

Chapter 18

Meet The MotivAider®: Your Electronic Follow Through Assistant

Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

Chinese Proverb

The MotivAider is the only device we know of that was created explicitly to help people follow through on their good intentions.

Used worldwide in the fields of health care, education, sports and business, the MotivAider has helped people of all ages achieve a seemingly endless variety of goals.

When I (Pete) came across the MotivAider about five years ago, I was blown away. Behind an unassuming electronic device - it does nothing more than count and shake - stood a powerful realization about human nature and an ingeniously simple way to tackle an age-old problem. Within hours of using the MotivAider for the first time, the device had taught me two lessons that I will never ever forget: (1) Success in all things big and small depends on follow through; and (2) The human mind needs just a little bit of the right kind of help to make it work a whole lot better.

The MotivAider concept emerged from Steve's discovery over fifteen years ago that the mind, amazingly, has no built-in mechanism to keep our attention focused on our good intentions; that without such a mechanism, intentions are bound to get lost in the shuffle.

Steve conceived of the MotivAider as the intention-supporting mechanism that the human mind is missing. The MotivAider was his answer to the question, "What would you have to add to the human mind

to make follow through the rule rather than the exception?" As it turned out, it wasn't necessary to add much at all.

Designing a Follow Through Device

When I (Steve) set out to design a device to enable people to do a better job of following through, I thought about what engineers do when they set out to add a specific capability to a machine. I realized that they usually try to get as much help as possible from what the machine already does. For example, when automotive engineers first set out to figure out a way to keep passengers warm in the winter, they realized that they didn't actually have to produce more heat. There was already plenty of heat available as a byproduct of the work the engine was doing. So the engineers concentrated on figuring out a way to capture the heat the engine is already producing and direct it to the car's interior.

I searched for something the human mind already does that I could build on - something about the way it works that could be used to help it do a better job of following through. I eventually found what I was looking for. I discovered a way to improve follow through by capitalizing on how the mind reacts to reminders or cues.

I began with some introspection. I realized that whenever something would happen to remind me of a particular intention, I'd focus my attention on that intention. Whenever the intention was in the spotlight - when it was on "the front burner" - I'd be much more likely to follow through.

I had seen this same phenomenon time and time again with the rehabilitation patients I worked with. As long as they were in the hospital, where they were exposed to lots of cues that reminded them of their intention to do whatever it takes to recover quickly and fully, they followed through. But soon after leaving the hospital to return home, where there were fewer cues to remind them of what to do and why to do it, these patients often fizzled out.

I recall talking with Lowell, a farmer who was recovering from an injury to his arm. He did his arm-strengthening exercises faithfully in the hospital. When Lowell was discharged from the hospital, his physician explained how important it would be for Lowell to continue exercising his

arm as much as possible. But when he returned a couple of weeks later for an outpatient visit, Lowell confessed that he was doing a lousy job of following through. He was troubled and mystified by his failure. Not only was he eager to regain the strength he lost, he didn't even mind doing the prescribed exercises.

"I did great while I was in the hospital," Lowell explained. "I thought about my arm all the time. I thought about how I'd better do the exercises the doctor showed me so I can get my arm back to normal as quickly as possible. But now that I'm home, I just don't think about my arm that much any more. The only time I think about it is when someone asks me how my arm is doing, or when I see someone else with an arm in a cast, or when I go to do something and notice that my arm is still weak. Whenever I think about my arm, I do my exercises. But unless something happens to remind me, I forget all about my arm and all about the exercises."

So whenever Lowell was exposed to the right cues, he behaved in accord with his intention to exercise his arm. Without the right cues to shine a spotlight on his intention, his intention was useless.

I was intrigued. If we humans could count on being exposed to enough of the right cues, the mind would already have what it takes to follow through. I sensed that somehow this insight could be used to create a way for people to follow through on their good intentions. But how?

The “Cue Generator” Concept

Strangely enough, the answer came to me while I was watching a TV documentary on undersea exploration. As I watched a scuba diver descend to the bottom of the ocean, an idea began to rise to the top of my mind. Here's how my thinking went:

Divers want to explore an environment that doesn't provide them with the oxygen they need to breathe. So they've figured out a way to take the oxygen with them. With a scuba tank, divers can thrive in an environment where there's no oxygen available.

Why not do the same thing with cues? We need enough of the right cues to follow through on a good intention. But, like Lowell, we spend most of our time in environments that don't have enough of the right

cues available to make and keep our intentions effective. So, why not create a "cue tank" or a "cue generator" that people can take with them wherever they go? That way they'd always have enough of the right cues to keep any chosen intention on the front burner.

So, I set out to create an "on-board personal cue generator." I called it "The MotivAider."

How The MotivAider Works

The MotivAider is a remarkably simple device. Beeper-like in size and appearance, you carry it in a pocket or clip it to your belt or waistband. It automatically sends you a private signal as often as you choose (as often as once a minute). The signal consists of a gentle, silent vibration that lasts for a couple of seconds.

To use the MotivAider, you first devise a personal message - a word or a short phrase or sentence - that will tune you in to the action you need to take or to a reason that motivates you to take the action. For example, say you've decided that you should stop participating in the incessant whining that's going on at work because it's only making things worse for you and everyone else. From now on, you intend to make sure that your own contribution to conversations is positive and upbeat. Your personal message might simply be, "Upbeat."

After you've decided on a personal message, you decide how often you'd like to receive it. Say you make an educated guess that to follow through on your intention, you'll need to have your attention focused on thinking, "Upbeat," at least once every ten minutes.

You simply set the MotivAider for ten minutes and turn it on. The MotivAider is now ready to serve, as one user put it, "as your intention's full-time guardian angel."

The MotivAider will count down from the ten minute interval you set, and when it's done counting, the whole device will silently vibrate for a couple of seconds. Then the MotivAider will automatically reset itself to ten minutes, count down again, and vibrate again when it's done counting. It will automatically keep on repeating the cycle of counting down, vibrating, and resetting itself.

So, how will all this counting and shaking help you follow through on your intention to be more positive at work? How can the MotivAider send you your "Upbeat" message? It can't talk, can it?

The MotivAider can't talk. But it doesn't need to talk. Your telephone can't talk, but that doesn't prevent it from sending you the message, "Someone is calling," whenever the phone rings. The MotivAider works the same way. You decide what its vibration will mean to you. If it's "Upbeat," then whenever you feel the vibration, the message, "Upbeat," will pop into your mind.

If you had a MotivAider at your side automatically focusing your attention on being upbeat at work, here's what you'd experience: Every ten minutes, you'd feel the MotivAider's vibration. Feeling it would automatically make you think the message, "Upbeat," which, in turn, would focus your attention on being positive in conversations. If you began to drift away from your intention, you wouldn't get very far. Soon you'd feel the next vibration, again think, "Upbeat," and that would put you right back on track. With a steady stream of private reminders flowing through your mind urging you to be upbeat, your good intention would have no chance of getting lost in the shuffle.

But what if a gentle tap on the shoulder isn't enough? What if what you really need is a swift kick in the pants? The MotivAider can help. Not only can it remind you of *what* to do, it can remind you of *why* to do it. It can add "motivational muscle" to any intention by keeping you tuned-in to an emotionally charged reason for following through on that intention.

For example, suppose you've decided that it's time for you to overcome your reluctance to express your opinion when it differs from the opinions of those around you. Although you want to continue to get along well with people, you've been feeling more and more lately that your life-long pattern of avoiding disagreement and conflict is doing you more harm than good.

Still, it's not an easy pattern to break, not because you forget what to do, but because you lack the courage to do it.

After doing some soul-searching about what would motivate you to overcome your reluctance to speak up, you realize that one of your biggest fears is that people will view you the way you used to view Bea, a

former classmate, who got no respect because she always "agreed" with everyone. All you have to do is think about somebody someday comparing you to Bea, and you can actually feel your intention grow muscles! So you decide to use the MotivAider to keep yourself tuned-in this motivating thought. The message you devise, "To Bea or not to Bea?" should do the trick. With this provocative question popping up in your mind every few minutes, you'll stay motivated to follow through on your intention to express your opinions.

Getting "MotivAided" Without A MotivAider

Although the MotivAider is designed precisely for the purpose of helping people follow through on their intentions, you can benefit from the MotivAider *method* even if you don't have a MotivAider *device*.

First, you'll need to find a signal to use in place of the MotivAider's vibration. There are two requirements for a serviceable signal:

- (1) It must reliably get your attention; and
- (2) It must occur often enough to serve as a useful cue.

There are two basic sources of signals. One source is from any device that's designed to produce signals. Examples of such devices include alarm watches, electronic organizers and computer programs that have reminder capabilities, oven timers, and alarm clocks. The second source of signals is from sights, sounds and events that occur around you. Examples are the sound of a phone ringing in a neighboring office, of an airplane passing over, or a circulating fan that makes a noticeable sound whenever it starts or stops; announcements over the P.A. system; and even the sight of a certain person.

Once you've selected a signal, just follow the same steps you would take if you were using a MotivAider. Devise a message that will tune you into a particular "voice in your crowd" that will make your intention effective. Then, mentally assign the message to the signal so that whenever you receive the signal, it will automatically send you your message.

Dianna found an interesting signal to use as a cue to relax her tense shoulders. She lived in an old house with a hot water heating system that

made a clunking noise whenever the furnace operated. She told herself that whenever she heard the clunking sound it would mean to her, "Relax your shoulders."

"It worked great," she said. "The colder it got outside, the more relaxed I was!"

A "Swiss Army Knife" For Your Good Intentions

The MotivAider is a remarkably versatile follow through assistant. It can help you follow through on virtually any intention you choose. By automatically focusing your attention on a chosen intention, the MotivAider enables that intention to have the biggest possible say in how you behave.

Here's a list of actual goals that users have achieved with the MotivAider.

At Work

- Stay focused at meetings
- Perform "executive" exercises
- Catch others doing things right and praise them
- Adopt a learning or quality improvement mindset
- Use persuasive selling techniques
- Make "cold" calls
- By announcers to breathe properly, use correct posture and intonation
- Keep on moving
- Monitor work activities and re-focus whenever necessary on the most important tasks
- Apply learning from workshops and seminars
- Think creatively
- Take periodic relaxation breaks

- Improve presentation skills
- Be a better team player
- Maintain a "follow through mindset"

At play

- Improve a golf swing
- Improve a tennis backhand
- Improve bowling technique
- Mentally rehearse basketball free throws
- Refrain from setting the hook prematurely when fishing
- Improve concentration during athletic competition
- Use proper breathing technique when singing

Improving health, safety and fitness

- By persons with Cerebral Palsy to swallow regularly to prevent drooling
- Improve gait
- Facilitate healing by refraining from using an injured body part
- Use mental imagery to promote healing/recovery
- Drink more water or other fluids
- By diabetics to eat on schedule
- Accept limitations as a way to increase (rather than decrease) freedom
- Practice pain reduction methods
- Carry out bladder training

- Reduce teeth grinding and jaw-clenching to prevent dental
- Problems and relieve symptoms of TMJ
- Follow through on prescribed self-care
- Do Kegel exercises
- Stick with a fitness program
- Stick with a diet
- Eat slowly
- Order the right foods in restaurants
- Quit smoking
- Improve posture
- Keep head up
- Keep back straight
- Practice vision-improvement exercises
- Use proper bending and lifting techniques to prevent back injury
- Drive defensively
- Relax shoulder muscles to prevent muscle tension following a neck injury
- Perform relaxation exercises before and during childbirth

Reducing stress, eliminating unwanted habits and boosting self-esteem

- Reduce public speaking anxiety
- Breathe deeply
- Monitor and control mood
- Combat negativity

- Fight procrastination
- Stop swearing
- Quit biting finger nails
- Promote restful sleep
- Stay calm during tests
- Implement therapy "homework"
- Think of accomplishments, positive qualities
- Try out a new attitude or outlook or maintain one
- Make specific self-affirmations regularly
- Stay tuned to personal priorities

Improving personal image and increasing interpersonal effectiveness

- Act friendlier
- Make frequent eye contact
- Smile more
- Be a better listener
- Avoid getting into unnecessary arguments
- Eliminate unwanted mannerisms
- By parents to look for opportunities to praise their kids
- Act more assertively
- "Try out" new interpersonal behaviors

Personal and spiritual growth

- Enhance creativity, openness