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“Our life is what our thoughts make it.” Marcus Aurelius

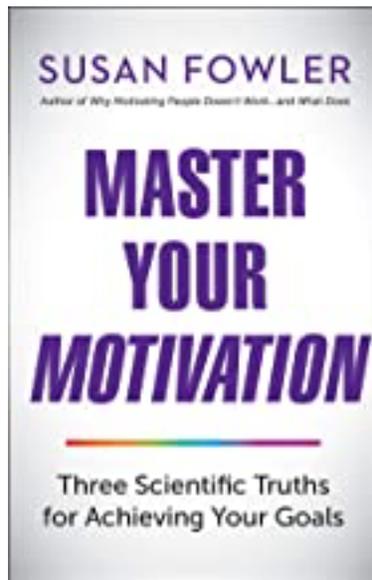
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TOPIC THIS ISSUE: MOTIVATION



## THREE TRUTHS ABOUT MOTIVATION

Adapted from *Master Motivation*  
By: Susan Fowler



Three scientific truths are at the heart of mastering your motivation. Using them in combination could transform the way you approach goals and your life. Their discovery represents one of the greatest breakthroughs in motivation science.

### Three Scientific Truths

You have a natural yearning to thrive—thriving is your human nature. We want to contribute, feel fulfilled, and grow and learn every day. Recognizing our nature to thrive leads to a critical question: How do I thrive?

The answer is different than what we’ve been led to believe. Thriving doesn’t depend on money, power, or status. Thriving doesn’t come

from promotions, perks, or driving for results. Thriving certainly doesn’t happen through pressure, tension, or fear—or even willpower or discipline. Thriving requires Choice, Connection, and Competence.

**First scientific truth: You need to create choice.** You have an innate need to perceive you have choices, recognize and feel you have options within boundaries, and have a sense of control over what is happening at any time: “I am the source of my behavior.” When you don’t create choice, your energy is diminished, and you are less likely to achieve your goals.

**Second scientific truth: You need to create connection.** You have an innate need to feel a sense of belonging and genuine connection to others without concerns about ulterior motives, to pursue goals aligned to meaningful values and a noble purpose, and to

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contribute to something greater than yourself. When you don't create connection, your energy is compromised, and even if you achieve your goals, you are less likely to find the experience meaningful or worth repeating.

**Third scientific truth: You need to create competence.** You have an innate need to feel effective at managing everyday situations, to demonstrate skill over time, and to feel a sense of growth and learning every day. When you don't create competence, your energy is blocked, and your frustration at not being able to meet challenges or make progress puts achieving long-term goals at risk.

**Motivation Isn't What You Think**

Motivation is the energy to act. The quality of your energy determines the quality of your motivation. Eating a candy bar produces energy—but eating a handful of almonds generates longer-lasting and more efficient energy. When your physical stamina dips, if you grab a candy bar, soft drink, or french fries, your blood sugar shoots up and so does your energy. Then what happens? You crash. Your blood sugar drops below what it was before, so you need more sugar, caffeine, or carbs.

A similar phenomenon occurs with motivation—how you fuel your psychic energy produces either a junk food motivational rush or a healthier alternative.

When it comes to motivation, the quality of your energy is what matters. *Mastering your motivation requires letting go of the outdated notion that motivation depends on how much motivation you have.* Creating choice, connection, and competence generates high-quality energy, which leads to optimal motivation. Optimal motivation delivers productivity and results but also increased creativity and innovation, an enhanced sense of well-being, and higher levels of work passion that sustain your high performance and help you thrive. On the other hand, eroding choice, connection, and competence leads to suboptimal motivation. Traditional ways of motivating ourselves—from relying on external motivators such as winning rewards, acquiring power, or achieving status, to succumbing to negative forces such as pressure, fear, or shame—tend to result in suboptimal motivation.

**Appreciating the difference between optimal motivation and suboptimal motivation has real-world implications.**



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# WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

**By: SUSAN FOWLER**



As human beings, we want to exhibit the positive tendencies of our human nature, and we yearn for optimal motivation. What's stopping us from creating what we naturally long to experience—choice, connection, and competence? Let's

explore the answers.

### **I Can't Shift**

Gina, a district manager, had a good excuse for not shifting. In fact, she refused to shift. She was being held accountable to implement a new approach to selling that she vehemently disagreed with. After years of providing award-winning service to her customers, she was being asked to focus on upselling her customers instead of meeting their needs.

Worse, she was expected to hold her team accountable for following the new policy. To say she had an imposed motivational outlook is an understatement.

It became clear: She was feeding on self-righteous indignation—that red-hot energy that fires you up when you know you are right and they are wrong. The only way to sustain this insidious form of junk food motivation is to continue fueling the flames of negative energy through blaming, name-calling, and comparing your intelligence or status favorably to theirs. Gina justified her suboptimal motivation by recounting examples of how moving from values-based selling to a profit motive was already damaging long-term client relationships.

But to Gina's credit, when she rejected on how sad and deflated she felt, she realized she wasn't saying, "*I can't shift*"; she was admitting, "I don't want to shift." She acknowledged that she had chosen not to shift. Her honesty provided the openness to ask herself, "*Why haven't I shifted?*" and entertain the questions, "*What if I did shift? Do I have any values that could support a shift?*"

Reflecting on these questions gave rise to a mindful moment and to intriguing possibilities. What if she was wrong? What if she could learn something? With her newfound awareness, Gina announced to everyone in the class—including her sales team, "*I just shifted. I'll either learn that I am wrong and they are right. Or I'll learn from experience what doesn't work and be a more effective advocate against the approach.*" She decided to embrace the new approach, full steam ahead. Her conclusion: "*Either way, we all win.*"

Gina's experience of reflecting on her reasons for not shifting recalls Byron Katie's brilliant process of inquiry to question the thoughts at the root of suffering, called "*The Work.*" Katie asks you to answer four



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powerful questions when you have a negative judgment or conflict about someone or something:

- ***Is it true?***
- ***Can you absolutely know that it's true?***
- ***How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?***
- ***Who would you be without the thought?***

After you answer the four questions, Katie asks you to turn your negative judgment around—to find one or more opposites—and consider whether that turned-around thought or those thoughts could be true.

Without her realizing it, Gina's reflection had revealed answers to Katie's questions: Is it true that this new sales approach is bad? How do you know it's true? Being open to the possibilities, Gina recognized the benefit of exploring the idea further. She'd either gain data to support the truth of her assertions or learn that she was wrong and fulfill her value for learning. Left with only constructive reasons for shifting, Gina could let go of her negative energy and focus on moving forward with positive energy, vitality, and well-being.

### **Beware Fatal Distractions**

Fatal distractions entice you, lure you in, and cast you into suboptimal motivation day in and day out. If you gravitate toward incentives, bonuses, prizes, rankings, competition, and recognition to feed your motivation, you have surrendered to the distraction of external motivation.

To arm yourself against a fatal distraction, you need to recognize one when you see it. Three of the distractions are so common—and so commonly projected as good things—that you may be surprised at how they erode your choice, connection, and competence without you realizing it. Beware materialism, the search for happiness, and busyness.

**Materialism.** Money is one of the most sinister fatal distractions because we all need money (or its equivalent) to survive. But there is a difference between needing money and being motivated by money. When money is your driving force, you do not control it; you are controlled by it—robbing you of choice. Money distracts you from high-quality reasons to do what you do—undermining connection. Money becomes the end goal instead of learning and growth—diminishing opportunities for competence.

Money does not buy happiness or the things that make you happy. In fact, the more materialistic your core values are, the more the quality of your life is diminished. A lower quality of life is reflected in a variety of ways, including low energy, anxiety, substance abuse, negative emotions, depression, and a likelihood to engage in high-risk behaviors.

With the insight gained through recent motivation research and the fascinating field of social neuroscience showing how our need to connect with others is more basic than our need for food and shelter, you can master your motivation and shift your focus from fatal distractions such as money and materialism to the more empowering values of acceptance, compassion, emotional intimacy, caring for the welfare of others, and contributing to the world around you.

**The search for happiness.** Consider what the word happiness really signifies. It derives from hap (n.) meaning “*chance, fortune.*” Happy means “*lucky, favored by fortune, ... prosperous; of events, turning out well.*” Happiness

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depends on what happens. By its nature, something “*making you happy*” is antithetical to your psychological need for choice—the perception that you are the source of your own actions.

Instead of searching for happiness, an option is to focus on mastering your motivation.

**Busyness.** Maybe you wear busyness as a badge of honor: “*I’m so busy doing important things that I don’t have time for anything else!*” If that sounds familiar, you might consider how it is that many of the most successful people in the world find time to refresh their spirit and connect with people they love. You have the same 24 hours a day as everyone else on the planet.

What fuels your inability to disconnect from work is important to understand. If your passion is fueled by fatal distractions—power, status, image, money—your passion may prove obsessive, not harmonious. You don’t control obsessive passion—it controls you. If you are caught up in busyness for the wrong reasons, your busyness is a fatal distraction that erodes choice, connection, and competence.

### Work Hazards

Traditional techniques for motivating people at work have proven ineffective, faulty, or downright wrong. Yet, well-intentioned managers still drive for results, promote suboptimal motivation, and make creating choice, connection, and competence at work a real challenge.

Don’t cast all the blame on your manager for resorting to carrots or sticks, praise or pressure, and promises or threats. Have you ever seen the competencies your manager is being held accountable for achieving? “*Drive for results, exceed goals successfully, constantly and consistently be one of the top performers, be very bottom-line oriented, steadfastly push self and others for results, assess staff members’ hot buttons and use them to get the best out of the staff*”—these are real expectations from real performance plans.

The real job falls to you to move beyond the carrots and sticks that can beat you up. Since motivation is at the heart of everything you do or don’t do, why depend on others to do what you can do for yourself?

You will discover that proactively creating choice, connection, and competence at work is worth the effort. Three ways to begin are to flip feedback, deepen connection, and advocate for justice.

**Flip the feedback.** Getting pure feedback on your performance is essential to your development and ultimate success at anything you do in life. Most managers don’t like giving feedback, so maybe it’s time you flipped the feedback. Don’t wait for it; ask for it. Requesting feedback delivers the information you need when you need it but also results in less defensiveness—meaning you are more likely to hear what you need to hear and act on it.

**Deepen connection.** Your greatest opportunity to master your motivation at work is in creating connection. Even if you create choice and competence, they are incomplete without the meaning, sense of purpose, or fulfillment of connection. You create connection when you and meaning in whatever you are doing—especially at work.

**Advocate for justice.** If you work for an organization that you think is unfair, you have a choice. You can leave. You can continue feeling disconnected and joyless but not leave (or as it’s often described, you can

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quit and stay—rationalizing that you need the money).

Or you can choose to stay and stand up for justice. You can work to open closed-door policies where information is used as a form of control. You can campaign against wage discrimination, favoritism, and implicit bias.

When you advocate for the principles of justice and fairness, you create deeper connection for yourself and with others.

A common thread of every great spiritual practice throughout history is the belief that human beings can raise their conscious awareness and live life at a higher level. The belief that change is possible entices you to greet a new day. Hope is a belief that things—and you—can change for the better.

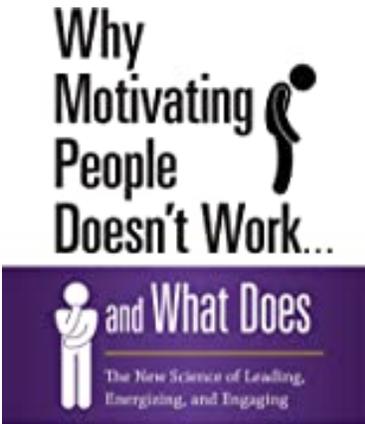
We are beings with self-determination and the ability to reflect and mindfully choose who we are, what we believe, and how we behave. **The skill to master your motivation may be your greatest opportunity to evolve, grow in wisdom, and be the light the world so desperately needs.**



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# THE MOTIVATION DILEMMA

By: Susan Fowler



Susan Fowler  
Foreword by Ken Blanchard

**The motivation dilemma is that leaders are being held accountable to do something they cannot do — motivate others.**

Understanding what works when it comes to motivation begins with a phenomenon every employee (and leader) experiences — the appraisal process.

To experience the appraisal process, think about a recent meeting you attended. Reflect on your different thoughts and emotions as you noticed the meeting on your calendar, jumped on a call and rushed to make the meeting on time. Whether mindful

of it or not, you had thoughts and feelings about attending the meeting — you had both cognitive and emotional responses to the meeting.

*Is the meeting a safe or threatening event? Am I feeling supported or threatened? Is it a good use of or a waste of my time? Am I excited or fearful? Am I attending because I want to or because I feel I have to?*

Ultimately, how you *feel* about the meeting has the greatest influence on whether your sense of well-being is negative or positive. Your well-being determines your intentions, which ultimately lead to your behavior.

Every day, your employees' **appraisal of their workplace** leaves them with or without a positive sense of well-being. Their well-being determines their intentions, and intentions are the greatest predictors of behavior. A positive appraisal that results in a positive sense of well-being leads to positive intentions and behaviors that generate employee engagement.

