

# 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*.

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## 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,

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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.

By mining the experiences of various people and seeing what worked for them, we were able to make a pattern language. Our reason for making this into a pattern language rather than a self-help book or clear guide is this difference between people. Patterns are made to be abstract and interpretable in many different ways. Any group of people should be able to all read the same pattern and all come up with different ways of applying it into their lives. As we will further explain in Section 5, we did not have as large of a voice as we initially strove for, so a pattern language is especially effective, as depending on every individuals innate differences and different situations, their application of the pattern will change to suit them.

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 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.

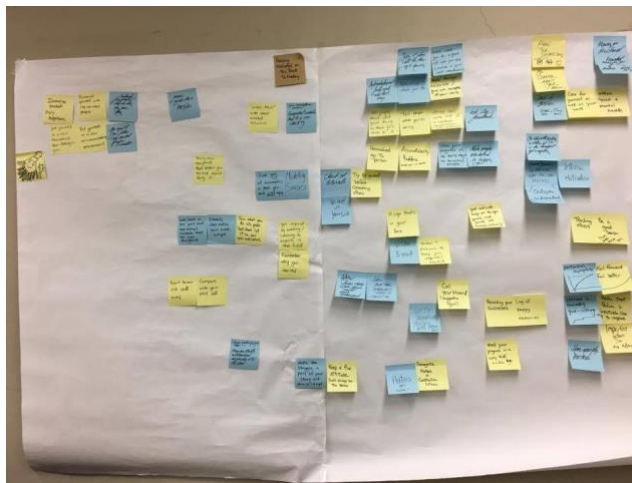


Figure 1: Mining Process for *Motivating Self-Improvement*

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.

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



Figure 2: Sticky notes in the process of being grouped

#### 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:

- Small Treats: Recognizing the importance of small tasks
- Outside Eyes: Support through an outside point of view
- Effort Log: A record of your accomplishments
- Investment for Growth: Making opportunities to improve and grow
- Visual Reminder: A space to remember your purpose
- Honest Coach: An objective person to help you grow

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No. 1

## Small Treats

Recognize the value of small tasks.



You tend to have a lot of short term goals.

▼ In this context

People tend to procrastinate due to the amount of time and energy needed to focus on and complete small tasks.

- 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.
- A significant reason people cannot find the motivation to start and complete these tasks is because they tend to not recognize the importance and value of small tasks. Rather than thinking of the outcome and the rewarding feeling that comes with effort, they think of the time and energy needed to complete the task.

▼ Therefore

### **Recognize that completion is a reward.**

Realize that small tasks are important and necessary. By completing these tasks, you are improving yourself, leading to larger successes. Help yourself recognize this by adding to your *Effort Log (No. 3)* as you progress in these small tasks. The completion of these tasks is a treat to yourself. However, there are times when the success is not visual, making it difficult to recognize this. In these cases, you can materialize your success through small rewards or incentives. For example, it is difficult to visualize the value of learning or studying for half an hour. Treating

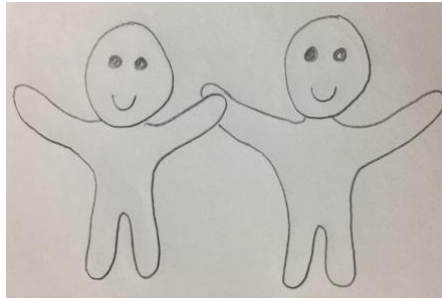
yourself afterwards can be a way to materialize your accomplishment, making it easier to visualize. The praise you get from *Outside Eyes (No. 2)* can also be a *Small Treat (No. 1)*.

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No. 2

## Outside Eyes

Get an outside point of view.



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 support in the people around you.**

Keep people updated on goals or tasks you plan to complete and share your progress. By sharing your goals with others, you will be more motivated to actually do what you initially said you would in order to not disappoint them. The people you confide in can also support you directly. Praise from someone close can be a *Small Treat (No. 1)* that further pushes you to put in effort. In this case, however, one should be careful to not have receiving praise be their only motivation.

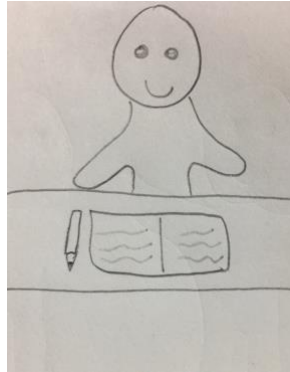
One example is a person who tells their family that they are trying to quit smoking and thinks of their family to keep them from relapsing. This can help them quit, but if not disappointing their family is the only motivation, it can be difficult to keep the final goal. While it can be using the approval of those precious to you as motivation, it can also be mutual. For example, a group of students may all make the same goal of passing a specific class and motivate one another to do the necessary work and study.

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No. 3

## Effort Log

A record of your accomplishments.



You want to remember your achievements and accomplishments.

▼ In this context

People tend to forget the effort they put into their tasks/goals.

- When looking back at past events, it's common to see them as failures and forget what you did good in that process. Many tend to only look at complete successes positively and forget the *Small Treats (No. 1)* that come from putting in effort, whether or not the outcome was a success.

▼ Therefore

### **Create a record of your accomplishments to look back at.**

Record all of your accomplishments, no matter how small they may seem. Especially in relation to any goals you have, record the small tasks you achieve in order to remember your *Small Treats (No. 1)*. By keeping this record written, even if the final goal is not reached or does not go as wished, you can still recognize that you put in effort that ultimately helped you grow. Because not all accomplishments are easy to recognize by oneself, you can even record when a *Honest Coach (No. 6)* points out your growth or when you are praised by *Outside Eyes (No. 2)*.

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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 will further help you reach your goal or expand your domain within the activity you enjoy**

This should be something directly related to your goal or activity. For example, buy new equipment to improve in a sport or other activity, join or take a class related to your activity, or travel to places relevant to your activity. If it is something that costs money, saving up for it is also a part of the process, and you can help yourself do so by including it in a *Visual Reminder* (No. 5). An example is a photographer who is either saving money to buy new camera equipment or saving up to travel to someplace to take photographs and includes pictures of those parts or the location on their *Visual Reminder* (No. 5). The difference between simply treating yourself and making an *Investment for Growth* (No. 4) is that the latter is meant to bring you further towards a goal or help you expand and improve. One should be careful to not see it as too much of a simply materialistic incentive, for it could easily become simply treating oneself.

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No. 5

**Visual Reminder**  
A space to remember your goals.



You want a way to keep your motivation level high.

▼ In this context

It's easy to forget your goals or purpose

- Even if you want to stay motivated, if your goal or purpose is not in mind you may forget why you are doing something and not be able to see the point in putting in effort, keeping you from doing that activity.
- Especially if it is an activity that requires a significant amount of effort and time, you can even forget that you find it fun.

▼ Therefore

### **Create a Visual Reminder of your goals and purpose.**

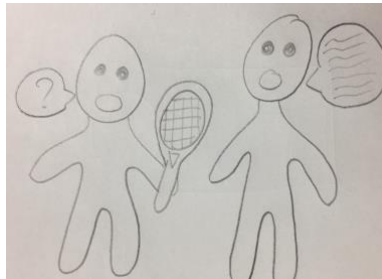
Gather pictures or quotes that remind you of your goals and happy memories and put them in places that you see every day. You can put up reminders of an *Investment for Growth (No. 4)*, some mementos of your *Small Treats (No. 1)*, or simply things that prompt you to remember your purpose. Because what's 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 having these reminders, by just looking at them, you can remember your purpose, whether that is to reach a certain goal or simply to have fun.

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No. 6

## **Honest Coach**

A person to help you grow.



You want to improve a skill.

▼ In this context

It's difficult to know how to improve and if you are doing so.

- 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.
- Even if you are improving, it can be difficult to recognize so.

▼ Therefore



### **Find someone who will be blunt with you and help you grow.**

This should be a “coach” who will watch your growth objectively and help guide you down the correct path towards improvement. This person can especially help when you are in a slump and are unsure how to further your skills. They can also serve as *Outside Eyes (No. 2)* that will help and point out where you have improved. By being trustworthy and always having an objective point of view, you can trust when they say you have made an accomplishment or improved, causing you to more easily be able to recognize your growth.

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## 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 mined enough patterns, we can build them into a Pattern Language book to publish and share with others.

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