

When the first flush of enthusiasm wears off...

We've all done it. Started the year, month, week or even the day full of big plans and enthusiasm only to find that the goal was more challenging than expected and that the initial enthusiasm wasn't enough to carry us through to successful completion.

What to do then?

Here are some thoughts about how to stay productive and how to succeed at the difficult things.

1. Start with WHY

Simon Sinek was right. You have to start with WHY. Why are you undertaking this project, task, goal, job or contract? Many years ago, as a member of a voluntary organisation I undertook the preparatory training of all of the incoming chapter Presidents for one year. As part of the training weekend I gave them each a bright yellow card. The heading at the top read, "The reasons I am taking on the role of President:"

I asked them to complete the card and to take it home and put it somewhere special. "There will come a day when you ask yourself – Why did I agree to do this? That's when you go and get this card and study it" I told them.

It worked. The organisation saw fewer mid-term resignations than usual that year.

Your turn. What are the goals you've got bogged down with, the tasks you've lost enthusiasm for or the projects that have slid down to the bottom of the priority list? Ask yourself, "What are the benefits I will see when I succeed at this?" "Why did I originally want to do it?"

Sometimes, the world has changed so much since you made the plan that it's no longer relevant to pursue that outcome. More often it's simply a

matter of remembering why it's important and you'll rekindle the enthusiasm.

2. Know your preferences

Do you prefer to focus on one thing at a time or are you more productive when you have multiple projects running? It's important to know this about yourself.

Linked to cognitive styles and your preferred hemisphere, there's a real personality difference here. Left-brainers usually prefer to work on one project and see it through to the end before starting the next one. Right-brainers often do better with multiple projects and regular shifts in the type of work.

If you're more left-brained and you find yourself running out of motivation for a task or project, you might regain some enthusiasm by re-visiting the overall plan. The complete story will usually be more exciting than the particular bit you've reached right now. Seeing how each stage sets up the next and the way the result build up to the successful conclusion is often all that's needed to get a left-brained thinker back on track.

If you're more right-brained in your approach, you may find that switching to another project and doing something completely different is the way to stay productive. If that's the case for you, you may find it helpful to plan a period of time with two or three major projects running concurrently. When your enthusiasm for one begins to ebb, you can switch to another and give yourself a change of pace or style for a while and still work on important tasks.

3. Plan your rewards

When you achieve a significant goal or complete an important project you may feel that is a reward in itself. That may be true. However, if you are finding it tough to sustain the level of

activity that will get you the results you want, consider building in some form of reward.

For example, you might plan to reward yourself when the whole project is done. The reward could be some time off to make a trip somewhere enjoyable. That doesn't have to mean an exotic foreign holiday – it could simply be an afternoon in the local park or a weekend visiting a special friend or relative. This can then serve the dual purpose of rewarding your achievement and relaxing before you start the next big thing.

Perhaps more usefully, you could build in more regular rewards for achieving smaller tasks that contribute to your overall goals. A half-hour break for a cup of coffee and a chat with a colleague might be a good reward for something that's had you focused at your desk for 2 hours or more. Treating yourself to some new music or a movie could be the reward for making a series of phone calls or selling a certain amount of products. Setting aside an evening to spend on a neglected hobby or to meet up with a friend might feel like a good compensation for reaching a milestone in your major goals.

The important thing to consider is what makes you feel good. What would you enjoy looking forward to? What would motivate you to stick at the current task so that you could complete it and enjoy your reward?

4. Don't suffer in silence

There are times for all of us when we feel overwhelmed by either the amount of work we've taken on or the challenging nature of that work. When that happens, you may be inclined to hunker down and try to work through the problem on your own. That doesn't always work. In fact, most people find that once they get into that state of feeling overwhelmed, they become less and less productive.

So what's the answer? Talk to someone.

If you have a coach, that's easy. Your coach is on your side and will help you think through the difficulties and re-focus on the important tasks. That kind of conversation will break you out of the overwhelm and put things back in proportion.

If you don't have a coach, talk to a friend or colleague you trust. (And make a note to find a coach for the future!) Two heads really are better than one and sometimes just the process of explaining your difficulty to someone else will begin to make it clearer to you.

...and finally

If you've done all of the above and you're still not making any progress, call it a day. Go home, relax, do something you enjoy and accept that you're not perfect. Recognise that you can begin again tomorrow and the fact that today wasn't as productive as it could have been isn't the end of the world.

The real secret of success is not to give up. In NLP we say, 'there's no failure – only feedback'. George Bernard Shaw put it more eloquently:

“In a good cause there is no failure, only delayed success”

Dianne Lowther
Master Trainer of NLP

Dianne Lowther is a Master Trainer of NLP, Master Consultant/Trainer of LAB Profile and Founder of Brilliant Minds. She specialises in applications of NLP and LAB Profile for leadership and business results.

www.brilliantminds.co.uk