

Extrinsic Versus Intrinsic Motivation

By Kate Monroe, CEO

Extrinsic motivation is when you do something to receive a reward or to avoid punishment. For example, a child wants to make the basketball team so he can be popular and get closer to the cheerleaders.

Intrinsic motivation is when doing an activity is rewarding in and of itself. A child wants to be on the basketball team because he loves to play basketball. Or he's fascinated with the idea of learning the game. The reward is internal.

Consider these examples:

- Most people don't go to work because they love going to their job (intrinsic). They go because they receive money for it (extrinsic).
- A child does her chores because she wants to receive a reward or to avoid punishment. (extrinsic)
- Do you love the idea of starting a business because the challenge excites you (intrinsic)? Or, do you dislike the idea of starting a business, but the potential financial reward (extrinsic) is intriguing enough for you to do it?
- Do you truly enjoy spending time with your partner (intrinsic), or is the primary reward the financial security, companionship, and the opportunity to have children (extrinsic)?
- Do you stay with your partner for love (intrinsic), or because the consequences of leaving would be too difficult (extrinsic)?
- Do you struggle to accomplish anything without deadlines (extrinsic)? Or, do you love the feeling of getting your work done and can't stop yourself from doing it as soon as possible (intrinsic)?

We all have intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Because intrinsic motivation relies directly on how you honestly feel about something, **this type of motivation is a more effective way of creating long-term happiness.**

If you want to develop more intrinsic motivation in your day-to-day life, these techniques will help:

1. **Make a list of the things you love to do.** If your doctor tells you that you need more exercise, there are many different types of exercise you can do. You could play tennis, run, swim, lift weights, or play soccer. If one of those activities is very enjoyable to you, it only makes sense to choose that activity.
 - Whenever you need to do something, consider the most enjoyable way to accomplish it. When you can find something you enjoy, it will be hard to stop yourself from doing it.
2. **Learn how to reward yourself.** A reward can be as simple as pumping your fist in the air and congratulating yourself. Avoid using an external reward system if possible.
 - Imagine that you want to do 25 pushups each morning. After completing your pushups, you jump up in the air and tell yourself how awesome you are. In time, that simple reward can make pushups enjoyable and attractive. This is also how habits can be created.
3. **Understand WHY you are doing something.** Even the smallest of tasks can be linked to a greater purpose. Playing piano scales might seem mundane, but if you believe they are an integral part of learning to master the piano, they seem a lot more meaningful.

Most people can't fathom why a millionaire or billionaire would continue to work. That's because most people work only to make money. Take the money away and they'd quickly stop going to work. Give them enough money that they don't need any more, and they'll quit.

However, the billionaire becomes a billionaire because he loves building and creating. His main motivation is intrinsic. The money is secondary. That's why he never stops working.

Intrinsic motivation will keep you coming back for more. Extrinsic motivation is less reliable. When the external reward vanishes or becomes less enticing, you'll stop repeating that behavior.

Find things you love to do, and then do them. Use your natural interests to your advantage and greater happiness will be the result.