

Motivating Self-Improvement Methods to Stay Motivated

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In this paper, we propose the *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns, a pattern language that shows various ways to sustain ones motivation towards any task that can then result in the improvement of ones skills. Many people have trouble staying motivated in certain activities, even if they are very passionate about it. These patterns were created with the hope that they can help improve the lives of such people. In this paper, we will further delve into the purpose of these patterns, summarize the making process, introduce the patterns themselves, and expand on our plans for the future of *Motivating Self-Improvement*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Virtually all people have some sort of activity that they enjoy doing and wish to improve at. It can be anything from sports, writing, making videos, designing, drawing, music or even video games. One big issue many people face, however, is that no matter how passionate they are about that activity, there are going to be times in which it is difficult to stay motivated to improve one selves' abilities. These patterns will address some options for when faced with such times.

Self-Improvement, quite obviously, is the improvement of oneself. Although this definition leaves quite a lot of room for interpretation, in relation to the *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns, we use this phrase as such. While we will address the patterns as if the reader is looking to motivate themselves to improve their skills in a certain ability or hobby, they can be used to motivate oneself in any component of one's life. By this, we mean that the term "Self-Improvement," in this paper, refers to improving one's skills, knowledge, character, or any other part of oneself through one's own efforts.

Another important point to notice is that we believe the one who measures improvement is oneself. The most vital point of improving is recognizing it yourself. This does not mean that it is untrue when other people say that you have improved. On the contrary, hearing from others that you have improved can help you realize such yourself. But if you do not acknowledge your own growth, there has not been self-improvement. While not everyone will feel as such, many people, by knowing why they are motivated and recognizing the effort they put in to stay motivated, will be more likely to notice and acknowledge their growth and improvement.

Motivation itself is a tricky subject as well. The most common way that people, sometimes unconsciously, tend to motivate themselves to do things they don't want to in the moment is through incentives such as rewards. However, most people do not go further than this. While simply rewards are enough for some people, some others need more to stay motivated. It is also difficult because one must be motivated in order to look for other ways to stay motivated. We will go more into detail of this in the next section.

2. PURPOSE & USAGE

As mentioned in the last section, staying motivated can be difficult. However, we also understand that all people are different. While some people only need a small push or very rarely feel a lack of motivation, some people require a lot more effort to stay motivated and are constantly suffering with a lack of motivation. While there are external factors that cause these differences between people, such as environment, family situation, and even the different activities they are engaged in, it is just fact that every person is innately different and so require different things.

Because every person is different, some patterns will be more effective than others depending on the reader. For many people, there will be patterns that are not effective, that they do not agree with, or that they simply do not understand. However, these patterns were made with this thought in mind. Unfortunately, this also means that there will be some people, that do not connect with any of our patterns. Our way to deal with this will be explained in Section 5 (The Future of *Motivating Self-Improvement*).

Our hope is that the people who use the *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns can look through the patterns and discover which one's are best for themselves and where they can most effectively implement them in their lives. We want people to know that these patterns can be applied to motivating oneself in any aspect of life. Additionally, as these patterns are basically suggestions of various methods, we want the reader to know that tweaking the patterns to fit personal needs does not make them any less effective. For some, they are most effective the way they are written, while for others, changing some aspects of the patterns will make them more applicable to their lives. We believe that because people all have different needs, a pattern language is the best resource for people who are searching for ways to keep motivated. Compared to a self-help book, a pattern language is organized in a much easier to navigate way and contains simple and straight to the point answers. For people who are looking for a simple and clear answer to their problems, pattern languages are an amazing resource.

As was brought up in the Introduction, even reading these patterns and striving to stay motivated takes motivation. This paradox can go on forever, as you can say that even that needs motivation. There is no definite way to bypass this paradox. No matter what, there will be some people who cannot reach that level of motivation, and some people do not necessarily consider this a problem. Our hope, however, is that the people who are able to read these patterns will be inspired to share them to others who may need them or are simply interested.

3. CREATING MOTIVATING SELF-IMPROVEMENT PATTERNS

In this section, we will describe the process undertook to create the *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns. As University students, we understand how detrimental a lack of motivation can be. This served as our main reason for creating the *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns. We first went through a mining session (Iba and Isaku 2016) with the members of our Lab (Figure 1). We all shared some experiences of times when we were dealing with a lack of motivation or needed to complete something that we did not have the



Figure 1: Mining Process for *Motivating Self-Improvement*

enthusiasm to do and explained how we got through those times. At the same time, we wrote tips and methods we noticed in both our own and one another's experiences on sticky notes.

We split the mining process into two sessions to give ourselves more time to reflect on our past experiences. We also interviewed a few people outside of the seminar so we could hear a range of experiences.

After the mining was over, we had 70 separate sticky notes that we began to group (Figure 2).

We put the sticky notes into groups with fundamentally similar ideas. During this process, we removed some sticky notes we believed were redundant or did not relate to our subject. We also ended up adding a few sticky notes with ideas we thought of from looking at the groups that were forming. From these groups, we extracted the elements that would serve as the building-blocks of the patterns.



Figure 2: Sticky notes in the process of being grouped

From there, we went on to writing and creating the individual patterns based on what we had extracted.

4. THE MOTIVATING SELF-IMPROVEMENT PATTERNS

The *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns consist of six separate patterns, each a separate method for spurring motivation.

These patterns include:

- Treating Yourself
- Accountability Buddies
- Success Log
- Investment for Growth
- Visual Reminder
- Friendly Coach

No. 1

Treating Yourself A reward for your actions.

You tend to have a lot of short term goals.

▼ In this context



The amount of time and energy needed to complete small tasks is often underestimated.

- When the thing you want to complete, such as cleaning your room, reading a chapter, or finishing a paper, is a fairly short task, it can be a lot more tempting to procrastinate. You know that it's a "short" task that you can finish right away, but you keep putting it off for later. This is because it's not doing the task, but rather starting

the task that needs motivation.

- The same point applies when the thing you want to complete is something that takes more effort, such as going to practice or a class, going somewhere to find a specific book or supplies, or doing a drawing that you've been telling yourself you will do. In these cases, thinking of the labor involved, despite it being fun while doing it, can also be a big part of holding off on it or skipping it entirely.

▼ Therefore

Set an incentive for completing the task.

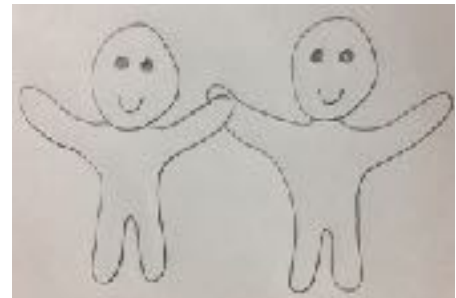
For example, you can tell yourself that if you go to practice today you can go out for dinner, or that once you finish reading a number of chapters you can eat ice cream. By knowing that you will have a reward when finished, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, it will be a lot easier to get yourself to start the activity.

No. 2

Accountability Buddies A mutually encouraging friendship.

You are on a rather long term task.

▼ In this context



When aiming high in a goal that takes time, you may get lost on the way.

- You want to keep up a pattern or schedule or just make sure you are constantly reaching for your goals, but this is hard by yourself. Even if you slack off, the only person who will know about it is yourself, and it's very easy to make excuses to yourself.
- With goals, if nobody else has heard them, it's very easy to just change them to something easier or twist them into something entirely different.

▼ Therefore

Find a friend who has a task of a similar length and is at a similar point in their goal.

The activities you are involved in can be completely different. You and this friend can keep each other updated on the activities or tasks you plan to complete and make sure to share with one another your progress. You can set up a certain time every couple of days or every week that you update one another on what you have done and what you plan to do. If you know that you will be sharing with another person, you will be more motivated to actually do what you initially said you would. However, because this is a mutualistic relationship, there will not be as much pressure that may cause you to pick an easier task, and it will be easier to feel comfortable with one another.

No. 3

Success Log

A record of your successes.

Remembering past successes make you more passionate.

▼ In this context

Most people need more motivation when they are in a slump.

- Even if remembering past successes makes you motivated, it is difficult to remember them at the times you need them. For most people, when you are in an unmotivated slump, your thinking tends to become negative. Because of this negative viewpoint, you may not even think of looking back and remember better times. Even if you do try to think back to your past successes, your negative thought may cause you to remember them differently, causing your thoughts to further become negative.

▼ Therefore

Create a record of your successes to look back at.

You can do this in the form of a daily success diary or even a type of journal or document in which you input a description and your feelings whenever you feel you did something great or succeeded in fulfilling a goal. This can be either strictly related to an activity or hobby, or include successes from all aspects of your life. By keeping this record written with a positive outlook and containing positive emotions, when you are in a slump you can look back at this record and reinvigorate your motivation.



No. 4

Investment for Growth

An opportunity to grow.

You want to find a way to improve and further yourself closer to your goal.

▼ In this context

You tend to forget that sometimes just being passionate about something is not enough motivation.

- When striving for improvement, there will be times in which it feels as if you are not improving at all. In these times, finding motivation can be very difficult. Because you are putting in effort and do not see improvement, your will to continue putting in effort begins to diminish.
- Especially if it is something like sports practice where you are surrounded by the same people, it can be especially frustrating and somewhat embarrassing to not be



improving as much as you would like to.

▼ Therefore

Invest in something that can contribute to increasing your knowledge or skill level in that activity.

For example, buy new or better equipment that can assist in improvement or pay for a course or lessons. Although this sounds as though it only relates to sports, it can be implemented to many different activities. For artists, buy more tools, take a class, or even buy a piece of artwork that can serve as further motivation or inspiration. Even for a person who is trying to improve their essay writing skills, they can pay for a course, buy an electronic dictionary, or buy books about essay writing. This new material can motivate you due to its positive effect on your skill level, the happiness of just owning those materials, or even the feelings of not wanting to have wasted money. Even the process of saving money to invest can be motivating, as simply knowing that you are investing in your growth can make you want to try harder.

No. 5

Visual Reminder

A space to remember your goals.

You want a way to keep your motivation level high.

▼ In this context



In a busy lifestyle, maintaining a high motivation level can be difficult unless you're willing to use a lot of resources.

- You know that remembering goals and recalling fun memories related to that activity motivates you, but when you have a lot on your plate it's easy to forget those things.
- Because you're busy, you may not have the time to keep a record or invest for a goal. Despite being passionate about what you're doing, because you're so busy, it's easy to end up taking the time you were going to spend doing that activity as time to relax or do something else.

▼ Therefore

Gather pictures or quotes that remind you of your goals and happy memories and put them in places that you see every day.

Because what's needed is a way to subtly remind yourself of these goals and happy memories, this can range from something like making a large collage and putting it on your wall or desk to simply putting a picture full of fun memories as the desktop background for your computer. By simply passing by and seeing these pictures, you are reminded of the fun times and your purpose for continuing. Through constant exposure to these positive motivators, you may even get to the point that without consciously thinking about it, your

practice or time spent doing that activity becomes your relaxation time and is what you want to do during your free time.

No. 6

Friendly Coach

A person to help you grow.

You want to simultaneously improve and interact with others.

▼ In this context



You may think that asking for someone's help makes you bothersome.

- When working to improve your skills through solely your own efforts, it can be difficult to be sure if you're going the right path. For many activities, if there is nobody there to point out your mistakes and tell you how to fix them, you can be stuck in a slump where, despite putting a lot of time and effort in, you are not improving. If stuck in this slump, you may develop the mentality that there is no purpose in trying if you are not improving.
- Even if you know you should ask for help, you may be under the assumption that the person you ask will be bothered.

▼ Therefore

Find a person more skilled than you who is willing to help.

While you may think that asking this person for help will keep you from becoming friends with them, it can often be the opposite. Especially if this person and you are equally passionate about the activity you both are engaged in, confiding in them and asking for help can lead to the two of you becoming good friends. The other party will know that you look up to them and recognize them as skilled, leading to them noticing and trusting you more. A shared passion for the activity can also lead to making more opportunities to socialize with one another, an example being to get together on a free day in order to work on the activity. The other party as well, despite being more skilled, can also improve themselves, or at least reinforce their knowledge, in the process of helping you.

5. THE FUTURE OF MOTIVATING SELF-IMPROVEMENT

The largest drawback of the current state of the *Motivating Self-Improvement* Patterns is the lack of voices. From the initial mining, we only had the experiences of our lab members as a base for our patterns. Additionally, other than our professor who also shared some experiences, we are all University students. While on one hand this means we are all very familiar with dealing with a lack of motivation, it also means that our patterns do not accurately reflect other age groups. To deal with this issue, we plan to interview people of various backgrounds, including more students and professors but also many others, and gain a larger viewpoint. After hearing more experiences of others, we will create more patterns

based from these. We also hope that once we have discovered enough patterns, we can build them into a Pattern Language book to publish and share with others.

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