

Eight Ways To Achieve Your Goals

13 SEPTEMBER 2017

1 Make it a money-losing venture

According to a study that compared rewards versus punishment in motivating reluctant exercisers, losing money is more painful than not getting it in the first place. So rather than rewarding yourself at the end of a task, try paying yourself a lump sum to begin with, and then fine yourself if you fall short of your goals.

2 Use subliminal messages

Priming the subconscious by having reminders of your goals helps you to achieve them, according to a large body of psychological research. Try sticking notes around your home or pictures of whatever it is that you are aiming for.

3 Make abstract goals visual

In tests of physical endurance, people stayed strong for longer when they saw a bar graph growing over time rather than a stopwatch going round and round. The researchers suggest that the same trick could help in other walks of life, perhaps drawing a graph to track your holiday savings rather than checking your bank balance.

4 Mind your language

Active verbs for dealing with difficulties, such as “battling” or “overcoming” make it harder to control impulses. Forget about “fighting” desires and think about “stopping” or “pausing” them instead.

5 Give yourself regular rewards

Don't save the payoff until the bitter end. Instead, try giving yourself smaller rewards along the way. Research suggests that even smaller meaningless rewards help spur people on. It seems that the fear of missing out keeps us going just a little bit longer.

6 Create a little competition

Research shows that near-misses are more motivational than wins, and tend to spur people on to better things. What's more, the boost you get from failing at one task spills over to others. To get the best from yourself it might help to compete against someone who is slightly better than you.

7 Watch what you eat

Avoid the high-fat diet fad. According to studies in both rats and humans, a high-fat diet affects gene expression in the brain in such a way as to impair the mesolimbic dopamine system, which controls motivation.

8 Laugh

Don't just take a break, have a laugh. In a study in which people took brief breaks from an impossible task to watch videos those who had seen something funny persisted for longer than those who watched a relaxing video of dolphins. Hilarious cat videos will help you get your work done: you heard it here first.

*Extract from 9th September 2017 **New Scientist** article by Emma Young*

