



how to...

# Stay Motivated

ditch the carrot, ditch the stick, and build yourself a winch...  
learn to love action and tiny wins!

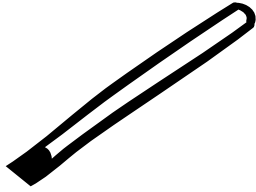
# Are You Doomed to Failure?

A lot of smart, creative people have a deep dark secret.

*I'm not, they confess, very good at finishing. I'm fine at starting. (Or, I can't even start.) I have a procrastination problem. I know what I should do, I just don't do it. I have to be watched. I work best under pressure. I need... accountability.*

Chances are, you recognize yourself more than a little in those statements, either separately or as a whole. And, as a result, you undoubtedly try to motivate yourself with punishment or rewards—the **stick**, or the **carrot**.

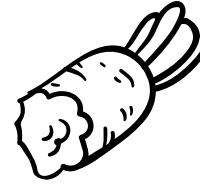
Those are, after all, the classical ways to motivate a person—or a creature. In fact, the terms come from the idea of motivating a donkey or carthorse—either with beatings from behind (stick) or the dangling of tasty rewards just out of reach ahead (carrot).



## The Stick

**The stick is punishment.** Punishment comes in a lot of forms, not just outright taking away of privileges or the infliction of physical pain:

- if I don't *this*, I can't *that* (taking away privileges or goodies)
- self-denial (I can't take a nap / take a walk / go out with my friends, this isn't done)
- self-devaluation (I haven't earned it)
- guilt, self-recrimination
- internal pressure (gotta get it done, gotta get it done—or else; if I don't... DOOM!)
- external pressure (waiting until a deadline looms to apply the pressure for you)



## The Carrot

**The carrot is reward.** Rewards, too, come in a lot of forms—some you might not immediately recognize:

- if I do *this*, I can *that* (giving privileges or goodies, especially ones that should be standard, e.g. breaks, naps, & socializing)
- treats (bribing with treats or goodies, non-standard (food, presents, spending))
- self-congratulations
- living for praise (backpats, strokes, and other ego gratifications from other people)
- living for results (imagining the successful and wonderful outcome—if you'll just get the damn thing done)

They look pretty different, don't they?

Pick one—the carrot or the stick. The carrot seems more acceptable, doesn't it?

But the fact is, they're the same. The carrot and the stick are exact, mirror images of the same exact philosophy: **you can't be trusted** to do things of your own accord. You either have to be beaten, or bribed.

And they both lead to your worst nightmare...

**Burnout:** one of the biggest fears for people who make a living off their brains.

**If you use the carrot, you'll burn out.** One day you'll look at the reward, vs the work you have to do to get it, and realize that it's simply not worth it. (And it'll suck all the joy out of the work itself, since you will think of it as purely an economic transaction.) You'll either need bigger and bigger rewards—or you'll simply stop working.

**If you use the stick, you'll burnt out.** One day you'll rebel.

Your self-image will be so low, you'll be so sick of pressure and guilt, that you'll decide that you're just not cut out for the work you're doing. You'll either knuckle down and apply *even more* guilt, thoughts about consequences, or even higher pressure deadlines — or you'll blow up, "Screw this, it's not worth it."

Do these sound familiar? The cycle of ever-increasing usage of a thing, leading to an eventual project death?

Yep, you got it right—we just described a **textbook case of addiction**.

*(And, by the way, this is all backed up by honest-to-god research studies: Rewards undermine people's joy de work. Guilt creates more procrastination, not less.)*

## It's Time for Rehab

So, that's that: if you use the stick, or the carrot, you're addicted.

Most people get along just fine this way. Maybe they're not the most engaged, excited, passionate people, but they're just fine. *You're* probably just fine.

Except...

## Addiction Doesn't Scale

You can keep going on “just fine,” so long as you don’t have to handle any kind of major change. So long as your *tomorrow* looks pretty much like *today*.

Therein lies the rub.

**Your *tomorrow* doesn't look like your *today*.** You're breaking out; you're doing something new. You want to run your own business. The person who specifies the work, prioritizes the work, does the work, and checks up on the work afterwards is going to be all rolled into one: *you*.

Which means that *you* either need an infinite capacity for addiction & burnout—or you need a rewiring.

In short, you need rehab. Because there *is* another way to work.

## What's carrot & stick rehab look like?

Happily for you, it doesn't take 17 days. You can rehab yourself on an outpatient basis.

Here's what you have to do to get over carrot-stick-itis (or inflammation of the motivation gland):

1. realize the true side effects of carrot-sticks (✓ **DONE!**)
2. learn about the cycle of carrot-sticks
3. internalize the mental model of the carrot-stick cycle
4. learn about the alternative way: the creative model
5. internalize the mental model for the creative model
6. go about creating the path of least resistance for yourself

And that's what you're going to do this week, while you start working on your product.

**Today, you're going to learn how to work without carrots —or sticks.** How to make inertia work for you, instead of struggling against it.

*The following diagrams were inspired by The Path of Least Resistance, an incredible (if somewhat impenetrable) book on the creative life cycle by Robert Fritz. Research mixed in from Punished by Rewards, Stumbling on Happiness, Predictably Irrational, Drive, and the various research papers I devour on a regular basis.*

Then, it's just a matter of consciously thinking about it, consciously practicing, applying the new work style to all the work you're about to begin doing.

Shall we begin with some shiny pictures?

## The Carrot-Stick Model of Work

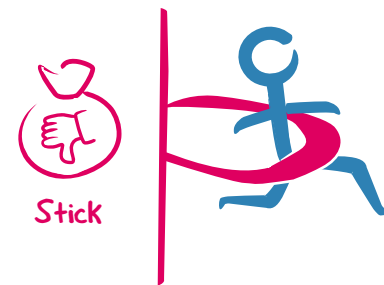
*Imagine you're in an almost featureless room.*

Your back is to a wall. Behind you is something you want to avoid: **the stick**. In front of you, the far wall, is the place you want to get: as far away from the stick as possible. Wrapped around your tummy is a giant rubber band, attached to the wall behind you (where the stick is).

**You want to get away from the stick**, so you run towards the other wall as fast as you can.

As you run, the rubber band stretches... & stretches... & stretches... til you're running at full speed, but can go no further. You stop for a second—and **TWANG!**

**The rubber band yanks you back. To where you started.**





Like clockwork, the closer you get to your goal, the harder it is to get closer. And you can almost never get there. That's because you're experiencing...

## The Rubber Band Model of Resistance

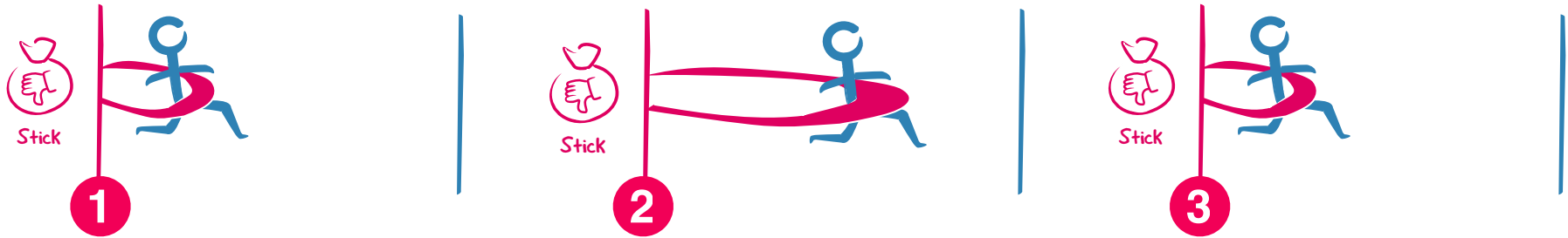
When you use the stick on yourself, you'll get *some* things done. But the more you use it, the less it works.

**The stick works by creating avoidance**—it doesn't matter if your particular poison of choice is guilt, self-flagellation, obsessing about how badly things will go wrong, or merely the denial of pleasures. The stick is *bad*. You want to *avoid* the stick. You want to *get away* from the stick. *You want to escape.*

Conveniently, running towards your goal is one way to get away from the stick. There's just one problem.

**The further you get away from the stick, the less pressure there is to go forward.** You're not so close to the fearful stick any more; you can let up. You are, after all, getting things done. So you start to relax and cut yourself some slack.





Which means, naturally, that you're less frantic to get away...  
so you slow down, or even stop.

**TWANG!**

## That's the Rubber Band at Work

When you chose the stick as your motivation of choice, you  
tied yourself to it.

**You created a conundrum: when things go well, you let up  
on the stick, then you're less motivated, then less gets  
done, and you have to start all over again.**

Yikes.

## Carrots: Same Stick, Different Day

Rewards — goodies, treats, being nice to yourself — is  
punishment dressed up nice.

Instead of running away from the hated stick, you are running *towards* the desired treat.

**But your resistance to doing the work is going to pull you back** when the reward *doesn't seem worth the effort*.

You're thinking in terms of economics: *How much effort do I have to put in for the goodie?*

**This encourages corner-cutting and rushing.** It also means you have a *set point* at which the work isn't worth the reward, and if you were working mainly for the reward, you're going to give up.

You'll find yourself thinking like this:

*I can nap when I'm done. Ugh, I just have to do this first. But... if I put in 3 hours on this freakin' crap, and all I get is a lousy nap, how could that possibly be worth it? I used to nap all the time! I didn't have to earn it! And, hell, I'M the boss of me, so I can just give myself the nap anyway. Screw it!*

It's just like paying your friends to help you move: it changes a delicate social exchange, based on mutual need, into an economic one. It changes friends into mercenary bodies.



And it wrecks everything, because...

## All You Think About is Gain and Pain

**When you work only for superficial reasons *unrelated to the work*, you don't engage with the work itself.**

You're not *engaged*, you're calculating. You're doing it solely to get somewhere, or something, else.

It doesn't matter if you're running *to* (carrot) or running *from* (stick).

You're not only motivating yourself inefficiently, you're undercutting your own motivation:

- People given rewards for something they enjoy, even love, will stop doing it when the conditional rewards stop.
- People who guilt themselves about not completing a task are even more likely to procrastinate on it in the future, compared to people who forgive themselves.

So, not only is it cruel to use the stick, it's ineffective. And

*If you don't believe me, believe the people who study motivation as a career choice: pick up a copy of Punished By Rewards by Alfie Kohn, Drive by Dan Pink, Predictably Irrational by Dan Ariely, or even Stumbling on Happiness by Daniel Gilbert.*

*(What's with all the Dans?)*

rewards aren't rewarding at all.

There's got to be a better way.

## The Effective Way to Work

“ *Do you want to be right, or do you want to be effective?*

This is a great question for every situation, including this one about the mystery of enthusiasm & motivation.

Being effective is so much more than being efficient: being effective means you do the right things, at the right time, in the right way. It also means **you treat yourself right**, because you are your own most powerful asset, and you can't be replaced.

So how can you apply the concept of being effective to doing all the work you need to do to create your product?

## Thinking Effectively About... You

**The carrot-stick treatment stems from the belief that *you can't be trusted*.**

That's a belief that you need to question. Give this one a serious moment or two, and see what your gut says:

*Do you really believe that, in the absence of carrots & sticks, you would do absolutely nothing?*

**If there's ever been something you worked on just for the joy of it, you can be trusted.** You *can* work without carrots & sticks, even when something is frustrating and feels just out of reach. You've stuck with it in the past; you'll be able to stick with it in the future. You have skills that brought you to this class—you had to earn them somehow. And, of course, you *are* in this class, and nobody's forcing you to do it.

**So, yes: you can be trusted.** Even if you're not perfect, and even if you feel like you struggle with other obligations, you *can* work without carrots & sticks. You don't need them. You just need new ways of working — and practice.

Phew!

## Thinking Effectively About... Your Choices

There's this jokey phrase in the personal development community: "Stop shoulding all over yourself." Get it? 'Shoulding' sounds like shitting. When you tell yourself "I should" all day, you're using a very subtle stick — a ninja stick. But it's still a stick.

**When you look at your project and say, "I should do x," you're either guilting yourself, or gearing up to.** Every little piece of *should* increases your potential for burnout, in every single realm of your life. You're trying to tell yourself that you have no choice, so get on with it already.

**If you're going to do something, choose to do it.** If you find yourself saying "I should" or "I have to," try saying "I choose to" or "I choose not to" instead.

Even the biggest, most fundamental actions comes down to choice: You *can* not eat. You *can* not pay your taxes. You *can* not put on pants, and run outside naked. Those are all choices you *can* make.

Those choices have consequences, naturally, but *you can*

*choose to accept the consequences.* That's the beauty of free will.

When you act, or don't act, you express your choice of preferred outcomes. When you say "I should," you are guiltning yourself and painting yourself into a corner, instead of recognizing that you always have a choice.

**It's remarkable how different it feels to say *I choose to do this* instead of *I have to do this*.** And, if you really can't muster up the feelings to commit to doing something for your side project, tell yourself, "It's ok, I don't have to. I'll revisit this in a week."

Think about the choice you have, and the consequences you *could* accept instead of choosing to do that work. Then revisit it in a week.

**This one little change of habit can make a world of difference.**

And giving yourself the respect you deserve, by recognizing your freedom to choose, will help you overcome burnout, until you *do* choose to do the work — freely, and happily.



## Thinking Effectively About... Your Work

Finally, the complete alternative to the carrot-stick rubberband treadmill is the **Winch**.

With the Winch model, you don't assign pain or value to given tasks. All you measure them against is this single metric:

“ *Does doing this get me closer to creating what I want to create?* ”

If so, *choose to do it*. Pull on the chain that will bring your desired result into being. Feel the progress of getting closer at every step to the thing you want to bring into the world. See it coming closer and closer to being within your grasp.

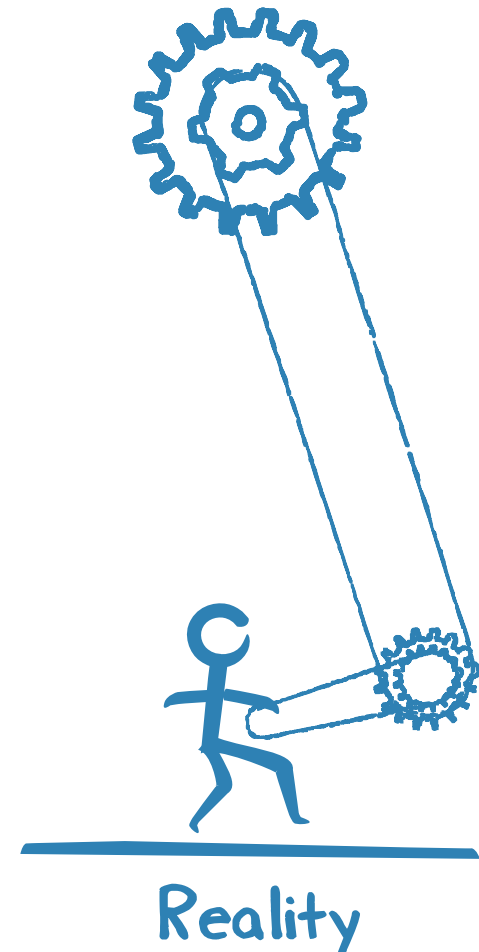
*Or not. It's your choice.*

The thing you are measuring, the thing you want to change, the thing that tells you if you're doing right, is the distance between Current Reality and Desired Creation.

**Distance is neutral — even objective.** It's not judgmental,

### Creation

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just like the mile between your house and your friend's house is not judgmental.

Your Current Reality, of course is where you sit right now, with the skills, connections, time, energy, motivation, funds, and know-how that you've already got.

Your Desired Creation can be your product, of course — but it can *also* be the new kind of life you want to have.

## Instead of Sticks & Carrots, Choice and Perspective

There's no carrot in the Winch. There's no stick in the Winch.

**There's only a question of distance, and whether you choose.**

And when things get tough, look up from the task at hand and think for a while about your long-term goal — the thing you're going to create. Give yourself a booster shot of perspective.

Ask yourself what you can do to get closer to it — and if you want to. Focusing on that end product will help you choose

what's right for you, and once you choose, stick to it. Even if the task is onerous or boring.

In the case of this launch class, the thing is your Creative Atom (what), and the change you hope it will bring to your life (why).

## How to Get Started

When you're overwhelmed by the squalling seas of uncertainty, the best port in the storm invariably involves a to-do list. When faced with an insurmountable task, break it down.

Now that you know what that task is (getting to your Creative Atom), and what that involves (your Backwards Plan), you know *what* you're breaking down into small tasks.

**All that remains is to actually do the breaking down.**

What you're going to do today is create a to-do list for the next week, and work steadily on it. Just one or two items per day is all it takes to get moving.

**It's important to make your list accurate.** One of the most motivating things in the world? Reaching a goal you set. Keeping a commitment. Showing yourself you can do it, that you *are* trustworthy and up to the task.

That means it's important to learn how much you can realistically achieve each week, and only set yourself to do that much and no more. Setting out to do unrealistic amounts of work is yet another way you use the stick on yourself.

*See the next page for a repeatable checklist that'll help get you off your butt and stay motivated.*

Unsure where to start or what to do? Buoyed by achieving

# Get Off Your Butt: Attack Plan

what you set out to achieve? Unhappy when you overcommit and can't meet your goals? Here's exactly what to do:

- ☐ Look for "Can do today" tasks from your Backwards Plan
- ☐ Pick a small handful, and write them out (on paper!) as your work for the week
- ☐ Try to tackle one or two every day — spending about an hour per weekday, 2 hours on the weekends
- ☐ At the beginning of each week, see how much you accomplished last week. Adjust forward expectations accordingly.

**This is all it takes to get started:** Pick a handful of items that require no prior work, and set them as your agenda for the week. Do one or two a day, and at the end of the week, figure out if you correctly determined how much work you *could* do.

**Repeat: It's very important not to overburden yourself continually, because that leads to dashed hopes—and those lead straight to burnout.**

Much better to be accurate in your assessment of how much you can achieve, and then feel satisfied when you hit it. Even if it seems very low at first.

That's why it's important to both estimate the time you can work on things each day or week, and then check up your estimates with reality at the end of each week — with no judgments, and no guilt, just a clear eye towards *what you really did*.

*Now, how do you find time to do that work? Yup. Next page.*

# Finding Time to Work

But *when* to do that work? That's a very excellent question. It's important to schedule in time for these tasks—even if you don't stick to the calendar religiously.

You may feel like you have *no* time. Trust me, it's untrue. You just have to uncover it.

Here's how:

- ☐ **Write a roughly weekly calendar. Any standing appointments? Hobby time? TV time? Actual work time, work at home (cleaning, etc) time?**
- ☐ **Look for time you can recover from value-less activities, like TV watching**
- ☐ **Figure out how you can save just 1 hour per day (on average)**

# Work Less, Work Better

**Another way you can help yourself along your way is to analyze your Backwards Plan:** Are there whole chunks you could eliminate? Can you use a 3rd-party product or service to get something done much faster? Can you outsource? Can you skip it for now? Could you recruit help from friends or family for the price of dinner & beer?

Be creative; be ruthless. Your time is limited, so you have to apply every ounce of your creativity to this problem!

Here's a quick list to check off to find time-sucks—and places to optimize:

- ☐ Look at your plan.
- ☐ Is there a part (or parts) that could be filled in by a third-party product or service? (Even if only for now?) (e.g. billing, the distribution channel for your infoproduct, one-click blog hosting, design themes, etc)
- ☐ Is there a part (or parts) where a friend or family member could help you, in return for bribes of food & fun?
- ☐ What about open source tools, for you programmers?
- ☐ What about free software, for running your sales site, support forums, mailing list, etc?
- ☐ Is there a tool you could buy that would make things go much faster?



# Your First Weekly Self-Assignment

Look at your Backwards plan. What can you accomplish (realistically) this week? (When in doubt, be conservative! Better to feel you could accomplish more, than not enough!)

When next Monday rolls around, you'll want to take time to figure out *how* your plan stood up to reality: Did you accomplish what you planned? Was it too much? Too little? Did you work on the days you planned? Why or why not? How did you feel about it? How did you motivate yourself?

**If you print nothing else, be sure to print the following weekly sheet!** And check things & days off, scribble fat lines through them, have fun—and keep a visible record of what you've accomplished!

# Weekly Action & Check-in Sheet

Week Range

**This week, I can...**

**I can fit in this much time on...**

Monday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual
Tuesday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual
Wednesday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual
Thursday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual
Friday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual
Saturday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual
Sunday	<input type="text"/> est.	<input type="text"/> actual

**In review (next Monday), this week went...**