

THE
MOTIVATION

MYTH

*How High Achievers Really
Set Themselves Up to Win*

J E F F H A D E N

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How High Achievers Really
Set Themselves Up to Win

JEFF HADEN

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To everyone who hasn't achieved their dreams—yet.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There's an old saying, "You never want to meet people you admire because in real life they will only disappoint." In the last few years I've met dozens of incredibly successful people and found that nothing could be further from the truth.

A famished Richard Branson apologized for having a sandwich delivered during our interview; then he offered me half, saying he wouldn't be able to eat unless I joined him. Metallica guitarist Kirk Hammett's management rep told me we had twenty minutes max for our interview. Kirk winked at me and did forty great minutes. Then he hung out and met other *Inc.* staffers. Then he invited my wife and me to see the band perform at Webster Hall. (Best show ever.) Seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson sat down to talk, even though he was two hours past his scheduled departure time, because he knew I had waited. (And then he set me up with his triathlon trainer, Jamey Yon.)

Actor Clive Standen fills every moment of his workday so that when he is home, he's *home*. His definition of success is being a good husband and father. Joe Gibbs, Super Bowl-winning coach and NASCAR championship team owner, gave every member of the video crew a signed copy of his book *Game Plan for Life* because he hoped it would make a small difference in people's lives. Dany Garcia, who with Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson cofounded Seven Bucks Productions, spent more time asking me what *I* do to be more focused and productive and how to accomplish multiple goals. She already knows what she knows; she wanted to know what *I* know.

Venus Williams is . . . well, Venus is absolutely delightful.

Mark Cuban stopped to chat with an unpaid intern who had spent six hours stuck in a chair at the far end of a lonely hallway. Eric Ripert hung out in the kitchen of Le Bernardin after a video shoot and talked shop; later, he treated my wife and me to the best meal we've ever had. Lance Armstrong is a guy I'd love to have a few beers with (and I don't like beer). Actor Robert Patrick answered

all my questions and then spent half an hour finding out about me. After learning that I live in Virginia, he said, “Hey, Bobby [Robert] Duvall lives there. The next time I’m up that way, let’s all get together.” (Hey, Robert: Gladly!) NASCAR team owner Rick Hendrick (who also owns more than a hundred automobile dealerships) shook his head when I thanked him for taking the time to speak, and said, “I have nothing more important to do right now than talk to you.” And I genuinely believe he meant it.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. reorganized his jam-packed New York City media day schedule so we could shoot a video interview together. Def Leppard guitarist Phil Collen is a great musician and an even nicer guy. If it’s possible to be a more humble and self-deprecating multi-platinum artist and Grammy Award winner than Zedd, I would love to meet that person. Roger Penske focuses so hard on the little things that you would think he owned only one rental truck, not multiple businesses that generate \$26 billion in annual revenue. If I was playing the “What three people, living or dead, would you most like to have dinner with?” game, actor James Purefoy is in my top three. (Hey, James: I’ll buy!)

Thanks to each of you, along with others too numerous to mention, for being so generous with your time and your insights. And most of all, thanks for proving what many people unfortunately choose not to believe: that if you are willing to work hard and stay the course, who you are is more than enough for you to become who you really want to be.

Thanks also to my agent, Katie Kotchman, for believing in me before I did. Thanks to my editor, Leah Trouwborst, for doing exactly what I hoped: She dramatically improved my original idea and, better yet, made me think. The incredible team at Penguin Random House have proven, over and over again, that I chose the best publishing house in the world.

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Most of all, thanks to my kids, who are already better people than I could ever hope to be, and especially to my wife, Cynthia. Maybe the old saying “behind every great man is a great woman” is occasionally true, but not in my case. Far ahead of this decidedly average man is a great woman. I’m sorry you have to drag me along . . . but I am eternally thankful that you do.

INTRODUCTION

You Can Do—and *Be*—So Much More Than You Think

When I worked in manufacturing for R.R. Donnelley, the world's largest commercial printer, I desperately—and I do mean desperately—wanted to become a plant manager; the closest I came was running manufacturing operations for a small, privately owned company. I spent years trying to get one—just one—short story published; the closest I came was . . . Well, I never came close. (Looking back, deservedly so.) I have dozens of failures to my name. I've tried and failed, over and over.

Even worse, I've let many goals go without even trying to achieve them. I thought about them, I dreamed about them, I imagined what it would feel like to accomplish them . . . but I never even got started.

In both scenarios, I spent a lot of time trying to motivate myself. I'd been told success was all about mind-set, and I wanted to lock in the optimal psychological state before the rubber met the road. We can all remember those times when we were hit with a lightning bolt of inspiration, whether to work out or to start learning French—and we can also remember how that urge never produced any action.

I was in the grip of an insidious myth. I thought motivation was a prerequisite to starting a tedious learning process—a spark necessary to get me going. But motivation is really a result. Motivation is the fire that starts burning after you manually, painfully, coax it into existence, and it feeds on the satisfaction of seeing yourself make progress. The problem with waiting for motivation to strike is that it almost never comes with enough voltage to actually get you started.

Granted, sometimes motivation strikes like a hammer. Minutes or hours later, though, you've lost your enthusiasm, partly because a lightning-bolt burst of motivation is like a sugar rush: It feels great but is impossible to maintain, and when you come down you actually feel worse. Rah-rah speeches and inspirational quotes and fire-walking challenges (more on those in a minute) may help you picture yourself at the top of the mountain with your arms raised in triumph, but the effect is fleeting. After the glow is gone, you're left standing by yourself at the bottom of that same mountain, hugely intimidated by all the steps you need to climb.

So you sit, and dwell, and sulk, and wish, and hope, and maybe even think about saving up for Tony Robbins's next seminar . . . but even that sounds too hard.

HOW SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE APPROACH MOTIVATION

I've met plenty of successful people. Yes, many of them are smart. Yes, some of them are creative. Yes, they're often talented. But none of those traits is crucial to their success. The gene cards we are dealt are just a starting point; nearly every successful person I know started on the downside of advantage. Humble beginnings can create the perfect foundation for success, because starting at the bottom creates almost endless opportunities to enjoy small successes.

Confused? That's okay. The key is to understand how motivation works.

There is only one recipe for gaining motivation: success.

Specifically, the dopamine hits we get when we observe ourselves making progress.

Not huge, life-changing successes. Those come all too infrequently, if ever. If you want to stay motivated, if you want to stay on track, if you want to keep making progress toward the things you hope to achieve, the key is to enjoy small, seemingly minor successes—but on a regular basis. If you're trying to learn a language, it's fun when you realize you can count to twenty. If you're trying to learn an instrument, it's fun when you realize you can read simple sheet music. If you're trying to learn to code, it's fun to realize that silly little program you wrote actually works. Small successes are fun—and motivating.

That's why you already have everything you need.

That's why motivation isn't something you *have*. Motivation is something you get, from yourself, automatically, from feeling good about achieving small

successes.

Success is a process. Success is repeatable and predictable. Success has less to do with hoping and praying and strategizing than with diligently doing (after a little strategizing, sure): doing the right things, the right way, over and over and over.

It's easy to look back on a path to greatness and assume that every vision was clear, every plan was perfect, every step was executed flawlessly, and tremendous success was a foregone conclusion.

It wasn't. Every extremely successful person I know never expected to achieve as much as they have. (Many still can't believe it.) Almost to a person, one day they woke up and were stunned to see how far they had come.

Why were they so surprised by their success? They were busy doing. They didn't focus on what they did not have. They focused on doing the work, day after day after day, to get them to where they hoped to go.

When you consistently do the right things, success is predictable. Success is inevitable. You just can't think about it too much. No obsessing allowed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS

The motivation myth makes us unhappy for two reasons. First, it leads to a sin of commission. A person who self-identifies as a failure, who regularly quits before reaching the finish line, is a chronically unhappy person. But it also causes a sin of omission. We aren't mindfully enjoying one of the most rewarding experiences on earth: slowly growing stronger, or more skillful, or more wise.

Like when my grandfather bought a racehorse.

I wasn't even a teenager, but even I knew it was a terrible decision. A racehorse was a luxury he and my grandmother surely could not afford. But at least ongoing costs were low because he lived on a farm. That's a justification I'm sure he floated by my grandmother.

Over the next year he would scrape together entry fees and race the horse with little success at small local tracks. One was no better than an open field rutted by the pounding of hooves. Another featured an announcer who placed his PA system on the back of his truck and powered it with a generator that almost drowned out the sound of his voice. (I can still remember him saying, "As you folks know, in Virginia it's illegal to bet at a racetrack . . . but if you folks mosey

away from the track and on down to that big old oak tree over yonder, I'm sure someone will be happy to accommodate you." And I can still remember the muscles in my father's face tightening in response.)

Then one day the impossible happened. After somehow talking one of the better jockeys into riding his horse—"somehow" surely including slipping the man an extra forty dollars, a princely sum for the ride—his horse placed second at the now long-defunct Goochland Races, held at the county fairgrounds less than ten miles from where my grandfather lived.

After the race, he stood at the finish line and held up the small silver plate so we could take his picture. Then we led the horse back around the sandy track toward the barn area as some of the people on the outside of the rail congratulated him.

I was only twelve, but even I could see a noticeable difference in the way he walked. For those moments he stood taller, carrying himself with a clear sense of accomplishment, dignity, and pride.

Only years later did I realize why my grandfather had bought the horse. He desperately wanted to be someone. He wanted to matter.

That's a wish we all share. For the most part, that's why we change careers, or start businesses, or play an instrument, or go back to school. That's why we run for local office, volunteer at a charity, or are active in church.

We want to matter . . . but when we focus solely on mattering to other people—when we focus on seeing the reflection of our worth in the eyes of others—the difference that feeling makes in our lives is often fleeting.

By the time we got back to the farm, my grandfather's glow had faded. Sure, he was still happy, but all the external benefits of that small success—the smiles, the words of congratulation, the nods from friends and strangers—had disappeared.

At the end of my grandfather's racing journey, he was left with what we are all left with, no matter what we have accomplished and no matter how much praise or recognition we have received from others. The accomplishment, no matter how amazing, is just the cherry on top of the fulfillment cake.

If your goal has long been to build a business that does \$10 million in sales, you feel amazing the second you hit that target—but that moment of achievement is just one moment. If your goal has long been to run a marathon, you feel amazing the second you cross the finish line—but that moment of achievement is just one moment.

The road to a target, to a goal, or to a finish line is filled with countless hours of work and determination and sacrifice . . . and countless opportunities to feel good about what you have accomplished, each and every day along the way.

A slice of satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness can be found in the achievement . . . but the real source of consistent, lasting happiness lies in the process. My grandfather wasn't involved in the process. Granted, he bought the horse . . . but then he jumped to the end. He skipped all the steps in between: training the horse, conditioning the horse, developing the horse's speed slowly but surely, teaching it not just how to run but how to race.

He didn't give himself the chance to enjoy the daily doses of fulfillment that come from engaging in the process. Accomplishing something, no matter how small the task, makes us feel better about ourselves. That's why to-do lists are so popular. (Many people write down really easy tasks—or tasks they've already completed—just so they can scratch them off.)

Incredibly successful people set a goal and then focus all their attention on the process necessary to achieve that goal. They set a goal and then, surprisingly, they forget the goal.

Sure, the goal is still out there. But what they care about most is what they need to do today—and when they accomplish that, they are happy about today. They feel good about today.

They feel good about themselves because they've accomplished what they set out to do today, and that sense of accomplishment gives them all the motivation they need to do what they need to do when tomorrow comes—because success, even tiny, incremental success, is the best motivational tool of all.

When you savor the small victories, you get to feel good about yourself every day, because you no longer feel compelled to compare the distance between here and there. You don't have to wait for “someday” to feel good about yourself; if you do what you planned to do today, you're a winner.

When I was training for long cycling events, I often rode up mountains. I've always hated the climbs . . . but I loved completing them, and years later I still love knowing I completed them. Think about anything you've done that was extremely hard, and how you felt afterward, and you'll know exactly what I mean.

For years I missed out on the happiness and fulfillment that come from accomplishing all the little steps in my various goal-achievement (actually, goal-failure) journeys.

You don't have to

you don't have to.

But it won't be easy. Success—lasting, fulfilling, meaningful success—never is.

Want to start a business? Don't be fooled by the work-at-home hype. Launching a successful business will make you wonder what the words “free time” could possibly mean.

Want to rise to the top of your organization? Don't be fooled by the work-life-balance fluff. Tremendous effort and dedication are required.

Want to run a marathon? Forget some sixty-day shortcut system that promises maximum results from minimal input. Life doesn't work that way.

To accomplish anything worthwhile, and especially to achieve a goal others say is impossible, you have to work your ass off. There are no shortcuts. The only way is the hard way.

Yet there are plenty of ways to make the process fun. There are plenty of ways to make the process uplifting. There are plenty of ways to enjoy every step of the journey . . . as well as that final step onto your personal podium.

Want to be happier? Want to be more successful at everything you choose to pursue? The paths to both happiness and success are one and the same.

You don't need to wait until you can find more time; you have all the time you need. You don't need to wait until you can find more money; money never drives success. (Though if you so choose, money can be the result of success.) And you absolutely do not need more motivation.

You don't need to wait to find your passion; if you follow this book's program, your passions—plural intended, as you'll soon see—will find you.

You will stand strong. You won't back off. You won't back down. You'll make smart decisions. You won't focus on what you don't have, because what you *do* have—however little it may seem—is more than enough.

And you will find that the process, not just the result but the *process* involved in becoming something that you once dreamed of, will also make you feel awesome about yourself—each and every day.

Some people are successful. Some people are happy.

You can be both.

Here's how.

CHAPTER 1

Motivation Is Not the Spark

A key moment in Tony Robbins’s “Unleash the Power Within” seminar occurs when participants take part in the fire walk.

(Okay, it’s more like a “kinda-hot coals” walk, but “fire” sounds more dangerous and macho and Katy Perry “Roar”-y. After all, Tony does know a little something about branding.)

(Actually, Tony knows a *lot* about branding.)

(And actually, this is the last time I’ll take a shot at Tony. I think.)

Robbins describes the fire walk as “a symbolic experience that proves if you can make it through the fire, you can make it through anything.”* The premise sounds great: Walking across kinda-hot coals gives you lasting confidence and motivation by tapping into the amazing power lying dormant within you.

In fact, it doesn’t.

Fire-walking is a one-off event. Fire-walking is like listening to a motivational speech: You go home inspired and excited and all jazzed up . . . but you wake up the next day the same person you were the day before, *because you haven’t truly accomplished anything*.

(Except listen. And pay for the seminar.)

Most people are confused about the source of motivation. They think motivation is the spark that automatically produces lasting eagerness to do hard work; the greater the motivation, the more effort you’re willing to put in.

Actually, motivation is a *result*. Motivation is the pride you take in work you have already done—which fuels your willingness to do even more.

That’s why tips for how to feel more motivated often fall short. Most of that advice can be boiled down to “You *can* be more motivated. All you have to do is dig deep into your mind and find that motivation within.”

(And burn your feet a little.)

The same is true for confidence, confidence being closely linked to motivation. The thinking goes, “You can be more confident. All you have to do is *decide* to be more confident.” It’s easy: Suppress negative thoughts, suppress negative perspectives, repeat some really cool self-affirmational statements, and . . . presto! I’m like Tony Robbins.

Or not.

The main problem in both cases is the way we’ve come to think about motivation.

Most definitions of “motivation” involve some phrase like “the force or influence that causes someone to do something.” Motivation is viewed as a spark, a precondition, a prerequisite, a *presomething* that is required before we can start. If we aren’t motivated, we can’t start. If we aren’t motivated, we can’t *do*.

Bullshit.

Real motivation comes *after* you start. Motivation isn’t the result of hearing a speech or watching a movie or cringing your soles. Motivation isn’t passive; motivation is active.

HOW TO START WHEN YOU’RE 0 PERCENT MOTIVATED

The best way to get motivated is to break a sweat, literally or symbolically.

Getting started is often the hardest part. Financial planners frequently recommend paying off a small debt first, even though the balance on that bill may carry the lowest interest rate of all your debts. Rationally, that approach makes no sense: If you carry a balance on three credit cards, the card you pay off first should be the one with the highest interest rate. But the thought of paying off, say, a \$7,000 balance when you can spare only an extra \$200 a month . . . ugh. The time horizon is too long for the payoff—literally—to seem worth it. The “irrational” approach often works better: Working to pay off the card with the smallest balance seems a lot more attainable. Once you start, you can see the difference. Knocking \$200 off an \$800 debt feels like you’ve accomplished something. After next month, you’re halfway done! And once you pay off that card, you’ll be motivated to keep going to pay off the next card.

Think about why you sometimes procrastinate. (Don’t say you never put things off. Show me someone who doesn’t procrastinate and I’ll show you a robot. *Everyone* procrastinates.)

I definitely procrastinate.

One example: I've written more than seven million published words. (Please keep the jokes about long-windedness to yourself.) You might then assume it's easy for me to sit down and write, but at times it's anything but: I'll make calls, take care of administrative tasks, do a little "research" (in my line of work, any reading is research, right?), play with the cats . . . I love to write, but sometimes the thought of writing seems daunting, especially at the beginning of a project, when I need to find the right voice and the best way into the material.

Except for the cats, I can rationalize that I'm being productive, but usually I'm just procrastinating.

Another example: I like to ride bicycles. Over the last five or six years I've ridden about 35,000 miles. I love riding, but sometimes I'll do *anything* not to ride.

Neither makes sense, right? Writing and riding are both things I love to do, yet at times I find ways to actively avoid doing them. Putting off tasks I *don't* enjoy would make a lot more sense.

I love to ride my bike, but sometimes the thought of riding seems daunting, especially those first few miles, when it's cold outside and my legs are stiff and my heart has just started to pound. I pant and gasp and wonder why I'm on the stupid bike . . . but then something magical happens. Somehow my aversion to "hard" goes away once I break a sweat.

The endorphins kick in. My legs warm up. I feel proud that I can do something hard, and do it reasonably well. That rush of satisfaction I always feel? (That rush of satisfaction you always feel when you start doing something you've put off . . . and suddenly realize it wasn't as daunting as you anticipated?) I know that feeling will come. I've trained myself to anticipate that natural "high." Instead of thinking, "Ugh. This is going to be hard," I've taught myself to think, "I can't wait for that little high I'll feel when I move from inactivity to activity. I can't wait to feel that rush I know I'll feel when I'm actually doing what I planned to do."

The key is to enjoy the feeling of success that comes from improving in some small way . . . and then rinse and repeat, over and over again.

Why? Improving feels good. Improving breeds confidence. Improving creates a feeling of competence, and competence breeds self-confidence. Success—in your field or sometimes in any field—breeds motivation. It feels good to improve . . . so you naturally want to keep improving.

You've probably put off a task, finally gotten started . . . and then, once you got started, thought, "I don't know why I kept putting this off. It's going really

well. And it didn't turn out to be nearly as hard as I imagined.”

And here's the thing: *It never is.*

Why? Because once you get started, once you get active and start doing something—doing not just anything but something you know will get you one step closer to your goal—the process gets easier. Motivation kicks in because you've gotten started. A really cool virtuous cycle—one we'll look at in detail a little later—kicks in. You feel good because you're engaged and involved.

You feel motivated because you took action. Motivation is a result, not a precondition. You don't need motivation to break a sweat. Break a sweat and you'll feel motivated.

Once you start, it's easy to keep going. The act of getting out of the house to go for a jog is often harder than actually running the five miles you planned. The act of sitting down at your desk to start writing a proposal is often harder than putting together twenty pages of material. The act of picking up your phone is often harder than cold-calling twenty prospects.

Starting is hard because “motivation” doesn't make it easy to start. Starting provides the motivation to finish.

Fire walks don't provide lasting motivation. *Breaking a sweat* provides lasting motivation.

Speeches don't provide lasting motivation. *Progress* provides lasting motivation.

Posters don't provide lasting motivation. *Success* provides lasting motivation.

If you aren't achieving your goals, a lack of motivation or confidence isn't the problem. A lack of motivation or confidence is actually the means to a solution. When you accept your weak points, when you accept your flaws, when you accept your imperfections . . . *that's* when you can motivate yourself to make changes and improve.

Hide from your weaknesses, and you'll always be weak. Accept your weaknesses and work to improve them, and you'll eventually be stronger—and more motivated to keep improving.

But you have to do the right things in order to make real improvements. In upcoming chapters I'll show you how.

Before we do that, though, let's debunk some other myths that have held you back.