



How to Get Motivated

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Do you ever have those days when you come into the office and, as soon as you see the piles on (and maybe even around) your desk, you're paralyzed? Is your 'to do' list so long that you don't know where to start? Are you just dreading facing yet another day at the office?

We all have days when it's difficult to get motivated. So here are some tips to help you get inspired again:

1. **Do Something:** The fact is that sometimes we just have to get started, even if we're not motivated. Staring at the piles and agonizing over the lengthy to do list only adds to the stress and anxiety that keeps you un-motivated. Many times, the quickest way to get motivated again is to 'just do it.' Start with one pile and make your way through it methodically, only touching each item one time and taking action until that one thing is finished. The sense of accomplishment usually kicks in and keeps you going - it's the getting started that's the tough part. Writers will tell you that the most difficult part about writing is just sitting down and doing it - frequently when you just don't feel like doing it.

2. **Do Nothing:** And I really mean *nothing*. Don't stare at the piles. Don't agonize over the to-do list. Don't talk to anyone. Don't turn on the radio, pace around your office, get a cup of coffee, or make another list. Just close the door, close your eyes and do absolutely nothing for 15 minutes. If you're not used to doing this, chances are that you'll start fretting about what you need to do and all kinds of thoughts will begin racing around in your head. Don't worry about that. Just recognize the thoughts and then let them go. Concentrate on your breathing. Fifteen minutes of nothing, particularly in the midst of a frenzied week or at the beginning of a long day, will do wonders for clearing your head and reducing anxiety so that you're motivated to tackle even the most daunting challenge.

3. **Get Moving:** Got a bear of a brief to write, an opening statement to prepare, or an estate plan that requires some real mental gymnastics? Getting your body moving will make those mental exercises flow more easily. Take a walk, go to the gym or run around with your kids. Your physical energy will get the mental energy flowing. Lots of times, great ideas come in the midst of a physical activity. Sitting at a desk, in meetings, in court waiting for your adversary, at a deposition or a closing for hours on end shuts down not only your body, but your mind. Get your body moving and the blood flowing to your brain.

4. Carry a Notebook: Inspiration comes at the most inopportune times. Capture those great ideas when they arise so that when you're not as motivated you'll have something to fall back on. Always have a small notebook, some index cards, or something else to write on, as well as something to write with. Sitting in the movie theater, driving in the car (wait until you're stopped to write, though), taking a walk (see above), and those last few minutes before you fall asleep are often the times when the best ideas come. If you have a pen and paper handy, you can preserve those great ideas and then get right back to what you were doing, without the anxiety that you'll forget. And they'll be ready for you when you're facing another day of work.

5. Create a Deadline: Often, the best 'motivation' is knowing that you have a filing deadline, a date on which you have to give the presentation, an appointment with the client to discuss their estate plan, or a court appearance. But since not all tasks have built-in deadlines, sometimes we have to create our own deadlines. If you're facing the awesome task of clearing some space on your desk so that you can work again, setting a timer for 15 minutes can be a great motivator. Often, once you get through that first fifteen minutes, you'll be motivated to continue. If you've got a project that is important to complete, but not urgent, make it urgent by setting a deadline and writing it in your calendar.

6. Enlist a Friend: You can reinforce your deadline by enlisting a friend, colleague, or coach to help you. When you tell someone else that you're planning to do something by a specific date and time, it creates an expectation. We don't like to embarrass ourselves or let other people down, so we're much more likely to get it done so we don't have to admit to someone else that we didn't do it. Ask your friend, mentor, colleague or coach to keep you accountable by following up to make sure you've done what you said you were going to do, when you said you were going to do it. Even an adversary can be a 'friend' in this context if you promise that you'll have the discovery documents to them by a certain time, or you'll be present for a settlement conference on a specific date. Create an appointment where one didn't exist before, and you're creating a built in deadline for yourself.

Coaches, colleagues, family and friends can also help motivate you by being sounding boards for your ideas, or just by lending an ear when it's time to vent about the bad day you're having, the pressure you're under or the uncertainty you're facing with a particular client or matter. Sometimes we lose motivation after completing a big project. Talking about your successes or your progress can be exceptionally motivating, too. Don't underestimate the power of sharing yourself with others to reduce your anxiety and get you back on track.

7. Turn On Some Music: This may not work in all situations in which you feel unmotivated, but it can certainly help. Music may 'soothe the savage beast' in you by calming you down if you're anxious, but music can also raise your heart rate, get your toes tapping and lift your mood so that you're ready to work. And if you turn on the music and start dancing, you'll be double motivating yourself.

8. Take a Vacation: Take a good, hard look at where you are, how much and how long you're working, and when the last time was that you took a break. Many lawyers confuse lack of motivation with pure exhaustion or burnout. Everyone needs some down time, and if you haven't taken a vacation in years, you're routinely working around the clock and on weekends, motivation may not be the real

problem. Making a clean break from all things legal, even for just a few days, can bring you a fresh perspective and a whole new reserve of motivation.

9. Try Something Different: Maybe your lack of motivation is the result of pure boredom. If you're doing the same things, day after day, your brain turns off and tunes out. We all need growth and stimulation. See if there's a project you can work on that would stretch your mind, challenge your knowledge, or force you to work on something different. Join a new committee at the bar association or find a lawyer in your firm that practices in a different area of the law and see if there's something you can help with. Take some CLE courses in a different area of the law.

Doing something different may mean doing something different *outside* of your work life. Motivation for your work can return when you feel inspired by other areas of your life. Volunteer, take a class, or learn a new skill. Even reading books in areas or on topics you haven't previously explored can bring new insights or inspiration.

10. Do Something for Someone Else: Again, this doesn't have to be related to work, although it can be. You can volunteer at a free clinic, give a free seminar, take on some pro bono work, or offer to mentor another lawyer. There are a million ways that you can be of service to others, whether it's joining a community organization, helping at your local church or food kitchen, visiting an elderly or sick relative or friend, surprising your spouse by making their favorite meal or doing a chore they hate, helping someone move, taking your family on an outing that they want to take (as opposed to going where you want to go), or calling up an old friend you've lost touch with. Doing something - anything - for someone else takes the focus off of you and often leaves you feeling better about yourself - and more motivated - in the bargain.



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