

The secret to staying motivated

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Credit: Bill Kuffrey/public domain

Have you ever started off well on a new goal such as losing weight or saving more money, only to find that motivation fizzles after a period of time?

Researchers from the University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba have discovered one possible explanation: Our source of motivation changes as we make progress toward a goal. Their findings are available online in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

In the study investigators predicted that during the early stages of pursuing a goal, participants would be motivated by hopes, aspirations and positive aspects of reaching their desired outcome. For example, [people](#) who wanted to lose 20 pounds would imagine their appearance at a desired weight, buying new clothes and feeling more energy. This is known as a "promotion motivation," and people in this mindset are motivated by positive things they can do to make progress, such as exercising more and eating more fruits and vegetables.

As people drew closer to reaching their goals, however, the researchers predicted that people would switch to a "prevention motivation" mindset. Now they would be motivated by their responsibilities, duties and the desire to avoid something negative. People trying to lose 20 pounds might think about the disappointment of possibly falling short of the weight loss goal or not fitting into a coveted piece of clothing. They would start focusing on things to avoid doing wrong, such as steering clear of dessert and a sedentary lifestyle.

The researchers conducted five experiments, and found that their prediction was correct: motivation switched from promotion to prevention as study participants made progress on their goals.

"Generally speaking, people in North America are predominantly promotion-focused, so they are good at starting goals, but not as good at accomplishing them," says Olya Bullard, PhD, an assistant professor at the University of Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada and lead author of the study. "My hope is that these findings will help people attain their goals."

The results of the study suggest that people may have better luck sustaining [motivation](#) in the late stages if they focus on what to avoid in order to reach their goals. For those who are trying to save money for a house or a trip, for example, initially it may work to pursue positive saving strategies like getting a higher paying job or investing money.

Later in the process, focus on avoidance strategies like going out to dinner less often or forgoing expensive purchases.

These findings also have implications for marketers, Bullard says. Companies can frame their advertisements based on whether consumers are in early or later stages of pursuing their goals. For example, a gym catering to people who are just starting to get in shape could emphasize the exciting opportunities and latest fitness technology at the gym that will help members achieve their aspirations. On the other hand, an ad for a gym catering for people well on their way to reaching a fitness [goal](#) could emphasize safe and proven technologies that will secure expectations for fitness and offer "satisfaction" guarantees.

This study will appear in the July, 2017 issue of the Journal of Consumer Psychology.

More information: www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-consumer-psychology ... [focus-in-goal-pursuit](#)

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