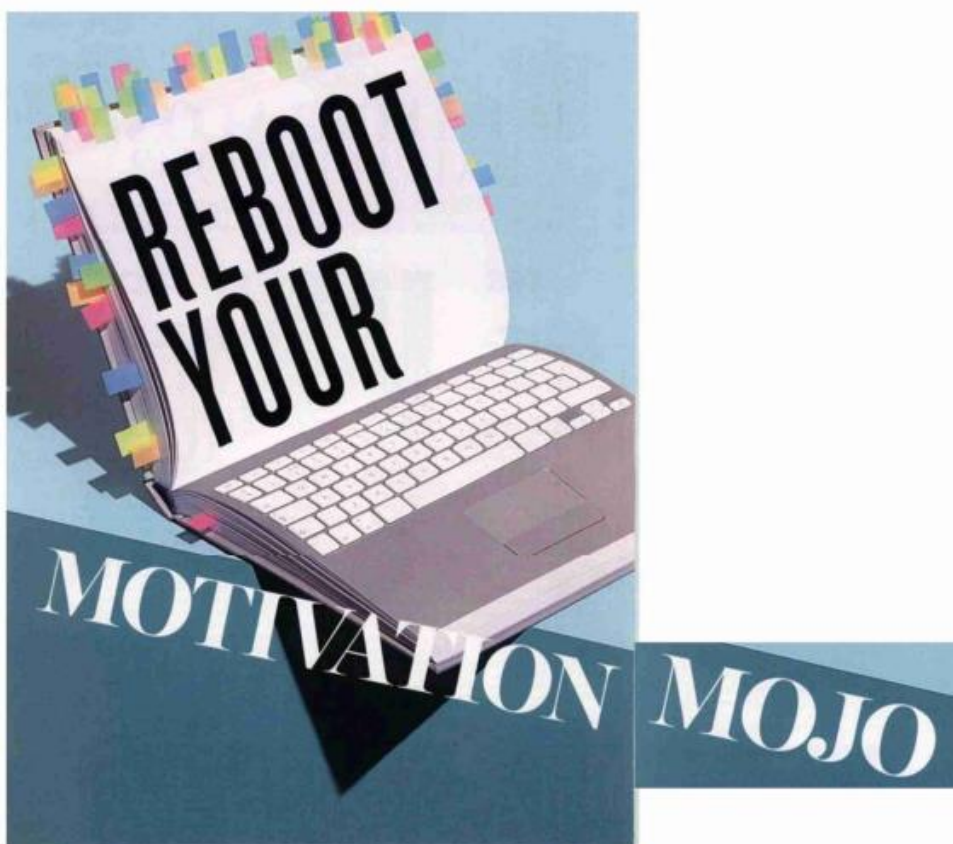


healthy



→ Another day, another bunch of tasks you didn't do. Sound familiar? Then it's time to get a hold of your get-up-and-go

WORDS **CHRISTINA QUAINÉ**

We all reach points in our lives where everything just feels like Such. Hard. Work. That new health regime? You'll start it tomorrow. Finding a better phone contract? Yeah, after you've checked Instagram/Facebook/Net-a-Porter. Those big work tasks? Put to one side while you attend to the fun, littler ones. Whatever's on your to-do list, that stuff's not going to get checked off without a big dose of motivation... if only we could find it. So how can we get some impetus behind the things we know in our hearts that we want or need to do?

'Motivation involves biological, emotional, social and cognitive forces that essentially cause us to act,' says Niels Eék, psychologist and co-founder of personal development and mental wellbeing app *Remente*. 'There are many factors that make us motivated, and understanding these is vital in setting goals.' These include anticipating a reward, eliminating a threat, being able to reach a decision and fulfilling a dream, so step one is working out *why* something has to happen. Then, throw a spotlight on how to make it a success. This is where motivation can get tricky because our fortunes rely on a mix of luck, task difficulty, ability and effort. Still, nothing will change unless we try. Here's how to unblock yourself and get motivated.

JAM #1

YOU CAN'T GET GOING

The link between exercise and cognitive ability is well known, but did you know even a one-off burst of physical activity before doing something demanding can help you focus? Researchers at Western University, Canada, found that participants who did 10 minutes of aerobic activity before a cognitively demanding task had more accurate responses and quicker reaction times – up to 14 per cent more than those who'd sat reading. 'This shows people can cycle or walk briskly for a short duration, even once, and find immediate benefits,' said the study author.

JAM #2

IT'S TIME CONSUMING

Thirty minutes. That's the golden number when it comes to staying focused on one thing. A study from Toronto University found that while doing a difficult memory task, performance begins to dip at the half-hour mark, indicating that it's important

to switch between tasks throughout the day to stay

on course with your goals. 'We don't have an unlimited concentration span, so assign a short period of time to a task, take a quick break to daydream or make a coffee, then return to it. Far better than getting distracted over a number of competing tasks,' says Jane Piper, an organisational psychologist and author of *Focus In The Age Of Distraction* (Panoma Press, £12.99).

JAM #3

YOU'RE NOT GETTING ANYWHERE

'It's also beneficial to reboot during the day to stay motivated,' says Eék. 'There's nothing more frustrating than having a to-do list that gets longer rather than shorter so take time to reset after lunch. Assess what's left to do, moving your priorities around accordingly. This technique means that you use your afternoon time wisely and don't procrastinate because you feel overwhelmed by a long list of things you haven't done.'

JAM #4

IT ALL SEEMS SO FAR OFF

It's a common thread: you start off well, working towards a goal, such as saving money for a big trip, but over time your determination fizzles out. The key, says US research, is switching up motivational strategies along the way. At the start of a goal, researchers found that we tend to focus on the positive things we can do to progress – known as 'promotion motivation' – such as opening a savings account or planning an itinerary. In the later stages, we switch to 'prevention motivation' mode where we focus more on responsibilities and avoid doing anything negative that could impede our goal – such as splurging on a new pair of shoes. Depending on which bit you struggle with, the study authors have some advice. At the start, you could 'make a list of the "right things" you can do to progress, take note of some of the positive things you will attain by reaching your goal, and reward yourself when you make progress.' And later on, as you near your goal? They advise listing any ►



negative points that could stop you from reaching your goal, 'and give yourself a break from something that you don't enjoy when you make progress.'

JAM #5
YOU HAVEN'T REFLECTED

It's important to acknowledge and celebrate any successes that you've already had. 'Your body will release endorphins, which reinforce a positive attitude and you'll be motivated to take on the next challenge,' says Eék. 'Dedicate a few minutes each day to writing down, or saying aloud, what you've accomplished and what the next goal is.' Meanwhile, Piper says we also need to feel the buzz of progress. 'A Harvard study looked at journal entries of over 200 people and found what made people happiest was when they were making progress towards something, so celebrate what you've already achieved on the way.'

JAM #6
IT FEELS BORING

We've all been there. There's something you really need to do but, frankly, it's dull. How to keep plugging away until it's done and dusted, rather than getting distracted? 'It feels more rewarding to check your emails because you know how to do that so it's an easy win,' says Sara Milne Rowe, performance coach and author of *The SHED Method: Making Better Choices When It Matters* (Penguin, £12.99). 'Practise staying connected to why a goal matters. You start to feel you're in control and that you're making progress.'

4 MOTIVATION KILLERS (YOU'LL BE SURPRISED BY)

Feeling too happy Getting too cosy and comfortable at work can lead to complacency, according to research from Suffolk University. 'Employees perceive that they are doing well and it's not necessary for them to take initiatives, thereby reducing their proactive behaviours,' says the study's author.

Your mates Beware telling friends and family of your intentions to write a novel or learn Mandarin – research published in the journal *Psychological Science* has shown that vocalising your goals too soon can lessen the chances you'll see them through: essentially, just talking about them tricks your brain into thinking you've already achieved them.

Your fitness tracker Alas, your fancy fitness wearable may not be enough to drag you off the sofa for a workout. Researchers at Clarkson University in the US found that when participants were given monitors to count their steps, their physical activity wasn't 'much above the minimum, and their activity didn't change with the monitoring'.

Money Financial incentives aren't the motivational tool you might think. The National Bureau of Economic Research in the US found gym-going participants promised a financial reward made just 0.14 more gym visits than those who had no reward, while another study revealed workers who received a cash bonus performed worse than those who got nothing. **Q**