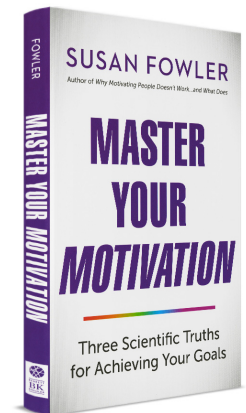


# Master Your Motivation

Three Scientific Truths for Achieving Your Goals

by **Susan Fowler**



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Motivation is at the heart of everything you do and everything you want to do but don't. Unfortunately, the ways we typically motivate ourselves don't work. Relying on sheer determination eventually becomes exhausting—it's not sustainable. And even setting goals can backfire—if you're not setting them for the right reasons.

In *Master Your Motivation*, Susan Fowler says that motivation is energy, and what matters is the quality, not the quantity. Traditional “motivators” such as fear, guilt, or the promise of a reward provide low-quality, short-term energy. Drawing on the latest empirical research, she proves that high-quality, optimal motivation is a skill that you can learn and apply.

Science tells us that satisfying three basic needs—for choice, connection, and competence—is essential to optimal motivation. You need to feel like you've picked your path, not that you're being driven down it. Your goal should be linked to people or a purpose meaningful to you. *Master Your Motivation* shows you how to identify and shift the quality of your motivation and finally achieve success.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The three scientific truths about motivation and how to make them work for you.
- Three actions that allow you to master motivation as a skill.
- To overcome attitudes, distractions, and hazards that keep you from shifting your outlook.

## Part I: The Truth About Motivation

Three scientific truths are at the heart of mastering your motivation. Using them in combination could transform the way you approach goals and your life. Their discovery represents one of the greatest breakthroughs in motivation science.

### Three Scientific Truths

You have a natural yearning to thrive—thriving is your human nature. We want to contribute, feel fulfilled, and grow and learn every day. Recognizing our nature to thrive leads to a critical question: How do I thrive?

The answer is different than what we've been led to believe. Thriving doesn't depend on money, power, or status. Thriving doesn't come from promotions, perks, or driving for results. Thriving certainly doesn't happen through pressure, tension, or fear—or even willpower or discipline. Thriving requires Choice, Connection, and Competence.

#### **First scientific truth: You need to create choice.**

You have an innate need to perceive you have choices, recognize and feel you have options within boundaries, and have a sense of control over what is happening at any time: "I am the source of my behavior." When you don't create choice, your energy is diminished, and you are less likely to achieve your goals.

#### **Second scientific truth: You need to create connection.**

You have an innate need to feel a sense of belonging and genuine connection to others without concerns about ulterior motives, to pursue goals aligned to meaningful values and a noble purpose, and to contribute to something greater than yourself. When you don't create connection, your energy is compromised, and even if you achieve your goals, you are less likely to find the experience meaningful or worth repeating.

#### **Third scientific truth: You need to create competence.**

You have an innate need to feel effective at managing everyday situations, to demonstrate skill over time, and to feel a sense of growth and learning every day. When you don't create competence, your energy is blocked, and your frustration at not being able to meet challenges or make progress puts achieving long-term goals at risk.

### Motivation Isn't What You Think

Motivation is the energy to act. The quality of your energy determines the quality of your motivation. Eating a candy bar produces energy—but eating a handful of almonds generates longer-lasting and more efficient energy. When

your physical stamina dips, if you grab a candy bar, soft drink, or french fries, your blood sugar shoots up and so does your energy. Then what happens? You crash. Your blood sugar drops below what it was before, so you need more sugar, caffeine, or carbs.

A similar phenomenon occurs with motivation—how you fuel your psychic energy produces either a junk food motivational rush or a healthier alternative.

When it comes to motivation, the quality of your energy is what matters. Mastering your motivation requires letting go of the outdated notion that motivation depends on how much motivation you have. Creating choice, connection, and competence generates high-quality energy, which leads to optimal motivation. Optimal motivation delivers productivity and results but also increased creativity and innovation, an enhanced sense of well-being, and higher levels of work passion that sustain your high performance and help you thrive.

On the other hand, eroding choice, connection, and competence leads to suboptimal motivation. Traditional ways of motivating ourselves—from relying on external motivators such as winning rewards, acquiring power, or achieving status, to succumbing to negative forces such as pressure, fear, or shame—tend to result in suboptimal motivation. Appreciating the difference between optimal motivation and suboptimal motivation has real-world implications.

### Create Choice

You have an innate need for choice—to perceive that you are the one controlling your actions and the ongoing source of your behavior, even when influenced by outside forces. To master your motivation, create choice.

To create choice, you need to perceive you have choices; recognize and feel you have options within boundaries; and feel that you are in control of your actions.

When it comes to motivation, choice is different than freedom. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl describes living through a World War II concentration camp. Frankl realized that even though he had no freedom as we would define freedom, his captors could not take away his choice. He chose to see the beauty of a sunrise, accept the punishment promised as he came to the aid of a fellow prisoner, and share a piece of his bread with another starving prisoner.

They couldn't rob him of his autonomy—his perception of freedom. He understood that you might not be able to

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control your situation, but you can choose your thoughts, reactions, and perspective.

Ask yourself targeted questions to create choice. When it comes to my goal or situation,

- What choices have I made? If I made choices I'm glad about, why am I glad? If I made choices I wish I hadn't made, why do I wish I hadn't made them?
- What different choices could I make going forward? How do I feel about those choices? If I perceive I don't have any choices, why is that? Is it true or is it just my perception that it's true?
- Do I feel the goal or situation was imposed on me? If I feel imposed on by the goal or situation, where is the pressure (or fear, guilt, shame) coming from? Why do I think that is? Could my behavior and actions positively impact the outcome? If I feel restricted, powerless, or controlled by current boundaries, how could I gain a sense of control over the situation? Why is that important?

### Create Connection

You have an innate need for connection—to care about and feel cared about by others, find meaning in everyday moments, and experience a sense of unity as you promote the welfare of the whole. To master your motivation, create connection.

Because we are social animals, connection is our deepest and most profound need, yet it's probably the least fulfilled in today's modern world. Connection means authentically caring about others and feeling cared for by them.

To create connection, you need to feel a sense of belonging and genuine connection to others without concerns about ulterior motives; align goals and actions to meaningful values and a noble purpose; and contribute to something greater than yourself.

Ask yourself targeted questions to create connection. When it comes to my goal or situation,

- Can it give me a greater sense of belonging or genuine connection to others involved? If I feel a greater sense of belonging, why? Could my active involvement contribute to the welfare of others? Could this goal or situation lead to a bigger purpose? Why might that be important?
- Is it meaningful to me? If I find it meaningful, why? Are important values aligned to it? When I think about the purpose of my role, do I see any connection between this goal or situation and my purpose? Why? What is the impact if I don't get involved?
- Do I feel what is being asked of me is fair and just? If I feel it is fair and just, why? If I feel it is not fair and just, why? Is it worth standing up for given my values or purpose? Why?

### Create Competence

You have an innate need for competence—to experience progress, gain mastery, and feel confident and resilient as you meet the challenges life can throw at you. Competence reflects your need to grow and learn each day.

To master your motivation, create competence. To create competence, you need to feel effective at managing everyday situations; demonstrate skill over time; and feel a sense of growth and learning.

Competence doesn't necessarily equate to mastery. It depends on your goal. Maybe you haven't mastered the goal of schussing down black diamond ski runs, but you can create competence if you are effectively managing the bunny slope and focusing on what you learn so you see progress each time you ski down the hill.

You can create competence by asking yourself key questions. When it comes to my goal or situation,

- What skills or experience do I have that might prove helpful? What core competencies can I draw from to manage the challenges I face? Why are drawing on my skills, experience, and core competencies important?
- What new skills could I develop? What progress have I made in my skill development? Why is developing

skills and making progress important?

- What insights have I gained—or might I gain—that could help me moving forward? Why is moving forward important to me? Have I made mistakes? Why is learning from my mistakes meaningful? What have I learned that will help in the future?

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## Part II: Motivation Is a Skill

The skill of motivation includes three actions to generate and maintain the optimal motivation you need for achieving your goals: identify your outlook, shift your outlook, and reflect on your outlook.

Before you delve into the skill of motivation, select a goal to work on. Pick a persistent problem where you need a breakthrough or a routine task that is affecting the quality of your work experience (such as expense reports). Select a goal or situation where you feel blocked, are procrastinating, or aren't progressing as you wish.

### Identify Your Outlook

No matter what journey you're on, you need to know where you are before you can decide the best way to get where you're going. That's why the first of three actions to master your motivation is to identify the type of motivation you have right now. You are always motivated. The question is, What type of motivation do you have?

Motivation science has verified six different ways of being motivated, called motivational outlooks. Each outlook has distinct characteristics that either create or erode choice, connection, and competence.

Three **suboptimal motivation outlooks** include the following:

**Disinterested motivational outlook.** When it comes to achieving my goal or resolving my situation, the reason for my motivation is “I don't care,” “I am too overwhelmed,” or “I don't have the energy to manage what's required.”

**External motivational outlook.** When it comes to achieving my goal or resolving my situation, the reason for my motivation is “I have been promised a tangible reward or incentive,” “I expect that it will bring me power, an enhanced image, or status,” or “I hope that I will receive people's love or respect.”

**Imposed motivational outlook.** When it comes to achieving my goal or resolving my situation, the reason

for my motivation is “I want to avoid damaging a relationship with someone who has expectations of me,” “I have feelings of guilt, shame, or disappointment in myself,” or “I feel pressure. I have to do it. (I fear what might happen if I don't.)”

Three **optimal motivational outlooks** include the following:

**Aligned motivational outlook.** When it comes to achieving my goal or resolving my situation, the reason for my motivation is “I am able to demonstrate important values,” “I derive a sense of meaning,” or “I've made a conscious and deliberate choice to do the right thing.”

**Integrated motivational outlook.** When it comes to achieving my goal or resolving my situation, the reason for my motivation is “I feel a deep sense of purpose,” “I feel I'm being the person I want to be,” “I'm tapping into a conscious but almost automatic way of being.”

**Inherent motivational outlook.** When it comes to achieving my goal or resolving my situation, the reason for my motivation is “I'm having pure fun and enjoyment,” “I have an unexplainable interest in and attraction to it,” “I have always gravitated to it naturally.”

Three of the outlooks, the disinterested, external, and imposed outlooks, reflect motivation lacking choice, connection, and competence (low-quality psychological needs). When a suboptimal outlook describes the type of motivation you have for your goal, you are less likely to achieve your goal. But even if you did achieve it, you are less likely to experience positive energy, vitality, or well-being.

On the other end of the spectrum, the aligned, integrated, and inherent motivational outlooks reflect motivation satisfying choice, connection, and competence (high-quality psychological needs). When an optimal outlook describes the type of motivation you have for your goal, you are more likely to achieve it. But even if you don't achieve your goal, you are more likely to experience positive energy, vitality, and well-being.

### Shift Your Outlook

Shifting from suboptimal to optimal motivation—the second action in the skill of motivation—is inspiring! Shift happens when you proactively create choice, connection, and competence. When you create choice, connection, and competence, you also create courage—the courage to take action for the right reasons.

Giving up a bad habit may be as simple as loving something you value more than you love the bad habit. You cannot align to values if you don't know what your values are—which raises the question, how do you know what you value?

To begin exploring your values, try this experiment: Make a list of five to 10 of your general life values. For example, family time, health and well-being, financial security, compassion for others. Now, evaluate your stated values against two questions:

- How do you spend your money?
- How do you spend your time?

These two questions reveal the veracity of your stated values—they expose whether your values are fully functioning in your life or you talk a good game.

Reflecting on your outlook heightens your awareness of just how good optimal motivation feels!

Values are personal choices. Begin to explore the beliefs and values you currently hold. Proactively develop values you act on and cherish by making conscious choices about how you want to live your life. Then keep those values in mind as you shift your motivation to give up a bad habit or embrace a new habit for something—or someone—more important. Aligning goals with values is a powerful way to generate positive energy and experience optimal motivation.

The word “credo” is Latin for “I believe.” A personal credo is a statement of your core beliefs, or guiding principles, and your intentions for integrating them into your everyday life. To create an optimally motivating credo to help you shift when you feel overwhelmed by a situation, external distractions, or pressure, include actions that will help create choice, connection, and competence. For example, consider statements such as these:

- “I create choice: I choose how I wake up and live my life every day. My choices reflect my values and who I truly am.”

- “I create connection: What I do to others, I do to myself. My work is meaningful and contributes to a greater good.”

- “I create competence: I consciously improve my skills because doing what I do well is one of the ways I contribute to others. By learning something new each day, I spark wisdom, progress, and change.”

Perhaps developing your own credo can help you master your motivation and generate the positive energy to achieve your goals and live your dreams.

### Reflect On Your Outlook

Creating choice, connection, and competence increases your sense of well-being. Reflecting on your outlook heightens your awareness of just how good optimal motivation feels!

Mindfully feeling good makes you want to continue feeling good. You realize you have created choice—and can initiate more; you have created connection—and can develop more; and you have created competence—and can build more.

But reflecting, the third action in the skill of motivation, also proves helpful if you haven't shifted or you discover you have a suboptimal outlook. Months after attending a motivation workshop, Josie, one of the participants, said, “I was sitting at my desk when I noticed my stomach was tied in knots. I was feeling pressure and almost sick.”

“I reflected on my motivation and identified I had an imposed motivational outlook for a meeting scheduled later that day. As I peeled away the layers to understand where the pressure was coming from, I realized it was a co-worker who would be in the meeting. She pushes all my buttons. I was anxious and worried about having to deal with her.”

“I decided to see if I could shift my motivation. I considered my choices. I had choice—I could go or not go to the meeting. I'd chosen to go. I asked myself how I could create connection, and realized the meeting was aligned to goals that were important to me, and I could also live one of my values—being a team player. And then, like a time bomb going off when I least expected it, I got in touch with how it would feel if I could handle my co-worker with grace instead of being scared of her! It may sound corny, but I walked into the meeting feeling determined, uplifted, and purposeful.”

Sometimes talking to yourself isn't crazy. Asking yourself questions and mindfully answering them is a form of reflection. Ask yourself, when it comes to my goal or situation,

- Why am I making the choices I am making? Why am I not making certain choices?
- Why is this goal or situation meaningful to me? Why isn't this goal or situation meaningful? Why do I hesitate to connect with the people involved?
- Why is gaining competence important to me? Why isn't learning from this goal valuable to me?

Research by Richard M. Ryan and colleagues shows that answering the “why” question reveals “whether one perceives the goal-directed behavior emanates from one’s self or, alternatively, is brought about by forces or pressures external to the self.” The questions to create choice, connection, and competence probe your whys and prompt something even more profound in the process: mindfulness.

Mindfulness is being aware of and attuned to what is happening in the present moment, free from judgment or impulsive reaction. The point of mindfulness is to free us from feelings, emotions, experiences, bias, prejudice, and preconceived notions that prevent new ways of perceiving our world. To master your motivation, reflect by being mindful of feelings, reasons behind your motivation, and new perspectives.

Through reflection, you realize that you can choose the quality of your experience anytime and anywhere. With practice, mastering your motivation shifts not only the quality of your motivational outlook but the quality of your life.

### Part III: What’s Stopping You?

As human beings, we want to exhibit the positive tendencies of our human nature, and we yearn for optimal motivation. What’s stopping us from creating what we naturally long to experience—choice, connection, and competence? Let’s explore the answers.

#### I Can’t Shift

Gina, a district manager, had a good excuse for not shifting. In fact, she refused to shift. She was being held accountable to implement a new approach to selling that she vehemently disagreed with. After years of providing award-winning service to her customers, she was being asked to focus on upselling her customers instead of meeting their needs.

Worse, she was expected to hold her team accountable for following the new policy. To say she had an imposed motivational outlook is an understatement.

It became clear: She was feeding on self-righteous indignation—that red-hot energy that fires you up when you know you are right and they are wrong. The only way to sustain this insidious form of junk food motivation is to continue fueling the flames of negative energy through blaming, name-calling, and comparing your intelligence or status favorably to theirs. Gina justified her suboptimal motivation by recounting examples of how moving from values-based selling to a profit motive was already damaging long-term client relationships.

But to Gina’s credit, when she reflected on how sad and deflated she felt, she realized she wasn’t saying “I can’t shift”; she was admitting “I don’t want to shift.” She acknowledged that she had chosen not to shift. Her honesty provided the openness to ask herself, “Why haven’t I shifted?” and entertain the questions, “What if I did shift? Do I have any values that could support a shift?”

Reflecting on these questions gave rise to a mindful moment and to intriguing possibilities. What if she was wrong? What if she could learn something?

With her newfound awareness, Gina announced to everyone in the class—including her sales team, “I just shifted. I’ll either learn that I am wrong and they are right. Or I’ll learn from experience what doesn’t work and be a more effective advocate against the approach.” She decided to embrace the new approach, full steam ahead. Her conclusion: “Either way, we all win.”

Gina’s experience of reflecting on her reasons for not shifting recalls Byron Katie’s brilliant process of inquiry to question the thoughts at the root of suffering, called “The Work.” Katie asks you to answer four powerful questions when you have a negative judgment or conflict about someone or something:

- Is it true?
- Can you absolutely know that it’s true?
- How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?
- Who would you be without the thought?

After you answer the four questions, Katie asks you to turn your negative judgment around—to find one or more opposites—and consider whether that turned-around thought or those thoughts could be true.

Without her realizing it, Gina’s reflection had revealed answers to Katie’s questions: Is it true that this new sales

# Fatal distractions entice you, lure you in, and cast you into suboptimal motivation day in and day out.

approach is bad? How do you know it's true? Being open to the possibilities, Gina recognized the benefit of exploring the idea further. She'd either gain data to support the truth of her assertions or learn that she was wrong and fulfill her value for learning. Left with only constructive reasons for shifting, Gina could let go of her negative energy and focus on moving forward with positive energy, vitality, and well-being.

## Beware Fatal Distractions

Fatal distractions entice you, lure you in, and cast you into suboptimal motivation day in and day out. If you gravitate toward incentives, bonuses, prizes, rankings, competition, and recognition to feed your motivation, you have surrendered to the distraction of external motivation.

To arm yourself against a fatal distraction, you need to recognize one when you see it. Three of the distractions are so common—and so commonly projected as good things—that you may be surprised at how they erode your choice, connection, and competence without you realizing it. Beware materialism, the search for happiness, and busyness.

**Materialism.** Money is one of the most sinister fatal distractions because we all need money (or its equivalent) to survive. But there is a difference between needing money and being motivated by money. When money is your driving force, you do not control it; you are controlled by it—robbing you of choice. Money distracts you from high-quality reasons to do what you do—undermining connection. Money becomes the end goal instead of learning and growth—diminishing opportunities for competence.

Money does not buy happiness or the things that make you happy. In fact, the more materialistic your core values are, the more the quality of your life is diminished. A lower quality of life is reflected in a variety of ways, including low energy, anxiety, substance abuse, negative emotions, depression, and a likelihood to engage in high-risk behaviors.

With the insight gained through recent motivation research and the fascinating field of social neuroscience showing how our need to connect with others is more basic than our need for food and shelter, you can master your moti-

vation and shift your focus from fatal distractions such as money and materialism to the more empowering values of acceptance, compassion, emotional intimacy, caring for the welfare of others, and contributing to the world around you.

**The search for happiness.** Consider what the word happiness really signifies. It derives from hap (n.) meaning “chance, fortune.” Happy means “‘lucky, favored by fortune, ... prosperous;’ of events, ‘turning out well.’” Happiness depends on what happens. By its nature, something “making you happy” is antithetical to your psychological need for choice—the perception that you are the source of your own actions.

Instead of searching for happiness, an option is to focus on mastering your motivation.

**Busyness.** Maybe you wear busyness as a badge of honor: “I’m so busy doing important things that I don’t have time for anything else!” If that sounds familiar, you might consider how it is that many of the most successful people in the world find time to refresh their spirit and connect with people they love. You have the same 24 hours a day as everyone else on the planet.

What fuels your inability to disconnect from work is important to understand. If your passion is fueled by fatal distractions—power, status, image, money—your passion may prove obsessive, not harmonious. You don’t control obsessive passion—it controls you. If you are caught up in busyness for the wrong reasons, your busyness is a fatal distraction that erodes choice, connection, and competence.

## Work Hazards

Traditional techniques for motivating people at work have proven ineffective, faulty, or downright wrong. Yet, well-intentioned managers still drive for results, promote suboptimal motivation, and make creating choice, connection, and competence at work a real challenge.

Don’t cast all the blame on your manager for resorting to carrots or sticks, praise or pressure, and promises or threats. Have you ever seen the competencies your manager is being held accountable for achieving? “Drive for results,

exceed goals successfully, constantly and consistently be one of the top performers, be very bottom-line oriented, steadfastly push self and others for results, assess staff members' hot buttons and use them to get the best out of the staff"—these are real expectations from real performance plans.

The real job falls to you to move beyond the carrots and sticks that can beat you up. Since motivation is at the heart of everything you do or don't do, why depend on others to do what you can do for yourself? You will discover that proactively creating choice, connection, and competence at work is worth the effort. Three ways to begin are to flip feedback, deepen connection, and advocate for justice.

**Flip the feedback.** Getting pure feedback on your performance is essential to your development and ultimate success at anything you do in life. Most managers don't like giving feedback, so maybe it's time you flipped the feedback. Don't wait for it; ask for it. Requesting feedback delivers the information you need when you need it but also results in less defensiveness—meaning you are more likely to hear what you need to hear and act on it.

**Deepen connection.** Your greatest opportunity to master your motivation at work is in creating connection. Even if you create choice and competence, they are incomplete without the meaning, sense of purpose, or fulfillment of connection. You create connection when you find meaning in whatever you are doing—especially at work.

**Advocate for justice.** If you work for an organization that you think is unfair, you have a choice. You can leave. You can continue feeling disconnected and joyless but not leave (or as it's often described, you can quit and stay—rationalizing that you need the money).

Or you can choose to stay and stand up for justice. You can work to open closed-door policies where information is used as a form of control. You can campaign against wage discrimination, favoritism, and implicit bias.

When you advocate for the principles of justice and fairness, you create deeper connection for yourself and with others.

A common thread of every great spiritual practice throughout history is the belief that human beings can raise their conscious awareness and live life at a higher level. The belief that change is possible entices you to greet a new day. Hope is a belief that things—and you—can change for the better.

We are beings with self-determination and the ability to reflect and mindfully choose who we are, what we believe, and how we behave. The skill to master your motivation may be your greatest opportunity to evolve, grow in wisdom, and be the light the world so desperately needs.

### IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Why Motivating People Doesn't Work...and What Does: The New Science of Leading, Energizing, and Engaging* by Susan Fowler
- *CRAVE: You Can Enhance Employee Motivation in 10 Minutes by Friday* by Gregg Lederman



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