



Motivation, Determination, & Habit in Recovery

Have you ever been envious of a highly motivated person (i.e., the fit guy who gets up at 4:30 every morning to hit the gym or the single mom who works full time and attends college classes at night)? Consider that in life there are times when you are inclined to do something, not because you *want* to, but because of the payoff. The fit guy and the single mother may actually be lacking in motivation but possess drive or habit.

Drive is doing something you do not want to, despite how you feel. *Habit* is doing something time after time because it has become a routine. Motivation, meanwhile, is fickle. It is a moment of inspiration and/or desire.

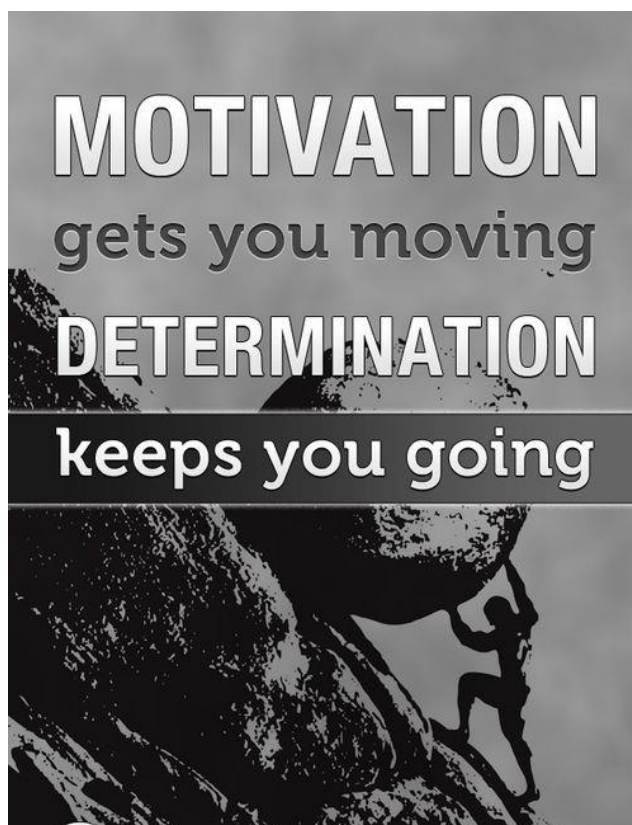
When it comes to making big changes, including the decision to stop using alcohol and drugs, motivation is less of an underlying trait and more of an emotion. Like all feelings, it can be powerful, but ebbs and flows.

Motivation as the Spark, Not the Fuel

At times, motivation is the perfect spark to start the fire. It provides a compelling nudge or push in the right direction. Strong emotions are influential. People are motivated to get clean because of how badly they feel (as both a direct consequence of their drug use and *about* the consequences of their addiction).

In early recovery, motivation is a powerful driving force, but is not sustainable. Motivation is not going to keep you sober. When you get clean, the consequences of addiction may become less severe. Without consequences, motivation dwindles. This ultimately leads you back to substance use. Once motivation fizzles out, there must be something else to keep you going.

For example, if you are motivated to stop using cocaine because you are sick of the aftermath of a binge — shakiness, anxiety, depression, and self-loathing — you lose sight of that initial motivation the longer you are sober. When you feel good, consequences become a distant memory, especially when the boredom of reality kicks in. You can either find a new motivator (i.e., "I want to work at Home Depot, but they do random drug tests") or you can rely on the power of determination or habit. While it may be enough to get clean, a spark of motivation is not enough to *stay* clean.





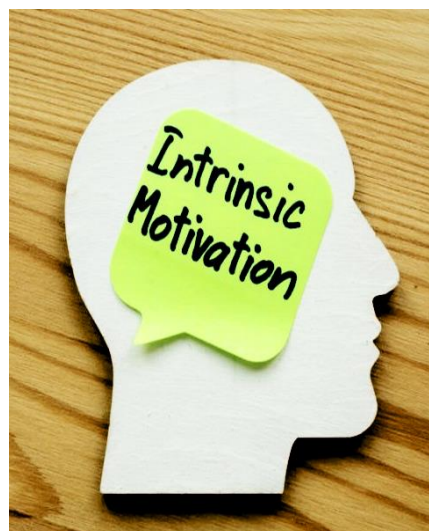
Multiple Motivators

One strategy for harnessing the power of motivation in recovery is to have *multiple motivators* instead of relying on a single motivating factor (i.e., to save a marriage or keep a job). When one motivator wanes, focus on the next.

Furthermore, the goal is to develop intrinsic motivation (vs. extrinsic). Intrinsic motivation takes place in the absence of external rewards because it brings about a sense of personal satisfaction.

Examples of motivators, both intrinsic and extrinsic, include:

- Feeling less anxious or depressed
- Not missing work
- Landing a promotion
- Better concentration and focus
- Increased self-respect
- Improved sleep
- Not fighting with significant other
- Not missing out on family events
- More spending money
- Feeling a sense of accomplishment
- No hangovers
- Increased energy
- No DUI's
- Closer relationship with God



Create your own list of motivators. Be as specific as possible and be thorough. Include motivators from different life areas:

- Emotional (mood, mental health, etc.)
- Physical
- Spiritual
- Financial
- Intellectual (education/career)
- Legal
- Relationships
- Personal growth (values, ideals, contributing to the world, etc.)

In developing multiple motivators, always keep in mind that while powerful, motivation lacks staying power. Even intrinsic motivation may not be enough to combat a strong craving. (The very nature of addiction, after all, is to hijack and destroy the brain's reward center, which directly affects motivation and decision-making.)

Take advantage of motivation when you can and be pragmatic when you cannot by improving determination, forming new healthy habits, and seeking out connections and support.

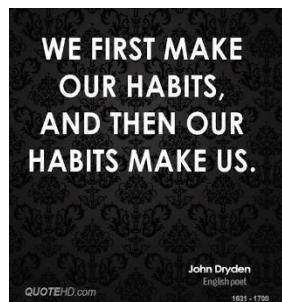


Determination & Habit Formation

By developing determination (in contrast to motivation), you remove the need to rely on emotion to stay on track in recovery. Determination (or drive) is a skill that you can practice and improve. Drive involves grit and resolve (vs. feeling).

You can be determined to stay sober even (or especially) when you don't feel like it. When you make a conscious decision to not use, you're rewiring your brain. This process takes time and is difficult due to brain changes that occurred in active addiction, but the payoffs (your recovery and your life!) are worth it. Other ways to heal your brain include taking medication, consuming a healthy diet, exercising, and practicing meditation/mindfulness.

As you develop determination, establish new healthy habits to replace old behaviors. Get up at a set time each morning, meditate for 30 minutes per day, talk a daily walk during your lunch break, etc. Habit may hold more power than motivation *or* determination.



Conclusion

In sum, while motivation in recovery is important, it's not as powerful as determination or habit. By focusing on multiple motivators, you are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, which can lead to personal grit and habit formation. Focus on the payoffs of sobriety. Practice determination and follow routines in other areas of your life as well as your recovery to sharpen your skills and rewire your brain.

Author Bio: Cassie Jewell is a licensed professional counselor who specializes in substance use treatment in Northern Virginia. She is also the author of [Mind ReMake Project](#), a blog where she shares mental health information and free resources for consumers and other clinicians.

On the pages to follow is some material for group therapy based on this reading



Motivation, Determination, & Habit in Recovery – *Taking the Escalator Group Therapy Activity*

This is a follow-up group therapy activity based on the above material.

Part 1 – Multiple Motivators

Directions: Individually create your own list of motivators. Be as specific as possible and be thorough. Include motivators from different life areas. Then discuss your motivator lists as a group:

Life Area	Motivators
Emotional (Mood, mental health, etc.)	
Physical	
Spiritual	
Financial	
Intellectual (education/career)	
Legal	
Relationships	
Personal Growth (values, ideals, contributing to the world, etc.)	



Part 2 - Determination & Habit Formation

- **Determination** - firmness of purpose; resoluteness. - "he advanced with an unflinching determination"

Group questions:

- What can help you increase your level of determination?
- What can you do to keep your mind healthy and strong so that you can maintain focus and remained determined to achieve your goals?

Coming Up with Positive Habits: Brainstorm at least 10 positive habits that you would like to have in your life (in any life area, regardless of whether you are ready to start these habits or not) – Try to make express these habits in a specific and measurable way

Examples:

- *I want to try to work out at least 30 minutes a day at least 5 days a week*
- *I want to read one book per month on a positive life topic*
- *I want to start setting aside at least \$50 a week to start a savings fund*

Now come up with up to 7 of your own ideas for habits you are interested in (even if you are not ready)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Finally go back and circle one or two (or three?) habits from this list that you are willing to start to try to make part of your routine in the very near future

DISCUSS YOUR LISTS AS A GROUP

Successful people are simply those with successful habits. -Brian Tracy