

The Common Motivational Cold

Achoo! I'm Bored

Does the idea of starting that English paper give you a headache? Does the thought of doing one more page of math homework make you queasy? Don't worry. It happens. Everyone catches the occasional motivation cold. Here are five prescriptions to help you get back in action.

Rx 1: Focus on High-Impact Activities

It may seem obvious, but it's easy to let trivial tasks distract you from more important ones. Smaller projects are often easier and quickly offer a sense of accomplishment. Keep in mind, though, that this sense of accomplishment tends to be short-lived. What matters most is still not done.

Make a list in two columns:

- Column 1: What are your most important tasks?
- Column 2: What's on your to-do list?

If your items in column 2 have little to do with your objectives in column 1, you have a problem. To solve it, you may need to rearrange your time and devote more energy toward what counts. This will help you build momentum.

Rx 2: Create New Challenges

When you start to feel bored with something, try changing your approach. Say you've been given an assignment similar to one you've done in the past. Think about how you can solve this problem in a different way or improve upon your previous work.

Rx 3: Set Attainable Goals

Lots of people have big dreams, but have difficulty translating them into concrete steps. The key is to think short-term, not only long-term. For example, if you're having trouble writing a 20-page paper for class because it seems too large, don't focus on that final number. Consider each section of your paper individually. Now you're dealing with a familiar task, not unlike papers you've written before.

Rx 4: Find a Social Support Network

In almost any setting, there are mentor figures who can give you guidance and help you develop new skills. Plus, there are peers who can motivate you by listening and exchanging ideas. Both mentors and peers are important elements of a support network, which is also a great resource for information and for new ways to challenge yourself.

Rx 5: Acknowledge Your Accomplishments

When you've got momentum going, it's tempting to jump from task to task. Sometimes, though, this can make you feel stressed, like you're not getting enough done. Instead, pause after you've reached a goal or give yourself a quick reward. Take a walk, send an email, get a snack—whatever works for you.