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Self-motivation: a guide for the foundation year doctor

Introduction

People always want to achieve something, and foundation year doctors are no exception. However, the main difference between one who succeeds and one who does not is the drive to achieve the desired goal. Motivation is this drive to achieve progress and develop. Motivation refers to the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of human behaviour (Geen, 1994).

There are two kinds of motivation:

- Intrinsic motivation, which occurs when you are internally motivated to do something
- Extrinsic motivation, which comes into play when you are influenced by external factors such as your job, power, promotion and various others.

Motivation varies from person to person and depends on your personal needs. Maslow (1970) described various needs for existence ranging from the basic physiological ones to reaching self-actualization. However, those needs are motivators only when they are unsatisfied.

Self-motivation

This is the fundamental tool for reaching all your goals and achieving what you want in life. Self-motivation is a complex process that largely depends on your initiative level in setting challenges, having belief in yourself, persistently developing and improving the skills needed to achieve the goal. You need to believe, in yourself, that nothing can be achieved without hard work and that you will not stop working until the goal is reached.

Miss Deepali Trivedi is Ophthalmologist and Ms Sherminder Sanghera is Outpatient Manager, Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre, Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, Birmingham B18 7QH, and Dr Rachel Hooke is Working Time Directive (WTD) Implementation Manager, Airedale NHS Trust, Steeton, Keighley, West Yorkshire

Correspondence to: Miss D Trivedi

Bandura (1997) believes that every individual possesses a self system that enables him/her to exercise a measure of control over his/her thoughts, feelings and actions. This self system serves a self-regulatory function by providing individuals with self-beliefs. Factors that build and improve our level of self-motivation include:

- Self-confidence: having a belief in yourself that you can succeed
- Self-efficacy: having belief in your own ability to succeed
- Self-assurance: setting challenging goals for yourself and preparing yourself for any adverse events
- Self-reflection: believing in your achievements, and learning and growing from your mistakes.

Building your self-motivation

As you recognize how much potential you have and have the confidence to achieve your goals, the easier it will be to self-motivate. All you need to do is re-shape your thinking.

Setting goals

This provides clear direction and focus to the goals you want to achieve and work hard towards. Take every goal in your life as a challenge and be committed in achieving them. Sometimes tougher goals in themselves can be very interesting and motivating.

Positive thinking

This helps to create a powerful vision of success, self-confidence and self-efficacy. Doubting your abilities, criticizing yourself and negative thinking could harm your performance and self-confidence.

Rational thinking

Become aware of your thoughts and rationalize them. What thoughts worry you, why do they worry you, consider 'do I really need to worry about it and what do I do to improve it?'. You might get the answer to this by just thinking about it. Challenge any negative thoughts that prevail by questioning and rationalizing them.

Reshape your thinking

Try to turn your negative thinking into positive. Take any setback in life as a challenge and opportunity for something better. Have an optimistic approach to life and consider every adversity as temporary and changeable (Seligman, 1990).

Avoid demotivators

Try to move away from or get over anything that distracts or discourages you – for instance, someone who persistently points out your negative points and completely overlooks how hard you have been trying. Ignore things you cannot change.

Passion

Always set yourself an inspirational goal that keeps up your interest and enthusiasm, and work hard and whole-heartedly.

Motivating others

People who are themselves self-motivated can be the best motivators. Motivating people effectively without appearing bossy is a skill that you need to develop, including as a foundation year doctor. By understanding and predicting the way in which individuals are motivated, you can influence them by changing the components of that motivation process (Handy, 1993). You have to find ways of getting things done while dealing with a diverse group of

people with different skills, competence and even different personalities and cultural backgrounds.

To motivate successfully, you should be able to encourage, facilitate and communicate effectively, resolve conflict and maintain a healthy working environment (Trivedi et al, 2008). This involves:

- Developing good interpersonal skills, listening to and understanding others
- Encouraging every member of the team to participate in the task and respecting their views and opinions
- Being flexible and understanding every team member's difficulties. Sometimes strict rules and regulations can cause resentment and lack of interest in performing the task
- Recognizing and rewarding the efforts of the team members from time to time
- Giving regular feedback on the progress of the task
- Demonstrating that you value every team member's input

- Demonstrating your own commitment and passion for achieving the goal – if you do this your team members will respect your integrity.

Conclusions

You need to be able to motivate yourself to achieve your goals in life. This is particularly relevant for foundation year doctors. You also need to be able to motivate others to help you and themselves. One often follows from the other. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: Dr Hooke has worked in both management and medicine.

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KEY POINTS

- It is good to motivate yourself by setting goals and aiming to achieve them.
- If you are motivated yourself, you are in a strong position to motivate others.
- Try to motivate others without appearing authoritative.