

## **Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation and Exercise Adherence** **By Scott DiNardo**

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines motivation as 1) the act or process of motivating, the condition of being motivated 2) a motivating force, stimulus, or influence: Incentive, Drive. A more comprehensive definition of motivation may be the interaction of cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social processes contributing to purposeful, often goal directed behavior. As one can see, motivation is not a single entity or trait but rather a dynamic model made up of many different components. Motivation, as it pertains to exercise, is often separated into two distinct categories. The first category focuses on external (extrinsic) factors involved in motivation. Some of the extrinsic factors involved with exercise include personal appearance, social support, and facilities, just to name a few. The second category focuses on internal (intrinsic) factors associated with exercise adherence. There are many intrinsic motivators to exercise such as health factors, personal competence, increased energy, and decreased stress.

External motivators are often what one thinks of when beginning an exercise routine. Many people start an exercise program to lose weight or get in better shape. These external rewards may be enough to motivate an individual to initially take part in an exercise program. However, research has shown that body-related motives are not, on average, sufficient to sustain regular exercise regimens, and thus should not be made the most salient justification for engaging in exercise. An example of this could be a person motivated to exercise by the promise or idea that exercise will help them lose weight. An individual early in their exercise program may lose a fair amount of weight by losing mostly water. On the outside this person focusing on the end goal of losing weight may be motivated at the sight of the numbers on the scale decreasing. However, what happens as they continue to exercise and do not see the rapid weight loss they saw at the onset of their exercise? This person often times will become unmotivated and drop out of their exercise program because they are no longer seeing the reward (weight loss) for their effort. Therefore, the goal must be to move an individual's focus to internal motivators in order for one to adhere to their fitness plan.

Internal motivators are those that produce long lasting adherence to exercise. Making exercise or physical activities more intrinsically motivating might be a viable route to enhancing persistence. Research has shown that, people who successfully maintain a workout regimen learn to shift their focus from distant, external outcomes like losing weight to positive, internal experiences in the here and now. The intrinsic exerciser looks inward in the attempt to discover what holds true meaning for them. One individual may be exercising because they find the actual exercise movement to be enjoyable while another person finds that each session holds a personal challenge for them. Whatever the reasoning behind one's motivation for exercising, it must come from within in order for meaning to be attached to it.

Jay Kimiecik has developed his own philosophy of intrinsic exercise from years of performing research in the field of psychology. In this philosophy, there are four core concepts that one must understand. They are labeled personal meaning orientation, mastery, inner synergy, and flow. Personal Meaning Orientation helps you find exercise rewarding in and of itself. Intrinsic exercisers articulate why they are working out and what they hope to get from it. Only when exercise becomes personally meaningful will you be motivated to do it regularly. Building on the concept of personal meaning orientation one must learn to recognize improvements in one's performance. This concept is referred to as mastery. Mastery allows one to meet personal challenges set forth by that individual in an effort to boost one's motivation. Inner synergy allows an individual to attach meaning to each exercise that is being performed. A good example of this is an individual who rides their bicycle in preparation for a charity tour they are scheduled to ride. This person is then attaching meaning to their exercise above and beyond just health related benefits gained from cycling. The concept involved with this theory is called flow. Flow involves a person totally being connected to an exercise. This involves a deep understanding and concentration on the exercise at hand. Once the flow state has been achieved an individual will want to work out for the deep psychological connection gained by performing the exercise.

Individuals cease exercising for a number of reasons. Those who find exercise internally rewarding have a better chance of adhering to an exercise program than those who do not. External rewards such as developing big muscles or losing weight will only motivate one for a limited time. The best advice for sticking with your exercise routine is to look deep within oneself and attach meaning to the exercise. Internal motivators will always outlast external motivators when talking about exercise adherence.