

Workbook

Build Lasting Motivation

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Motivation is *not* the opposite of willpower

Recently, I've noticed people degrading the idea of motivation in a lot of social media spaces, saying all people need is willpower and hard work. While we do need both will and work to accomplish our goals, it's worth paying attention to motivation as a measure of how we get things done **without feeling perpetually worn out** in the process. This is why I distinguish between lasting motivation and the hype-you-up-just-to-burn-you-out kinds of motivation associated with dodging punishment (whether it's a bad manager eval, a bad customer review, or a bad grade) or seeking a quick prize (whether a tasty piece of chocolate, binging screens, or a bonus).

How did I get into this topic?

I became curious about exactly what triggered and supported motivation when I was a college professor; I noticed how some of my students were so much more interested in learning than others. It didn't take a study of motivation science to notice that it was not possible to create someone else's motivation for them, and it only took observing myself to know that it's not always easy to light up your own motivational fires either.

Since I'm a super nerd, that's all it took to spark a jump from curiosity to active research. It doesn't hurt that my spicy brain almost always seems to have enough energy to learn about a topic that piques my curiosity (even as it interferes with sustained focus on anything that feels like an obligation. But more on that later).

Fast forward a number of years, when a fellow educator asked me how she could support a student who'd said "can you help me give a shit about high school? I want to, but I don't know how." I wanted to find a good book for her, but at the time there wasn't one. So I started interviewing students all over the country to understand their most motivating learning experiences, found a co-author in the process, and released the book *Can You Help Me Give a Sh*t? Unlocking Teen Motivation in School and Life* in the summer of 2024.

While *Can You Help Me Give a Sh*t?* focuses specifically on teens' experience in school, the underlying principles of **what it takes to build and sustain lasting motivation applies across ages, groups, and contexts**. As I went on podcasts and book talks, people frequently asked me if there would be a workbook to accompany the book's review of student experiences and academic research. The more I spoke with parents, employees, leaders, and solopreneurs, the more I found it wasn't just teens who were looking for ways to feel more motivated by what they were doing with their days, weeks, and months.

So who is this workbook for?

This workbook is for anyone, adult or teen, who wants concrete ways to sustain energy towards a meaningful goal. If you're looking for alternatives to just "apply nose to grindstone and push through" or "use carrots and sticks to get yourself to do what needs to be done," then you've grabbed the right workbook. The activities here focus on the four pillars that support lasting motivation (or what I call the ABCDs of motivation): Abilities, Belonging, Choices, and Dopamine. If we don't feel we have the abilities we need to reach our goal, the belonging with people who can help us reach it, the meaningful choices on what we're doing (and how), and the healthy habits for a good dopamine baseline, we will be hard-pressed to feel any motivation for long. (There's a bit more explanation for each of these at the start of each section.)

Additionally, as someone with a spicy brain who works with many other neurospicy folks, I've found the ABCDs to be especially salient for those of us who frequently feel like the way our brains work jumps between being exhilarating and being exhausting. These workbook activities don't directly talk about the various ways our brains can be spicy – whether it's from adhd, autism, anxiety, mood differences, sensory processing differences, or even the significant neurological effects major hormonal changes can have – but as someone whose brain has several "spices," I've found all of these activities, at different times, have helped me. And every client, colleague, employee, or friend who has experimented with one or more of these activities has found at least one that made a big difference for them.

I know that isn't sexy marketing language promising a magic silver bullet to solve all your woes. If I had that to offer, I would! Instead, this workbook is more like a cookbook: each activity is a recipe / experiment, and you can try the ones that spark your curiosity and consider whether or not to push yourself to try something that's outside your comfort zone.

If you resonate with the activities in this workbook, I'd love to hear from you. You can find my various socials and other links at linktr.ee/spicybrainsgetstuffdone. And if your brain also works differently, and you want personalized support building your motivation, or getting just-right strategies for your unique strengths and challenges, please check out spicy-brains.com or beccablock.com to learn more about how we can collaborate.

How to use this workbook

You may have already started to recognize some areas where you don't feel like one or more of your motivation ABCDs is going as well as it could. Rather than worry, or go down a rabbit hole digging up content on that topic, you can use this workbook to find and try out a

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quick activity to help you bolster that area. There are activities for all four of the ABCDs—Abilities, Belonging, Choices, and Dopamine—organized in themed sections that each start with a quick overview of that area (plus an image you can color if you want—sections end with a printable coloring page too. Yay for easy ways to play with art).

Each activity is something you can either finish, or reach a good pause point on, in just 15 minutes. Each activity is also something you can do more than once, focusing on different goals or areas of your life each time. Just reprint a blank page, or make a digital copy for some fresh space. While the whole workbook is printable, if you're feeling selective the one part I do strongly recommend printing is the values cards in the last four pages, as they're meant to be cut up and sorted, and are used in several of the activities.

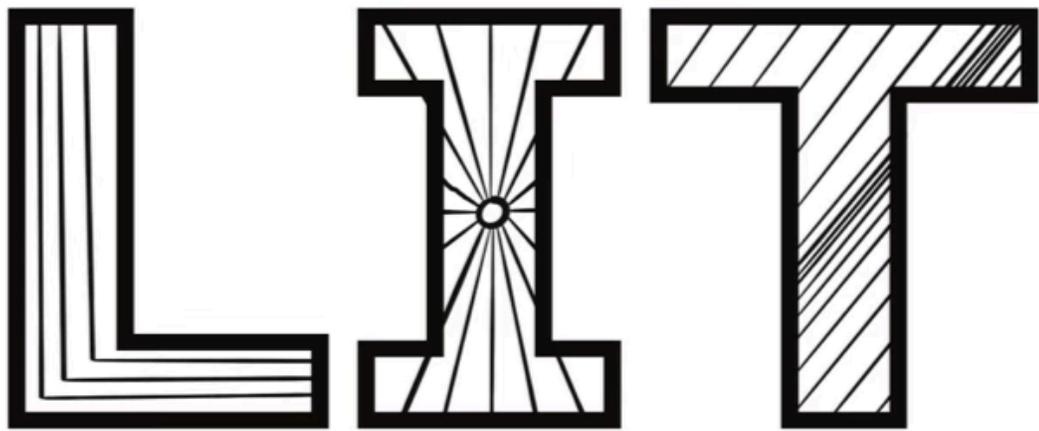
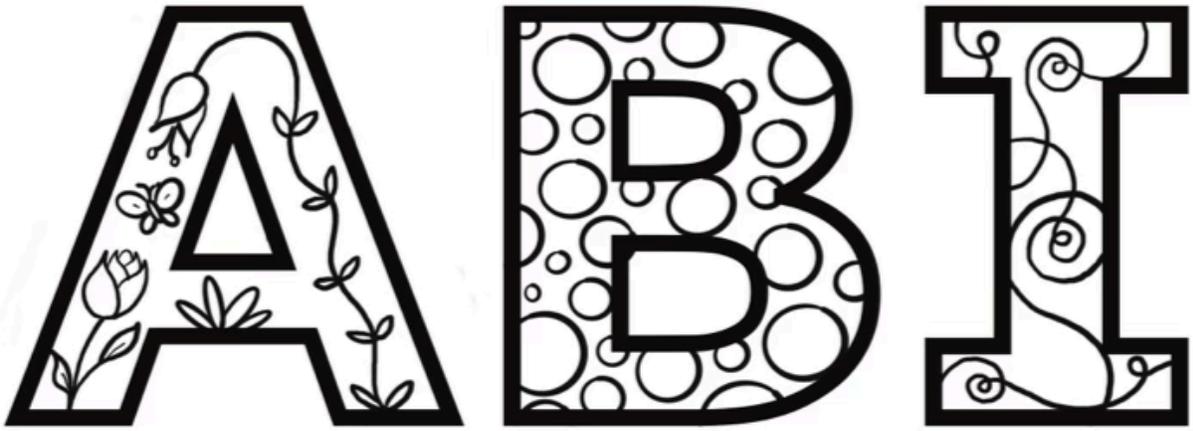
However you approach it, give yourself permission to play.

You can chart your way through the activities in whatever way works for you. Abilities activities are first purely to make the alphabetical order easy to navigate, not because building your abilities is the first essential step. Some people find it helps them most to start where they feel the biggest deficit. But some people do best starting where they already feel okay, and really building an area into a strength to lean on before they tackle something that feels like a bigger challenge. Try one approach, and if you get stuck switch it up and try another.

A couple more ideas before you jump in:

- If you're really not sure where to start, skip to the Dopamine section. Building some good habits around sleep, exercise, and screens will make it easier to get those healthy brain rewards for accomplishments in the Abilities, Belonging and Choices sections.
- Do this with a friend or loved one. Think of building mindful, sustainable motivation practices as a goal unto itself. Doing it with an accountability buddy (check out that activity in the Belonging section) will both support you in achieving your goal and strengthen that relationship while you do it. And who doesn't love a win-win?
- If you start to think of this workbook as a chore rather than a choice, pause to check in with yourself on why it's feeling that way. Try printing out and playing with the coloring pages to loosen up the reins a little and get back into a playful and curious mental space.

Alright, enough yammering from me. You got this. Dive in!



A is for Abilities

To keep feeling motivated, we need to believe we have, or can learn, the skills and mindsets we need to succeed at our goal. We also need to believe those skills and mindsets are going to matter to us and to other people over the long haul. So, for instance, if you're in an algebra class but don't think you're capable of doing algebra, obviously you're going to find it hard to feel motivated to succeed in the goal of learning algebra and passing the class. But even if you think you could learn algebra, if you don't think those algebra skills have any value to your life or to other people you care about once the class is done, you're going to find it pretty hard to stay motivated.

So if you find yourself in a situation where you're doubting your ability to reach a goal, or wondering what skills and mindsets you actually want to learn, one or more of the next four activities might help you get clearer and reboot your interest.

Abilities: What's right with you?

What to do: Pause to reflect on what you're already pretty good at (even if you want to get better). Do you make your friends laugh? Are you great at convincing people to try that new thing you just discovered? Do you love imagining new worlds, or reflecting on big ideas? Chances are, there's a lot to appreciate about you that you might be overlooking. Nobody needs to see this page, so put worries about being over-confident aside, and really identify where you shine.

Why to do it: It's easy to focus on our deficits—what we can't do (yet), aren't good at, struggle with, and so on. But it's much easier to sustain motivation to keep growing and learning if we're building on our existing strengths. Reminding ourselves of specific times we demonstrated a particular strength reinforces our confidence.

Try it out:

1. Circle/highlight at least 5 things you're good at from the list below (or add new ones and then choose them).

Active	Helpful	Punctual
Adaptable	Honest	Realistic
Affectionate	Humble	Reliable
Calm	Imaginative	Resilient
Caring	Innovative	Resourceful
Capable	Inspirational	Respectful
Confident	Intuitive	Responsive
Courageous	Just	Savvy
Creative	Kind	Self-directed
Curious	Logical	Sincere
Decisive	Methodical	Smart
Devoted	Objective	Social
Discerning	Open-minded	Strategic
Disciplined	Organized	Supportive
Encouraging	Passionate	Team player
Ethical	Patient	Tenacious
Faithful	Perceptive	Thoughtful
Flexible	Persuasive	Tidy
Funny	Polite	Trust-worthy
Gentle	Positive	Versatile
Hard-working	Proactive	Zesty

2. Use the blank boxes to write out a specific story of a time you showed this strength (don't skip this step if you want the confidence and clarity to last more than a few minutes!)

One time I showed	strength was when...
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One time I showed	strength was when...
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One time I showed	strength was when...
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Abilities: It's so Venn

What to do: Brainstorm abilities you might want to invest in building further by exploring intersections between things that are meaningful, fun, and valuable.

Why: "Purpose" has become a pretty weighted term, and some people feel pressure to figure out what they're "meant" to do. That kind of pressure shuts down creativity and self-discovery. This activity helps lighten and simplify exploring what you may want to spend more time doing.

Try it out:

1. Use the venn diagram on the next page to:
 - a. Fill in the top left circle with activities, topics, or experiences you've found meaningful
 - b. Fill in the top right circle with things you do or say that other people value
 - c. Fill in the bottom circle with activities or experiences you find really fun
 - d. Look for connections. Is there anything you can put in the three-part overlap that's expanded on the bottom of the page?
2. List anything that ended up overlapping 2 or all 3 circles

My overlaps are...

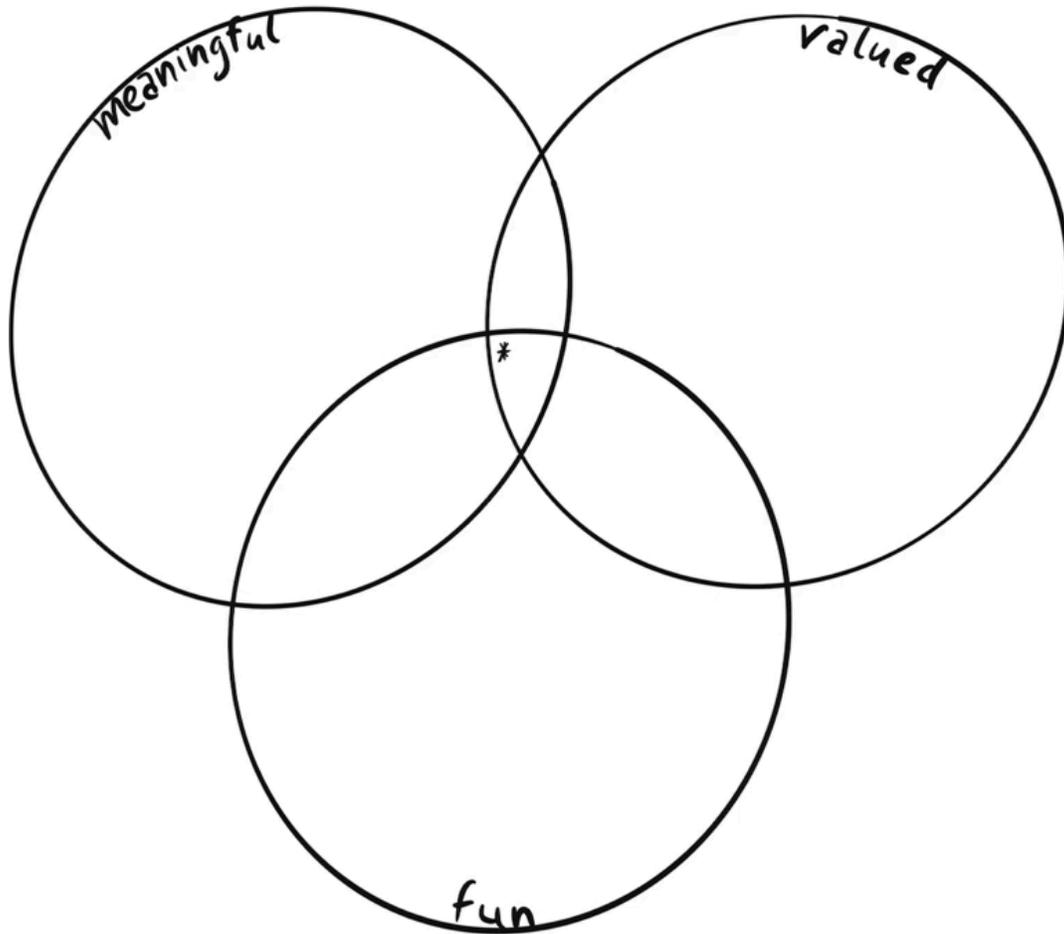
3. How much time do you spend on those overlaps in your average week right now? How much time do you want to spend in one of those overlaps each week?

My actual vs desired time in overlaps is...

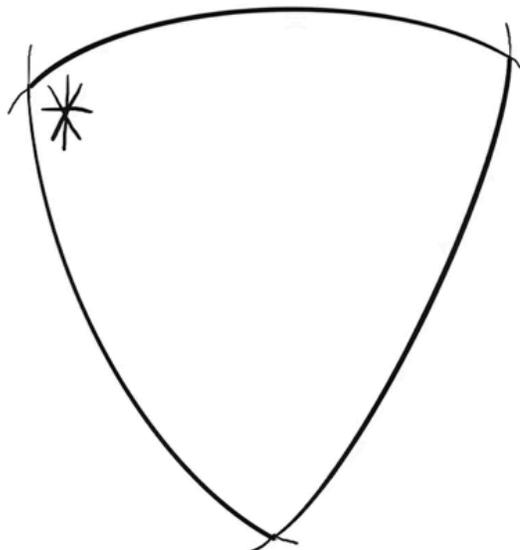
4. Set a mini-goal: what can you do over the next 7 days to increase that time by 5-10%? Fill in this box with your commitment to yourself.

During the next 7 days, I will support myself growing my ability to:

by spending time on:



What's
in
the
overlap?



Abilities: Learning to learn

What to do: Let go of old conditioning about learning being associated with mandatory classes or training. Instead, set yourself up to make any learning you want to do in the future more engaging and effective by identifying what techniques, contexts, and connections make it easier or enjoyable for you to learn.

Why: Every skill or mindset you develop throughout your life requires you to have one meta-ability: learning. Learning gets associated with “schooling” or “training” but they’re not the same: ever sat through a bad lecture and not remembered a single thing? If you undo the story that learning is something directed by other people, and instead begin to intentionally direct it yourself, you’ll unlock the ability to stay engaged in long-term goals even when you run into obstacles that require you to change or grow in some way to overcome them.

Try it out:

1. Remember a time when your skills or your mindsets changed for the better over the course of a day, weeks, months, or years. This could have happened intentionally or by accident, in a formal setting (like classes or the workplace) or an informal one (like hanging out with friends and picking up their knowledge of cooking/crochet/politics/etc). Fill in the blanks:

When I was years old, I learned:
I learned that from:
Because I learned this, I now:
It was interesting / meaningful for me to learn this because:
I handled obstacles during this learning experience by:

Now remember a different kind of learning you've done and valued, and notice what does and doesn't change about your answers.

When I was years old, I learned:
I learned that from:
Because I learned this, I now:
It was interesting / meaningful for me to learn this because:
I handled obstacles during this learning experience by:

Given these experiences, how do you want to experiment with making future learning more effective, engaging, and meaningful for you?

I'm going to experiment with future learning by:
I'll be able to tell if this experiment worked for me if:

Abilities: Values into action

What to do: Get in touch with what matters to you by sorting through what doesn't. Then use this insight to identify what habits, skills, or mindsets embody this value into action. This activity can stand on its own, or feed into the "time audit" activity in the Choices chapter.

Why: Sometimes we get caught up in what abilities we think we "should" have that we don't, and are overwhelmed by everything it would take to learn them. This can be a sticky trap to get out of, even though we logically know that not everyone can be equally good at everything. (Ever heard of an Olympic athlete who was simultaneously a rock star?) Focusing on what deeply matters to us as a current part of our identity can help us move from a "I *should* be able to do this" head space into a mentality that's more like "I *want* to be able to do these specific things that matter to me, and I can say no to the other stuff."

Try it out:

1. If you haven't already, print out and cut up the values card pages at the end of the workbook.
2. Do a quick initial pass through the cards, sorting them into 2 stacks initially: "definitely not a value for me now" and "yes, I care about this"
3. Put aside the first stack and go through your "yes" stack, sorting it again into 2 stacks: "top value" and "background value"
4. If you still have more than 5 in your "top value" stack, sort those again until you land on just your top 5 values *for this point in your life* (sometimes reminding yourself you're not vowing to make these your top 5 forever makes this easier!)
5. Jot down those 5 values on the next page (one per row).
6. Next to each value, write, doodle, or capture audio notes about what someone who holds that value *acts* and *thinks* like on a day to day basis.
7. Now star the actions and thinking patterns you're already doing much of the time.
8. Pause to do a quick celebration wherever you put a star—do a happy dance, fist-pump, give yourself a hug—whatever acknowledgment looks like to you (just don't skip this; we get vital energy from celebrating our wins!)
9. Review what you did and didn't start. Any reflections?

Reflections on where I'm embodying my values in my thoughts and/or actions:

Value	Acts like...	Thinks like...

CAN'T

NEVER COULD DO

ANYTHING

BUT I

CAN

B is for Belonging

To sustain our motivation, we need to feel like we have people we respect and care about, who also respect and care about us—and support us in pursuing our goals. So, for example, if you're in a new job, or working on a new project in your old job, and you think you're capable of getting the job done but you don't feel like your supervisor or any of your colleagues will be there to support you as you run into hurdles along the way, you're going to find it hard to sustain motivation, especially when you hit roadblocks.

Obviously, building a sense of belonging doesn't happen overnight. The first three activities in this section help you strengthen the relationships you already have, and the last one helps you begin to build new ones. Think of building belonging with people across a range of contexts as an investment in your motivation (and theirs!) – it's not a get rich quick scheme, but with ongoing, meaningful contributions, you'll build something that matters.

Belonging: My values, your values

What to do: Connect with others in a way that feels both playful and meaningful by doing a value card sort together and discussing what you each select as your top 5 values and why.

Why to do it: Sharing why you chose what you chose, and being curious about their why, is both a meaningful and safe way to connect with another person—whether you're deepening a dynamic you've had for a long time, or forming a new one. By pulling back the curtain on what certain ideas mean to you, and why they matter, and then listening deeply to someone else do the same, you create a space to connect around both your similarities and your differences that is respectful and caring. By using a fun tool like values cards to do it, it adds an element of play, making it easier to enter the conversation with an open mind and heart.

Try it out:

1. Find one or more people who you want to have a more meaningful connection with, and ask them to join you in this activity
2. If you haven't already, print and cut out the values card pages at the back of the book (you may want to print enough to give a separate set to each person).
3. Sort through the deck to select your top five values right now. (If you're passing a single deck around, jot down your five and put them back into the deck before you hand it to the next person.)
4. Take turns sharing one value at a time with each other.
 1. As you share the value you selected, explain what that word means to you, and why you picked it.
 2. As you listen to others share, listen with curiosity, regardless of whether that value personally matters to you right now.
5. As each person finishes, it can help to say things like "thank you" or any other acknowledgement before moving to the next turn. (Try not to jump into asking questions since they can often sound like judgments in disguise, especially if someone is feeling vulnerable about what they shared.)
6. Once everyone has shared all five, invite people to share insights they had from identifying their current values and hearing from others.

My reflections:

Belonging: Accountability buddies

What to do: Once you have a goal in mind, no matter what it is, find someone else you trust who also has a goal they're pursuing. Then set up a structured way of supporting each other as you each pursue your goals.

Why to do it: When we share our goals, we can help each other be more likely to reach those goals *and* strengthen our connection in the process. It's like being half cheerleader, half coach: you've got their back when they run into a challenge or start procrastinating and distracting themselves from their dreams, and they've got yours.

Try it out:

1. Pick a goal. It could be something shorter-term, like building a new sleep habit, or something longer term, like learning to play an instrument.

My goal is:

2. Identify 3 people you trust to support you in pursuing that goal:

Name:

Name:

Name:

3. Pick one to reach out to first. Tell them about the accountability buddies idea, share the goal you are working on, and ask them if they have a goal they want to work on as well.
 - a. If they're onboard with the idea AND have a goal, go on to step 4.
 - b. If they're not excited, or don't have a goal, reach out to the next person on your list. (Skip having a one-direction accountability partnership; it's prone to start feeling like nagging rather than being a relationship builder.)
4. Set up a structure that will work for you both. Answer the questions below together. Get specific about the behaviors you'll check in about; for example, if your goal is to "get in shape," it will be more helpful for you to say "I plan to go to the gym 3x a week" and for them to then check in on how it's going with getting to the gym this week than for them to ask "how's it going with getting in shape?" Also get specific about frequency and method of touching base, and aim for at least 2x/month.

What specific behaviors are you adopting or changing that you want your buddy to check in about?

What specific behaviors are they adopting or changing that they want you to check in about?

How often will you touch base?

How will you touch base—text, calls, in-person?

5. Around a month in, touch base about how the structure is going. Is there anything you all want to adjust?

Updates:

Belonging: Appreciations

What to do: Strengthen existing connections by focusing on what's great about people you already know. Then tell them! It will boost their sense of belonging, too.

Why to do it: Gratitude is one of the fastest and most consistent paths to happiness ([here's one accessible summary of it](#)). The trick is to actually *feel* grateful, not just dutifully name things we think we *should* feel grateful for but don't right now. When we focus on things we appreciate about other people, it not only triggers that feeling of gratitude in us, it also boosts our feelings of connection. When we share those appreciations, it usually does the same for the other person, and strengthens that relationship even more.

Try it out:

1. Make a list of people you appreciate in the table on the next page.
2. Next to each name, add at least one thing you specifically appreciate about them. It could be something simple, like "they always smile at me when we pass in the hall," or something that really moved you, like "they sat with me while I cried about my pet dying and didn't say anything to try to make me feel better, so I felt safe really grieving in front of them."
3. Next to each appreciation, jot down how grateful you're actually feeling about this right now (the goal is not to make yourself feel more grateful than you do, just to notice how you actually feel when you think about it).
4. Look at the people you feel the most appreciative of right now. Is there at least one person on that list you'd feel comfortable sharing what you appreciated?
5. If there is, decide how and when you're going to tell them.
6. Whenever you're feeling disconnected from the people you know, come back and revisit / expand on your list, and consider reaching out to share an appreciation with someone again.

Notes/doodles about how it felt to tell someone your appreciations:

Person	I appreciate...	this much...

Belonging: Icebreakers that don't suck

What to do: Have a set of questions you can draw on when you want to make it easy, interesting, or playful to get to know people. You can use these if you're running a meeting, facilitating a group space, or just approaching people at a party or networking event.

Why to do it: While ice-breakers done poorly induce a cringe moment, that's generally because they're perceived to be inauthentic or forced, not coming from genuine curiosity. When we ask each other unexpected questions we're genuinely interested in hearing the answer to, it has the opposite effect. It prompts us to find uncommon things in common with other people, feel a shared spirit of discovery — and be delighted not to be having the same boring conversation over and over.

Try it out:

1. Pick some questions you both feel comfortable asking people (you may find it helps to have some deeper ones you ask people you already know, and a lighter set for people you're just meeting). I'm listing some ideas below to get you started, but a short search online will give you hundreds more to choose from if none of these appeal to you. (I suggest looking up "35 questions to fall in love" as one interesting set that's been researched for its ability to build intimacy—not just of the romantic kind.)
2. Make your own list on the next page. Refresh it if you find you actually aren't enjoying the conversations that get started, or that you were but now it's a bit boring.

Some ideas to get you started:

- Instead of "what do you do?" try "what do you love doing?" or
- Instead of "how are you?" try "what's sparking your curiosity these days?"
- "If your current mood was a weather report, what would it be?"
- "What's one thing you do almost every day?"
- "What's your favorite pick-me-up?"
- "What's the most recent song, book, or movie you enjoyed? What did you like?"
- "What's something most people don't know about you that you wish they did?"
- "Who was your favorite musician to listen to when you were a teen (if you're talking to an adult — switch it to "a kid" if you're talking to a teen)? Do you still listen to their music now?"

Questions I like learning the answer to:

BETTER TOGETHER
BETTER TOGETHER
BETTER TOGETHER

Graphic Design

C is for Choices

Not any choice will do—to sustain motivation, we have to feel like we have meaningful choices about what our goals are and how we'll achieve them. This means there is more than one lever we can pull to increase our sense of agency: we can notice all the ways we're already making meaningful choices that we just weren't registering *and* we can deliberately seek out or create more choices than the ones that were presented to us by our culture, community, workplace, school, or family. In this section, you'll find the first activity is more for mindset shifting, the next two are more for changing your situation, and the last is a bit of both.

A quick additional note about choices: it's one of the trickier elements to navigate, but also can be the most rewarding. Depending on your circumstances, you're going to have more or less power than others in changing the number of actual choices in front of you. Sometimes, pushing to increase those choices—for you, and even for others—is the most meaningful thing you can do. Other times, that's overwhelming. You're the best one to judge whether you'll get the most reward out of shifting your mindset or pushing for change in your situation. (Talking with a loved one, therapist, or coach can help too.)

In my experience, I've found it most helpful to adjust my focus based on my energy levels. When I'm really feeling burned out, I focus on my mindset. When I've got a bit more energy, I build momentum by finding and creating more choices for myself. And when I'm fully recharged, I put my energy into collaborating with others to help them change the situations and structures that are limiting them.

Choices: I get to

What to do: Make a list of everything you've "got" to do every day, week, or month. Lean into anything you feel especially trapped, annoyed, or bored by. Then refresh that list by changing your mental framing about those activities and seeing what comes up for you (usually either a realization of why you do want to continue doing that thing or a commitment to changing something so you don't have to continue doing it).*

Why to do it: Feeling like we get to make meaningful choices in our life is key to sustaining our motivation. When our list of obligations and "shoulds" gets too long, it leaves us feeling trapped, like there's not enough space to make choices that matter. When we change our language about all the things we've "got" to do, it lets us rediscover the choices we've made, and whether we want to find new ones.

Try it out:

1. Write out the things you feel like you have to do, especially anything you have to do over and over again.

I've got to:

* See the book *Nonviolent Communication* for the inspiration for this exercise (and lots of other useful content!)

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2. Rewrite each one of your sentences from the last box as “I get to [do this activity]; I like how it allows me [whatever reason you keep choosing to do it]”

I get to:	I like how it allows me:
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3. Look at your new list and notice what comes up as you look at each item.
- Do any of these now feel like a choice you want to keep making? (If so, mark those in some way, like with a smiley face or green highlight.)
 - Do any of these now feel like you need to dig deeper to really understand what’s driving you to keep doing that thing? (If so, reflect on the deeper “why” behind your “like to”)
 - Do any of these now feel like a choice you want to change as soon as possible? (If so, use the other choice activities to help you brainstorm new options)

Reflections:

Two examples:

The last time I did this, I wrote “make dinner for my family.” I regularly felt frustrated by this obligation—but when I realized “I like how it allows me to transition from work to family time with a creative but useful activity” it shifted from an obligation to an opportunity.

Another time, a client wrote “go to my job every day” as one of their obligations. When we dug into what she liked, she realized it was just that she liked not having to think about how she would make income each month—and how that wasn’t enough of a reason for her to continue in that job indefinitely. It helped her build the commitment to starting a new job search, something she’d been avoiding up until that point.

Choices: Find new entrees, Part 1

What to do: Make it manageable to expand your horizon of choices on your life's main "entree" right now (e.g. school, work for pay, caretaking) with little bits of research here and there to uncover options you may not have previously considered.

Why to do it: If you don't find the main thing you do every day to be meaningful and motivating, you have three basic choices: work to change your situation, work to change how you feel, or keep suffering.* If you want to change your situation but haven't yet because it feels overwhelming or impossible, you need to shrink the change. Breaking it down into smaller steps will help you gradually build both your awareness of choices you didn't previously see, and your confidence that you can make those choices real.

Try it out:

1. Think through what you specifically dislike and like about your current main thing. (It may seem weird that I'm asking you what you like about it, but identifying even small things you like is helpful because then you know what you want to keep/expand on going forward, which is easier than just knowing what you want to avoid.)

I dislike:
I like:

* A quick note: how much power you have (direct or via influence) affects these choices. If you're still a minor, you have less choices than an adult. Your culture's rules and traditions about what you're allowed to do affects you too. Acknowledging these constraints matters. However, only seeing what you can't do, blocks you from noticing what choices you *do* have available. And finding more choices when you previously felt like you had none will boost your motivation. That will help you change your situation—and eventually it might even help you change some of the bigger constraints in your culture so others after you have better choices from the start.

1. Brainstorm a list of at least 10 “main things” you’ve seen or heard about other people doing that you think you might find more meaningful or motivating than what you currently do. If you run out of ideas, hop online and look for free tools you can use, like the “Holland code career quiz,” to give you ideas.

1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5	10

2. Now use the categories listed next to mark up your brainstorm. Use multiple marks where more than one thing applies (e.g. if you’re both excited about something and don’t know much about it, give it both a star and a question mark).
 1. Star the 1–3 you are most excited about.
 2. Circle the 1–3 that would be the easiest for you to do
 3. Put a “?” next to the 1–3 you know the least about (either the least about *what it’s actually like* to do that as your main thing, or the least about *how to get there*)
3. Based on your marks, pick 2 to do some more digging into. If you gave anything multiple marks, especially if you gave one all three, then make sure to include that one! Write down what you want to investigate first, plus *how* and *when* you’ll do that investigating:

<p>I’m going to investigate:</p> <p>by (circle at least 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internet search on “how to become a...” or “what’s a day in life of ... like?” ● Interview someone doing this ● Ask a librarian for help learning more ● Other: <p>on (dates/times):</p>	<p>I’m going to investigate:</p> <p>by (circle at least 2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internet search on “how to become a...” or “what’s a day in life of ... like?” ● Interview someone doing this ● Ask a librarian for help learning more ● Other: <p>on (dates/times):</p>
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4. After you do that investigating, move on to part 2 (next page)

Choices: Find new entrees, Part 2

What to do: Reflect and make a manageable action plan to start moving towards your next thing based on the research you did in part 1. Start by figuring out what assumptions you're making that you need to pressure test to determine your best path forward.

Why to do it: Making sure you distinguish between what you've definitely learned about an option, versus what you're just starting to think might be true, will keep you from getting either too blindsided by excitement or too disheartened by bad news to think clearly about what to do next. Plus, a goal without a plan is just wishful thinking. Breaking things down into smaller pieces will make it easier to keep moving forward on something this big without getting sidetracked or overwhelmed

Try it out:

1. For your first idea, think through your research and then jot down:

The most positive/promising thing I learned about this possibility was	The most concerning thing I learned about this possibility was
My current level of research makes me (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• very• somewhat• only a little confident that positive is true	My current level of research makes me (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• very• somewhat• only a little confident that concern is true
If that positive turned out to be false , it would be a (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total deal breaker• Not great, but I'd still want to consider this possibility and keep learning• Other:	If that concern turned out to be true , it would be a (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total deal breaker• Not great, but I'd still want to consider this possibility and keep learning• Other:

2. For your second idea, think through your research and then jot down:

The most positive/promising thing I learned about this possibility was	The most concerning thing I learned about this possibility was
My current level of research makes me (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● very ● somewhat ● only a little confident that positive is true	My current level of research makes me (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● very ● somewhat ● only a little confident that concern is true
If that positive turned out to be false , it would be a (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Total deal breaker ● Not great, but I'd still want to consider this possibility and keep learning ● Other: 	If that concern turned out to be true , it would be a (circle one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Total deal breaker ● Not great, but I'd still want to consider this possibility and keep learning ● Other:

3. Did you identify any deal-breakers you have low to medium confidence in? Plan for how to increase your confidence in whether or not that thing is true.

I could learn more by:

4. Did one or both options have certain deal breakers? Then congrats—narrowing down choices is still progress! Circle back to the previous exercise. Which option are you going to research next?

My next possibility to research will be:

5. Did you find your thing, and have no more assumptions to double-check? Congrats!

My next small step to move towards my new thing is:

Choices: Find more side-dishes

What to do: Enhance your feeling of meaningful choices by expanding your possibilities for “side-dishes” (the activities and communities you’re not part of for 40+ hours a week, but that add richness, meaning, and fun to your life). Expand what’s on your menu here, explore what lights you up, and/or rediscover a deep love and appreciation for that thing you already do but had forgotten why you did it.

Why to do it: In interviews with high school students, who are a group that often experiences very confined choices about what they can do as their “main thing,” paying attention to extracurriculars, electives, and other ways of making choices made a huge difference in how motivated they felt in their lives overall. The same holds true for adults, though the choices are more likely to look like hobbies, volunteering, community activities, or interest-based social groups. Paying attention to where we do have choices, even if it’s for a relatively small amount of time, can really enhance our overall motivation and energy levels across our life.

Try it out:

1. Use the table below to brainstorm ideas you may not have considered before. The intersection of columns and rows are meant to help you brainstorm new ideas you wouldn’t have thought of otherwise, so push yourself to come up with at least one thing for every box.

	Volunteer	Work/ school	Hobbies
Values-aligned	1.	2.	3.
Curious about	4.	5.	6.
Passionate about	7.	8.	9.
Friends/ family love	10.	11.	12.

2. Once you have something in every box, go to a random number generator (you can ask your smartphone) and ask it to pick a number between 1–12.

Idea random number generator picked:

3. What can you do *this week* to do or explore that option more? Make it specific.

This week, on

I will

to help me discover if I am energized by that “side-dish”

4. Come back after you did it and reflect. How do you feel? Do you want to keep exploring that option?

Based on what I discovered, I plan to

5. Do you also want to explore another new possibility? Plan that one too!

I’m also curious about

So, on

I will

to help me discover if I am energized by that “side-dish” too

Choices: Time audit

What to do: Audit your time to see if the choices you're already making align with the choices you want to make. If you discover there's a misalignment, make a plan for how you'll choose differently next week, and then reflect on how that goes.

Why to do it: Sometimes we get so caught up in our routines that we forget just how many choices we actually are making every day, and that leaves us feeling stale and short on options. Though this arises from a helpful facet of our brains — just think how overwhelmed and tired we'd be if we had to make a conscious choice every day whether to brush our teeth, how to put on shoes, whether to make a meal, and so on — when we get too far into autopilot we can feel more like automatons than humans. We also can end up slipping into ways of spending time that we don't actually value, and noticing where that's happened frees us up to make new choices we're more excited about.

Try it out:

1. Grab a calendar you'll actually use. (You can make your own from a notebook or pieces of paper, use a pre-made planner, or go digital. Just make sure it's something you can easily access throughout your day, and that you can track things at the hourly level.)
2. Start tracking what you spend your time on (just for one week — starting midweek is fine, just track a full 7 days from whenever you start). You can either jot each thing down after you've done it, or plan a couple times each day when you'll pause to write in what you spent the last few hours on. Decide how granular you want to get — for instance, do you want to track all work or class time as just “at work” or “in class,” or do you want to break it down further, like by topics? Plan what level of detail you'll track and how often you'll track it here:

Here's how I'm going to track my activities so I can learn what I want to learn:

3. During or after your tracking week (if you haven't already), do the “values into action” activity from the Abilities chapter. What are your top 5 values currently?

My top 5 values are:

4. Once you've tracked 7 days, look at how you spent your time. Use the lens of your top values to answer these questions:

In the last 7 days, I spent time that aligned with my values the most when I

In the last 7 days, I spent time that seems misaligned with my values when I

Given that, I want to spend less time on

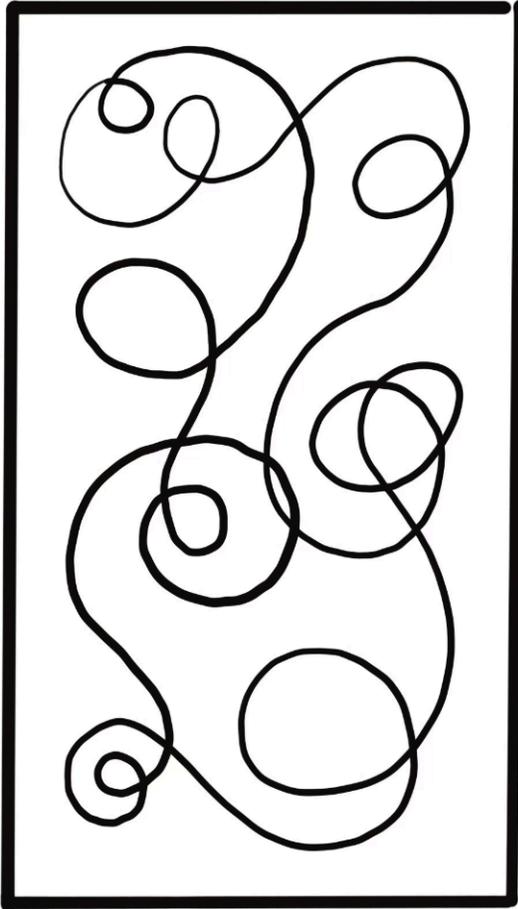
And more time on

Seeing what I spent time on caused me to realize I do/don't have a different value that's actually more important to me than my original 5:

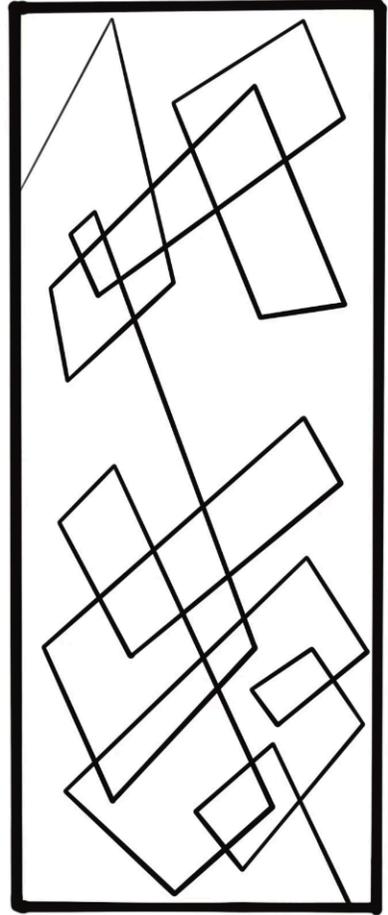
5. If you want to make changes once you see what you're spending time on, then make a plan. What small, different choice can you make this week to move you more in the direction of aligning your time with your values?

To better align my time with my values, I could

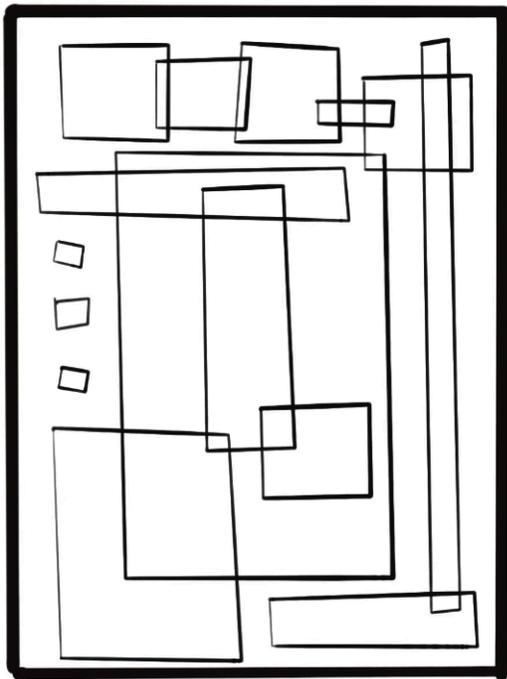
To make progress on that this week, I'm going to



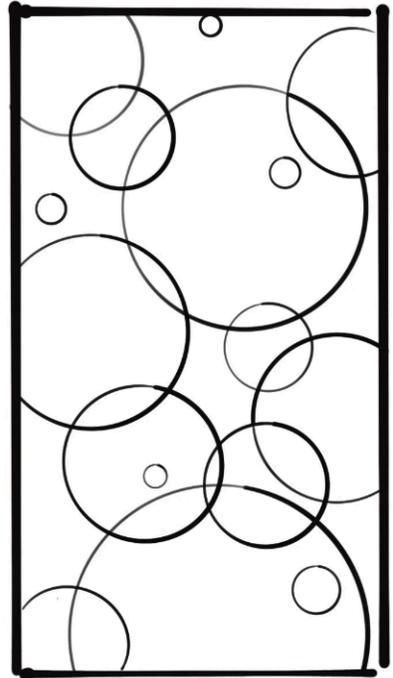
DOORS



**WINDOWS
OPEN**



OPEN



D

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D is for Dopamine

D is for Dopamine. Dopamine is both a hormone and a neurotransmitter. It affects our mood: it's like the biochemical reward our brain gives us when we achieve something. And it's affected by our daily habits, especially sleep, sunlight, exercise, and screen use. To sustain motivation over time, and not just experience short bursts, it helps to be mindful of how we nurture healthy dopamine levels inside ourselves.

A quick cautionary note on dopamine: for some people, especially those of us with spicy brains, dopamine levels can be especially tricky. For instance, those with ADHD often have low dopamine levels; conversely, people on the autism spectrum can find some challenges get worse with more dopamine. There are other medical situations that affect both dopamine production, release, and effect, and I'm not a medical doctor, just a nerdy researcher with a lot of lived experience. So if you think you might have a medical issue going on, please see a doctor! In the meantime, being mindful about sleep, exercise, and screen use may help some, but they're more like supplements than like prescription medication—they can enhance your overall well-being, but not treat specific conditions that require nuanced care.

Dopamine: Sleep hacking, sleep tracking

What to do: Level up your sleep game by deliberately trying and tracking changes to see what difference they make for you. This exercise will give you the foundational sleep-supportive habits to start with, but if you've tried all these already, use the space to track something that is new to you.

Why to do it: We need to regularly get enough sleep each night for our physical and mental health. We know that already, but sleep isn't sexy, so it tends to get skipped in favor of other, more exciting-seeming motivation hacks. But it's foundational, so if you're getting less than 7.5 hrs a night as an adult (or less than 8.75 hrs a night as a teen), it's worth it to see how much your motivation jumps just by improving your sleep.

Try it out:

1. In the last week, how many hours of sleep did you average each night? (no need to get fancy sleep trackers for this if you don't want to, just write down your best estimate)

Currently, I average _____ hours of sleep per night

2. Identify what you're already doing. Currently, how many days per week do you:

Stop screentime at least an hour before bed?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Exercise for at least 30 minutes (but not within 1-2 hrs of bedtime)?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Use the same peaceful routine at night?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Wake up at the same time each morning?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Use a sound machine or noise blocker?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Journal before you turn off the light?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Use a guided sleep meditation or sleep-supportive music?	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
Other:_____	7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

3. Pick one of those you're not currently doing often that you want to try this week. Circle it in the chart above
4. Each morning, when you get up, use the chart below to estimate how many hours of sleep you got the night before, and whether you did your new thing.

Day	Hrs of sleep	Did new activity	Notes
		Yes/No	

5. Now use that data to decide on whether you want to:
- Keep doing that thing and leave it at that. (Congrats, that was fast! There are so many people jealous of you right now that just don't know it)
 - Keep doing that thing and add a new change to see if you can keep moving your sleep in a better direction. (Welcome to the club. Most of us need to adjust a few things to get our sleep right.)
 - Stop doing that thing and try a different behavior change. (Ugh. Sorry that experiment didn't work for you. What are you going to try next?)

Based on what happened, my next move is:

Dopamine: Constantly pinging

What to do: Make use of your access to data to see if the dopamine-oriented design of many apps has got you hooked without even realizing it. You can do this by looking at the records in your devices to see just how much time you're spending on your screens, and which apps command the most time. Then decide if that matches your values. (This is like a screen-specific version of the time audit activity in the Choices chapter.)

Why to do it: We have the chance to express our values in two fundamental ways every week: where we spend our money and where we spend our time. But we tend to pay more attention to our money and undervalue our time, especially because companies design programs/apps/software to snag and hold our attention without us consciously realizing just how much time we're spending. Putting our brain into a more objective place to really assess the data, and see if it matches what we want to prioritize, gives us the chance to find healthier sources of dopamine than the quick-hits-and-dips that screentime produces.

Try it out:

1. Before you check the data, make a prediction. How much daily time do you think you averaged on each of these devices in the last week?

I think I averaged this much daily time on each of these devices in the last week:

Phone:

Tablet:

Laptop/desktop

Gaming system(s):

TV:

2. Now go look it up. Different devices store this info in different ways, so you may need to do a quick bit of research to see how to tell for your particular devices. How much time did you actually average per day on each?

I actually averaged this much daily time on each of these devices in the last week:

Phone:

Tablet:

Laptop/desktop

Gaming system(s):

TV:

3. Are you spending more time on one of your devices than you mean to? Is it a particular app/program/software/show that draws you in? Get really specific on where there's a discrepancy between your priorities and how you've spent your time in the last week.

My values and how I spent my time weren't aligned when I:

4. Identify how much time you want to average on each of these devices every day. If you want, make it more specific still, and zone in on what time limits you want to set for specific programs you know get you into that dopamine hit-and-dip cycle.

I want to average hr(s) on my phone
& mins/hr(s) on this app:

I want to average hr(s) on my tablet
& mins/hr(s) on this app:

I want to average hr(s) on my laptop/desktop
& mins/hr(s) on this software:

I want to average hr(s) on my gaming system(s)
& mins/hr(s) on this game:

I want to average hr(s) on my TV
& mins/hr(s) on this program:

5. How can you make it easier to reach your new targets? Check all that apply

- Install software that makes me earn my time or shuts things down when it's done
- Schedule the time I'll use it, and an alarm for when it's time to turn it off
- Select a replacement activity that supports healthy dopamine
- Tell a friend (so I can use social pressure to my benefit)
- Other:

6. Once you've tried it, reflect. What did you learn? What do you want to try next?

I learned:

Next, I want to try:

Dopamine: Basic bio hacks

What to do: If you've already got sleep, exercise, and screen management under way, and you're looking for something to add onto those foundational pieces, there are other things you can try. As with any change in physical routines, please check with your doctor before trying anything new to make sure it's appropriate for your body! These are not a cure for chronic health issues that can affect dopamine.

Why to do it: These simple bio hacks might help you move away from the unhealthy hit-and-dip dopamine activities that plague us in the modern attention economy. Do your own research to learn more about each—davisphinneyfoundation.org has useful info, for instance, because they focus on Parkinson's (characterized by dopamine deficiency).

Try it out:

1. Need an overall boost for the day? Get 5–20 minutes of morning sunshine, unfiltered by windows or sunglasses (obviously, don't look at the sun!). If you can combine this with a brisk walk, you'll be blending two sources of healthy dopamine support in one activity.

Before going out, I felt:

Right after, I felt:

Throughout the rest of the day, I felt:

2. Need a quick burst of focus? Consider holding an ice cube, step into a cold shower, or take an ice bath. This doesn't release dopamine, it releases endorphins and neuroepinephrine, which helps you feel more alert and focused. (There's tons about this online; the clearest explanation I found was at longevity.stanford.edu.)

Before getting icy, I felt:

Right after, I felt:

Throughout the rest of the day, I felt:

3. Need something while you're working? Find the right music to support your mood ([see an interesting study](#) on the relationship between dopamine and music). Experiment with different kinds—music with and without words, upbeat or calming, even music that has

“binaural beats” intended to help your brain work at different frequencies. Jot down what you noticed about how you responded to each; many people find different kinds of music works best for different kinds of tasks or activities.

I noticed music with vs without words affected me in this way:

I noticed upbeat vs calming music affected me in this way:

I noticed alpha, delta, and/or theta binaural beats affected me in this way:

4. Wondering if your diet might not be quite right? Food plays a role in healthy dopamine production in a variety of ways. If you’re getting good sleep and exercise, and you’re happy with your screen use, but you’re still feeling low, it might be worth talking with a nutritionist or doctor to get an idea of whether any of the following changes might be helpful to you:
- i. **More lean protein.** Studies suggest the amino acids tyrosine and phenylalanine play a critical role in dopamine production ([see this academic source](#)).
 - ii. **Less saturated fat.** High saturated fat in your diet might interfere with the dopamine signalling in your brain, so if you’re eating a lot of saturated fat, that could be hampering you as well ([see this academic source](#)).
 - iii. **Healthy nutrients.** Your body needs effective levels of B6, iron, and folate to produce dopamine ([see this academic source](#)). If you are wondering if you might be low in these, ask your doctor to run some tests.
5. Quick tracking: If you try a specific change, track how you feel each day of the first few weeks by just putting a 1–5, or a quick emoji, to rate your overall motivation:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
Day 15	Day 16	Day 17	Day 18	Day 19	Day 20	Day 21

Dopamine: Finding your movement zone

What to do: Find ways of moving your body that work for your schedule and personality by treating the process as an act of curiosity and discovery rather than as a disappointing indicator your old habits aren't working anymore (or, for those of us who grapple with getting any movement into our routine at all, as a motivation-sapping obligation.)

Why to do it: Unless you just emerged from a multi-century coma, you probably already know many of the reasons exercise is important for physical and mental health. You can add healthy dopamine production (and production of other mood- and motivation-supporting biochemicals) to that list. Knowing all this, however, can make it really hard to approach moving our body as an opportunity for curiosity, play, and exploration. Some feel social pressure to follow the latest trend in why *this* cardio/strength-training/stretching routine is the best for men/women/teens/seniors. It can feel like shame-inducing judgment when a doctor, friend, or relative suggests we need to do more/better exercise. And all of that depletes our motivation to discover what forms of movement work for us, which in turn depletes our motivation in other areas. Vicious cycle—let's break it!

Try it out:

1. What's your current approach to moving your body around throughout the day? If you have existing routines, what do you like & dislike about them? If you don't have existing routines, what gets in your way?

My current approach to movement during the day is...

The thing that most often gets in my way of moving my body in ways that work for me is...

2. Draw an emoji next to each of the terms below that expresses your overall feeling and associations when it comes to that word and your body

Work out	Exercise	Strength-training
Stretch	Sports	Balance
Grace	Movement	Sweat
Ability	Time	Play

3. Are there any forms of movement you've always been curious about, but never tried?

I'm curious about...

4. If you were to change one thing about your current ideas, associations, and stories about moving your body, what would it be?

One thing I'd change is...

5. After you've reflected on all those questions, consider if there is a way you could play or experiment with new approaches to moving your body, ways that might help you discover something that really feels like an opportunity rather than an obligation for you. How might you make moving your body something you look forward to?

Ideas I have to help me find the right movement zone for my body include...

A small step I'm going to take to explore one of those ideas is...

SCROLL

LESS

LIVE

MORE

Values cards

A few of the activities earlier in the book called for using the “values cards.” The printable, black and white version of them starts on the next page. Or, if you’d like a color copy, you can go to beccablock.com/resources and find a free, printable, color version there.

If you only print out one part of this workbook, those are the four pages to put your printing towards – and don’t print double-sided, or you won’t be able to cut them out!!

You’ll see there’s a few blank spots so you can add any values you feel are missing. I’d love to hear from you on what you added; your version might make it into future editions of this workbook.

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