

How to Craft Effective Motivating Messages

An effective motivating message focuses your attention on an important personal reason to take action. It's job is to make that reason come alive and to motivate you to make the change you've decided to make.

Selecting a motivating reason

You often have more than one reason for wanting to make a particular change. So how do you choose the best reason?

The best reason is the reason that will do the best job of motivating you. It's not necessarily the reason that makes the most sense or the reason that most people would choose. In fact, it rarely is.

The secret to selecting the best motivating reason is to be absolutely honest with yourself.

Sometimes the most powerful personal reason for taking an action and achieving a goal may seem embarrassingly trivial.

That's the way it was for George. He was tempted by logic to conclude that his desire to stay healthy was the best reason to follow a particular piece of medical advice. But some soul-searching revealed a more personal reason that - although admittedly far less sensible - felt much more motivating to him.

George realized that what would motivate him the most was the fear of being hospitalized and having to use a bedpan and wear a hospital gown that doesn't quite stay closed in the back. This moved him more than just wanting to stay healthy did.

Maximizing motivational power

A motivating message should make your most important reason for making a particular change stand up and shout.

Here's how Jen identified a motivating reason and created a message to make it come alive:

Jen wanted to be more assertive in expressing and promoting her opinions. Although there were lots of good reasons why she wanted to make this change, when she thought about it honestly, she realized that the reason that moved her the most was that she wanted to shock the socks off people who knew her when she was at her all-time mousiest.

Fortunately, there was a school reunion coming up in a few months. When Jen learned that Sue, a former classmate who was especially critical of Jen when she was in school, was going to be attending the reunion, Jen had an idea. She could easily picture the look of shock she'd put on Sue's face by looking her right in the eye and boldly speaking her mind.

Jen's message, "The look on Sue's face," brought her motivating reason to life.

Like a sleeping lion, a motivating reason to change your behavior has to be nudged or poked to make it roar.

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Here are a couple of examples of personal messages that smokers crafted to put some adrenaline into their motivating reasons to quit smoking:

One smoker crafted the message "Remember Uncle Louie." Louie was his favorite uncle and a charming, vital, energetic chain-smoker who died a horrible death as a result of lung cancer.

Another smoker crafted the message, "Reach for that apple" The message stimulated her memory of a wonderfully healthy experience she once had on a smoke-free autumn vacation while biting into a cold, crisp, juicy and intensely delicious apple.

Motivating messages like these can move you in ways that "Quit smoking" never could.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

Again, the purpose of a motivating message is to get you to take the action that you've decided to take. That's why to be as effective as possible, a message should also rely on persuasive methods that you typically respond the best to.

For example, if you know from experience that you're more apt to be motivated by the negative consequences of failing to change - *the stick* - than by the benefits of changing - *the carrot* - by all means, craft messages that revolve around the stick.

Amy and Karen both decided to do daily back strengthening exercises recommended by a health care professional. Both were motivated by the same desire to be free of restrictions. Amy responded well to the message, "Golf, here I come!" that graphically conveyed a benefit of exercising. But Karen responded much better to the message, "Traction and boredom, here I come," that stimulated her thinking about the awful consequences of failing to exercise.

Just draw on your own experience.

- If you know from experience that you usually do best in making changes when you tune-in to the lighter side of a problem, saturate your messages with humor.
- If you know from experience that future benefits rarely seem real enough to be motivating, don't create messages that promise you fame and fortune way down the road.
- If you know from experience that you tend to respond poorly to any type of authoritarian demand, create messages that use a gentle, soft-sell approach.
- If you know from experience that anger usually gets you in gear, make a point of crafting messages that awaken the sleeping bees in your bonnet.