. But the book, now that it's done, is not changing my life every day. I mean hopefully it's someone else's.

This is why there is no shortcut to motivation and why the shortcut or hacking or trying to figure it out or fix it. This is the point. So when you try to hack motivation or just to simply get more motivated, like jumpstart your car just so you can get to the next place and break down. That's cutting off the legs, really, of what makes something worth doing. So while we all get a rise out of rousing speeches, great books, courses like this one, hearing from someone who may make you feel like, yeah, yeah, great! I can't actually motivate you. I can give you tools, resources, a fresh perspective so that you can take it and motivate yourself.

This is one of my favorite quotes from Hayden's book and I use it all the time. He says, motivation is a result, not a precondition. Progress provides lasting motivation. The best indicator of whether you're going to do a thing is starting to do it. In the beginning when I started working out, like literally I was not doing like workouts every day, but in the pandemic, like a lot of people, I started. And the best indicator of whether I was gonna continue to do it was that I got up and did it every day, and I wasn't motivated and I literally didn't care. It was never a priority of mine. But the outcome, the progress I was feeling, I could see myself getting stronger. I could feel it.

I could see my numbers rising on the bike. I could see that I was lifting and needing to buy heavier weights to lift. That progress was what motivated me and still does. Cuz I feel myself getting stronger every day. You can't wait to feel stronger first.

So one thing to ask yourself is where are you allowing yourself to experience progress? Anywhere? Where have you experienced progress and what did it feel like? What has it done for your own work? Or if it's personal for your personal life, where do you see tangible progress?

This is critical, to be able to bear witness to what you are capable of. Other people can tell you, other people can hand you awards for it. But until you do it and believe it and see it yourself, you won't. So take a minute now and just pick one thing. What's one area of your life where you have experienced progress?

What were you doing? How did you know you were experiencing progress? What did it feel like? What did it look like? What were the symptoms, right? Or the side effects of that action? And what has it allowed or encouraged you to do? Take 10 minutes, set a timer, pause here and start writing.

<Pause for writing break>

<Resume after writing break>

In the huge runaway bestseller “Atomic Habits” by James Clear. If you haven't read it, it is worth it. He of course, talks about and gives a whole fresh perspective to what habits really are. There are a ton of books out about habits, really good ones. And this is really more of the user manual. And one of my favorite things that he says is that habits are a vote for who you want to be. Think about that. Every habit is a vote. Every time you do a thing. It doesn't make you, if you eat one bag of chips and you said, always said, I wasn't gonna eat chips anymore, I'm terrible, forget it. That doesn't mean you're done forever and you failed, but that bag of chips that you eat, is a vote for the version of you that eats chips. If you go for a long walk, that's a vote for the person who goes for long walks.

Those habits add up. So motivation and habits go like this together and progress is the sign. So you don't have to be perfect, but you do have to start to take action small enough that you can watch them and measure them. You don't have to keep tracking a log if you don't wanna do that kind of thing, but you do have to pay attention to what you're doing, why you're doing it, how often you're doing it, and seeing what's happening as a result. Because if you are happy with what you're doing and you don't

wanna change anything, then nothing will change. And that's fine if you're okay with that. But if your habits do not change, you will be precisely where you are a year from now. And you have to ask yourself, do you want something else? Is there something more?

<End of Module 5>