

## Ep #29: What You Need to Know About Motivation



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Carrie Holland, MD, CPT**

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## Ep #29: What You Need to Know About Motivation

You are listening to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast, Episode #29. Motivation is great to get you started, but what do you do next? Let's talk about it.

Welcome to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. If you're balancing career, family, wellness, and some days sanity, you are in the right place. This is where high achieving, busy working moms get the tools they need to eat, move, and think. I'm your host, physician, personal trainer and Certified Life Coach, Carrie Holland. Let's do this.

Hey, how are you? What's new? What's good? So, what's good here, we are going to talk about motivation. Here's why. It's the new year. Okay, technically, we're already a few days into the new year. But this is a time when motivation becomes a bit of a buzzword. You'll hear it and see it as a lot of people are trying to kick new habits into gear.

So, things like, "I just need to get motivated. I'm not feeling very motivated. I wish I had your motivation." And, I get it. January 1 is a clean slate. There is a true and real psychological do-over that comes from flipping open a new calendar. And the number of resolutions that are made, to get in shape or get healthy or finally kick that bad habit, these skyrocket this month. And most of these resolutions, most just don't last.

I looked this up, and as expected, there is a ton of research and surveys about this. And, the responses are all over the map, but one study suggested that 23% of adults give up their resolution after the first week. One study even referenced January 19, and said that by this date, the majority of people will have abandoned the resolutions. The article even went so far as to call January 19, Quitters Day. I had no idea this was even a thing, until I started doing homework for this podcast.

But suffice it to say, it is pretty clear that resolutions are hard to keep. So, there are a number of reasons why this is the case, but what I want to zone in on today, is motivation. I think it's timely to talk about this now, because it's January, and many of you may be feeling very motivated to make change and take advantage of the year ahead of you.

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And in order to set you up for success, in whatever goal or habit you're pursuing, there are some key things to know about motivation. So, that one, you don't rely on it. Two, you maximize it at the right time. And three, you understand the connection between motivation, action, and results; because it may not be what you think.

So, here's what we're going to talk about today: We're going to talk about what motivation is, of course. I'll keep that brief. Then, we're going to talk about the different kinds of motivation; negative and positive, intrinsic and extrinsic. And we're not going to spend a ton of time on this, because what I really want to get to is the upsides and downsides of motivation.

And then, I'm also going to turn a concept that I commonly talk about here, I'm going to turn it upside down and share with you a caveat that applies to motivation. And you'll see what I mean by this, in just a few minutes. All right? So, let's go.

First, what exactly is motivation? We talked about it very briefly in Episode 16, in relation to discipline and willpower. But today, we are really zoning in on motivation and giving it its own separate podcast to dissect this. So, as a reminder, motivation, when you really get to the heart of it, is your willingness or desire to do something. Willingness or desire, those are key words.

So, if you go even further, you'll find that it's the reason you have for acting a certain way. Simply put, you can think of motivation as your "why". Why do you want to start exercising? To get in shape. Why do you want to eat more fruit and vegetables? To feel better, or maybe to lose weight. Why do you want to apply for a new job or change careers entirely? To do work that has meaning to you, and gives you a sense of purpose.

So, whatever it is, motivation is your moving cause; it's what compels you to take action, at least to start anyway. Keep it simple: Motivation moves. Alright, so this is an old habit. I was always trying to come up with mnemonics or play on words in med school to remember things, and here it is, it's coming in handy today.

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Okay, so to pick this apart even more, there are two types of motivation; extrinsic and intrinsic. First, as it sounds, extrinsic motivation comes from outside you. It's any reason outside of yourself to get something done. It's driven by external factors. So, those factors can be positive or negative.

Here are some examples, a wedding class reunion or other big event. A new diagnosis or illness. An athletic competition, like a race or 30-day challenge or 75-Hard. Extrinsic motivation can also come in the form of more money, more prestige, or fancy job title; all of those are external.

Extrinsic motivation can be positive, like the reward of money, a new job, a smaller dress size. Or, it can be negative, in the form of a threat, like a worsening illness, a fine or fee, losing your job, etc., it can go in either direction.

On the other hand, intrinsic motivation, as it sounds, it's the drive that comes from within. It's doing something for your own personal satisfaction. And it's fueled by your own desire; running, because you love to be outside. Eating a certain way, because you want to feel good. Applying for a job to challenge yourself and do hard things.

Intrinsic motivation is personal. So, like extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation can be positive. It's based on your sheer desire or passion for something. You do something because you love it, straight-up. Intrinsic motivation can also be negative, when it provokes fear. So, when you don't want to do something, but you do it out of fear. But this fear is internally created, rather than the fear of an external consequence, like losing your job.

As you can imagine, in most cases, intrinsic motivation tends to give you the biggest return on investment. Meaning, you take on a habit or you're looking to make serious change for yourself, and having intrinsic motivation and a genuine, innate desire to improve for your own sake, minus the external rewards, that's when you're onto something.

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When you're internally motivated to exercise because you love it, instead of exercising to lose weight. Or, take a class in order to learn something that interests you, versus taking the class solely to bolster your resume. Or, find a new job that gives you purpose, versus finding a job that simply pays you loads of money. That's when you're setting yourself up for success. That's the upside of intrinsic motivation.

I think of it as being true to yourself, and pursuing something that has meaning to you. It's something that you would do, even when no one's watching you. And the key feature here, is that it's genuine. Intrinsic motivation is self-created.

I've said this before, and it bears repeating in this context, but you can't fake yourself out. You can't pretend to be internally motivated to improve; you have to really want it. Genuine, intrinsic motivation is doing the work for the satisfaction you get, independent of any reward. And, you can't fake this.

So, here's why intrinsic motivation is so important. Whatever change it is, or whatever habit you're trying to adopt, eventually you're gonna get bored. As in going to the gym and lifting weights every day; it's not always exciting. Running on the trail when it's pitch black and 30 degrees outside; not always fun. That job that pays you six figures but sucks your soul: not rewarding.

How do you keep showing up every day? It's really hard to pretend that you're internally motivated, and your brain will call B.S. on you, in a heartbeat. So, without intrinsic motivation, when things get hard or boring, you will be much more likely to back out and turn off; no good. And, that's when people fall off the wagon.

Okay, let's go over the upsides of relying on intrinsic motivation. Okay, so first, it gives you persistence. When you're doing something that matters to you, whether it's learning to swim, searching for a new career, or changing your lifestyle, if it truly matters to you in your core, you will keep at it. Even when it gets hard, or even when it gets boring.

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Second, your learning and retention are much greater when it's fueled by intrinsic motivation. You are far more likely to truly learn something and then hang on to it when you're engaged and genuinely interested for your own personal growth, versus taking on something purely for an external reward like praise, recognition, or money.

The upside of using extrinsic motivation in certain situations, is that it can help you get through things you don't want to do. So, as an example, if you want to stop spending so much money on takeout, you make a plan to save a certain amount of money and forego takeout, so you can go on a cool vacation instead. There it is, that's using external motivation to do something that might be hard in the moment, and rewarding the behavior with a fun vacation or trip.

If you have a job that you do not like, you may see the paycheck as the external motivator. You have to show up and do the work even if you don't want to, in order to be paid. But if you've done that, you know how it feels to do it over time, and it is no good.

Another example would be biggest loser competitions, or any sort of weight loss challenge with money attached to it. You may see the money or winning, as the external motivation to keep going. And you know what I'm gonna say if you do these sorts of challenges; whether it's the Biggest Loser, or 30 days of squats, or 75-Hard. Whatever it is, that challenge will serve as your external motivator, for sure.

But then, ask yourself my most very favorite question when it comes to these types of challenges; and then, what? Meaning, what happens on the day after the challenge? What will you do when there's no money to be won? Or, when there's no more competition at stake, then what?

This illustrates the challenge of relying on an external reward to keep you going. Once the reward has happened, you have to be prepared for the next day. And, this is where I commonly see people fall off their habits. Because they haven't found their "why". They haven't determined their internal driving force. Okay?

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So, here is the key to know about extrinsic motivation; it will get the job done. Meaning, it will get you started and light a fire under your booty to take action. It may also reveal an interest to you that you didn't even know you had. As an example, if you've ever done a Couch-to-5K, maybe you started out thinking that you hated running, and it was the app and the upcoming race that kept you moving.

But somewhere in that training process, you realized that you actually enjoy running. And once the 5K is over, you keep running because you love it. So, there that's an example of a transition from external to internal motivation. And, that's pretty sweet when that happens.

But there are some downsides to relying on external motivation. So first, it feeds. If you regularly rely on rewards like money, praise, trophies, or titles to motivate you, you may find yourself constantly in pursuit of more, more, more, and that is just straight-up exhausting. Plus, the thrill of the reward may fizzle out over time. You may find that you need more of a reward; meaning more money, more power, more praise, in order to justify your efforts.

Second, external motivation is typically finite. It is short lived and then it's over; you win the race, you get down to the next lower dress size, you win your office's biggest loser competition, you get the job that pays you a lot. But once that external motivator is gone, then what? So often, when you rely on an external motivator, you often find yourself lost once the motivator is no longer there to pursue.

Third, and probably the biggest downside to relying on extrinsic motivation is this, extrinsic motivation does not create passion. In fact, it can do the opposite and create a pressure that stresses you out. So, if you're in a job that you hate, but you're doing it solely to take home six figures, that's no good. And you have to decide for yourself, whether it's worth it to stay in a job that leaves you unfulfilled, and miserable, or find something else that fills you with purpose, even if it doesn't have the big paycheck.

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And if you've ever been there, and you've tried to stick it out, you know what a challenge it can be. I've been there. I've done it. I tried to make myself love clinical medicine, and I just couldn't. The motivation of the paycheck just didn't cut it for me, at all. It wasn't until I took a huge risk and left, and started a career that brought me so much more joy, that I could see it.

Alright, so to review, we've talked about intrinsic motivation; the drive that comes from within. And extrinsic motivation; any reason outside yourself to pursue something. We've talked about their upsides and their downsides.

Here is where things get interesting. I'm going to backpedal just a little bit on something that I commonly say, okay? So, you know that thoughts create your feelings, and feelings lead you to take action, right? Again, this is based on universally accepted truths that you'll find in philosophy and psychology textbooks; I'm not making this stuff up.

Let's apply this to motivation. How do you create the feeling of motivation? As an example, let's take exercise, because I find this is where it most commonly applies. Many of you have told me that in order to exercise you need to feel motivated. So, let's run with that. If you want to feel motivated to exercise, you have to practice thinking thoughts that make you feel motivated.

So, something like, "I'm going to feel really awesome when I'm lifting these weights. I'm going to go and get stronger. I'm going to feel like a rockstar, once I'm done with this workout." When you think that way, maybe that makes you feel motivated. You are choosing sentences that you want to practice thinking, so that they, in turn, become your beliefs.

And when you practice telling yourself those sentences, you feel motivated. The thoughts you are choosing to think, create the feeling of motivation. And then from that place of feeling motivated, you slog yourself to the gym and pick up the weights and get your workout done. There's your action; you did the thing; you did your workout. You told yourself thoughts that made you feel motivated.

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And then from feeling motivated, you took action in the form of getting your workout done. And, that pattern will work at first. But then, what happens over time? I know I talk about thinking and feeling a lot. And yes, thinking in a way that makes you feel motivated is key. It is critical to getting you started. But what I find, both for myself in my own experience, and in the women I coach, is that motivation is not a reliable feeling; it is neither reliable nor sustainable.

In BJ Fogg's books, *Tiny Habits*, he even compares motivation to a super fun friend that you go out with on a night on the town. But that same person may not be reliable to pick you up at the airport. Same idea: over time, motivation gets harder and harder to create. It is unreliable. I know I've said that you can choose your thoughts in order to create your feelings.

But it's pretty hard to create the feeling of motivation all the time. And the reason for this goes back to our primitive brain; our brains are lazy. Motivation is a high energy feeling. There's a lot of energy behind motivation. It takes a lot of energy from your brain to get and then stay motivated. So, you can put motivation in the same bucket with other high energy feelings, like excitement or rage.

I think of those as feelings that are hard to sustain repeatedly, over the long term. With a high energy feeling like motivation, your brain will accept it and support that feeling for a while. But over time, your brain widens up and, in an effort to conserve energy, it will do everything it can to offer you a different, less high energy feeling than motivation.

And the result here, is that you won't always feel motivated to do your workout. Even if you know you'll feel better after, your warm and cozy bed may win out over the freezing cold water of the pool that is waiting for you at the crack of dawn, if you let motivation be the deciding factor. Motivation is unreliable. And it won't always be available to you when you want it. Your brain will say, "No, thank you."

And motivation, it is not sustainable. It just doesn't last. So, here is another reason why motivation is so fickle, and generally unreliable. And it's so

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fascinating, because it is true, whether we're talking intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. So, when it comes to motivation, certain conditions need to be met first, in order to do whatever you set out to do.

Whatever it is, there's a condition required, in order for you to feel motivated; it's fun, it's new, it's a novelty, there's a deadline approaching, there's a fine or a fee, or a consequence if you don't do the thing. There is a reward of some sorts on the other end of the task, whether it is tangible, or intangible. And, those conditions are compelling enough to get you going.

Okay, so this is where it gets really cool and we flip the script. This is where you can thank motivation for getting you started, and then you use your brain to create different feelings that compel you to take action, long after your motivation has faded. So, here's the takeaway: You have to continue to take action, even if motivation is not the driving force, in order to continue seeing results.

This is where holding yourself accountable, having serious, straight-up discipline, making a plan and sticking to it, even when you don't want to; here, is where this absolutely matters. So, please show me someone who was motivated 100% of the time; I'm not sure that she exists. Even the most intrinsically motivated people will get bored after a while.

And in order to be successful, they have to rely on something else to continue taking action. To put it even more simply, when you are initiating a big change or a new habit, think of it in this order: Motivation, Action, Results. Meaning, when you're just starting out on your pathway to change, you can generate the high energy feeling of motivation, that will lead you to take action and get to the gym or pick up the weights or jump in the pool or show up for your Peloton ride. And, those actions will lead to results.

You will feel the endorphin rush. You'll feel the sweat, or you'll be able to move more easily in your body without getting winded. So, at the beginning, it is this order, motivation, action, results. But over time, the

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order flips. The more you do this, the more you will see this pattern emerge. So, here it is Action, Results, Motivation.

Meaning, you take action before you feel motivated, because if you wait for motivation, you're gonna be waiting a long honking time. So, you show up to the gym, even when there's a blizzard. You swim your laps in the dead of winter, even though you hate cold water. You get up at the crack of dawn to work out, even though you would love to sleep a little longer.

You take action. And from that action, done repeatedly over time, you get stronger, you get faster, you feel less winded, you feel good. Because that's what exercise does for you; feeling better, or getting faster, or getting stronger. Those are your results.

Remember, your work, your results. When you put in the work, and show up for the daily grind and fall in love with that process, you will see results. And that is true whether it's in the gym, at work, in your relationships. Really, anywhere in your life; your work, your results. And those results, what do they do for you? They motivate you.

Your results compel you to keep going. Seeing the results of your hard work; there it is. That's pride. That's success, and that is self-efficacy. So, over time, the order switches; now, it's Action, Results, Motivation. When you start, motivation is the driving force. But over time, motivation comes after you take action instead of before.

So, there it is, that is the coolest part; motivation can be both. It can be a feeling, which you use to get started. But motivation can also be an end product, it can be a result in and of itself. So cool. And this, here it is, this is where it gets even more fascinating. I mentioned this earlier, that often, motivation comes from the novelty or newness of something; the novelty is a condition that gets you started.

But over time, that novelty fades. Learning a new language because you're interested in it, may not always be interesting, no matter how motivated you were at the outset. Or, think of how day one at the gym feels, and compare

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it to day 67; not as cool and new anymore. Or, think of your first day at your dream job, versus the start of your fourth year in. Those do not feel the same.

The motivation that got you started will have long faded. But here's the thing, in order to see results, you have to keep showing up. You have to keep putting in your reps. And it's really hard to stay motivated, to do that day in and day out. But over time, the place of motivation changes. Meaning, instead of being what gets you started, motivation is what you get at the end. And, it fuels further action.

And it only does that, it only becomes the end product, when you stick it out. When you move beyond the feeling of motivation and take action, despite not having any motivation. And in turn, create results for yourself, then you're creating your own motivation. You are creating it and experiencing it as a byproduct of the results you have made for yourself.

It's at the end of the cycle, but it's what perpetuates the cycle. So cool. I have to admit, it took me a very long time to understand this. It took me understanding my own habits and doing a lot of work on myself. And then, coaching a ton of women around this so that I could see and pick up patterns.

If you start a habit or decide to make a big change and you stick with it, you will inevitably have days that you just don't feel like it. I realized that about myself. I am most definitely a nose to the grind kind of person. I absolutely love lifting weights. So, of all forms of exercising, strength training is by far my favorite. But there are days when I'm just not feeling it, but I do it anyway. I take action, even if the motivation isn't there to get me started.

Because I know, that motivation, it's there waiting for me later, when I can pick up that enormous box and move it all by myself. Or, when I put all the weight plates back at the end of my workout and just feel strong, period. And that motivation perpetuates the cycle. Seeing results fuels the cycle.

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The other thing I want to address is this, and you may have already been asking it as we've been talking through this. If the feeling of motivation is unreliable, what feeling do you need in order to take action? If you're wondering that, I encourage you to dig in and answer that question for yourself. How do you need to feel in order to take action?

So again, I'm going back to exercise, because this is one of the more common examples that comes up when I'm coaching. But whatever it is for you, whether it's searching for a new job, writing a book, beginning your side project, starting a business, whatever it is, ask yourself; how do I need to feel in order to take action? Is it empowered, hopeful, prepared, focused? Whatever it is, work the model.

If your goal is to get up at 5am to get on your Peloton, there's your action. Now, go backwards. How do you need to feel in order to get yourself out of bed at 5am? So, let's go with empowered, because that is a common answer I get when I ask this question. And to be honest, I just love that word.

So, to me, empowered is not a high energy feeling that burns out like motivation. Instead, I think of empowerment as a strong, steady, fierce feeling. It is tough as hell and it's not going to fizzle out the way that motivation does. So, let's run with empowered. Okay, so taking it back one more step.

How do you need to think in order to feel empowered? Here's some examples; I can do this, this is going to be really good for me, I am committed to getting my workout done before the rest of the day starts. Whatever it is, find the thought and practice thinking it.

As a reminder, when you practice thinking, it means you consciously choose to think thoughts that lead to the results you want. And when other thoughts that don't help you, thoughts like; this isn't gonna make a difference. I can't do this workout. This is going to be rough. I am too tired or out of shape or too old. Whatever it is, whatever limiting beliefs start to come up, you can allow them to be there.

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But remember, treat those sentences as you would a volume dial; you turn down the volume on the negative sentences that are keeping you from getting your workout done. And then, you turn up the volume on the sentences that compel you to get your booty out of bed and get your workout done.

You are allowing those sentences to co-exist because generally, there are tons of sentences firing off in your brain at any moment. And you are just selectively choosing to turn up the volume and practice thinking the sentences that serve you better; I can do this, I am committed to my workout. And then, you go and get it done.

This is just one example of how you can use your insanely powerful brain to create feelings that inspire you to take action. There's always more than one way to do something, and getting yourself to take action is no different. You do not need motivation to kick you into gear. There are other feelings that are more reliable, more sustainable, and more long-lasting than motivation.

You can try this out for yourself, and see where it takes you. Find what it is for you, whether it's empowered or inspired or something in between. Practice thinking in a way that creates a feeling that will get you in motion and keep you in motion when you need it most.

Okay, so there it is. I was really excited to talk about this with you because I truly think there is a special case for motivation. It's really great to get you started, and if you use it to kick-start a new habit, go for it. But I hope that I've offered you some questions to consider in the process.

First, if you're relying on an extrinsic motivator, ask yourself; what happens after that extrinsic motivator is no longer there? So, you can borrow one of my most favorite questions; and then, what? And, answer it. Have a plan; always, always, always have a plan. Okay?

Next, go back to your "why". This is getting back to intrinsic motivation, which will serve you much better in the long-term. Why are you choosing to

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exercise? Why do you want a new career? Get really clear on your “why” and you will find your intrinsic motivator.

Next, what feeling do you need, to take action after your motivation has fizzled out? Work it backwards. Think of the action you want to take, and then ask yourself how you need to feel in order to take that action.

And last, what will you do when it gets boring, when the novelty wears off? What is going to compel you to keep showing up and putting in your reps, day after day, long after motivation has faded? This is key. What separates people who succeed from those who don't, is that those who succeed are okay with boredom; they fall in love with the process.

So, how can you do this in a way that is real and true and genuine to you, so that you continue to take action? Alright, I hope this sheds some light on motivation for you, and helps you to use it and use it wisely.

Thank you again for hanging out with me. And, I'll catch you again next week.

If you like what you've been hearing, please review the show. I would love to get your feedback and ideas. Your suggestions have inspired episodes and will help me make the show better for you. And, share this podcast with a friend, text a show link, share a screenshot, or post a link to the show on your social media. Be sure to tag me @CarrieHollandMD on either Instagram or Facebook, so I can follow along and engage with you.

This is how we get the word out to other working moms who want to feel strong, inside and out. If you know someone who wants to feel better, or eat and move differently, but she is too tired or too busy, it is time to change things up. And you know, making that change starts with how you think. And that is what we do here, on the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. I'll see you next week.

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Thanks for listening to *Strong as a Working Mom*. If you want more information on how to eat, move, and think, so you can live in the body you want, with the mind to match, visit me at [CarrieHollandMD.com](http://CarrieHollandMD.com).