

JOHN PENDAL: Coaching For People Who Feel Like Outsiders

Motivation Strategies

I'm often asked for help by folk struggling to initiate tasks. Before we look at 'tips and strategies' – first let's check if any of the following is holding you back:

BURNOUT - in burnout your brain goes into "*demand avoidance mode*" and you don't want to do anything.

SENSORY OVERLOAD - are unpleasant things happening to your senses? Do you need to move somewhere else, or put on headphones / sunglasses?

AUTISTIC INERTIA - do you need to complete a task before moving on, and do you need to do something in between (*e.g. walk outside/ breathing exercise/ favourite music*) to help with the transition?

As long as it's okay for you to continue, here are some strategies clients have shared that help them do tasks:

UPDATE AN EXISTING ROUTINE

If you want to start something new it can help to attach it to something else you're already doing. For example, if you want to do start each day with yoga breathing and you already have a routine for coffee/ breakfast/ shower – fit yoga breathing into that list. That way your brain is updating an existing pattern rather than trying to remember a brand new thing.

GIVE YOURSELF A DEADLINE

If the task doesn't have a deadline it can help me to pick a day and schedule it in, rather than wait until I feel like I want to do it. My feelings are unreliable, but if I schedule something then I'm more likely to do it.

<https://www.johnpendal.com>

johnpendal.coach@gmail.com

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DISTRACTION LOG

If your brain keeps thinking of other things you should be doing instead, try keeping a "distraction log". Write down things your brain remembers or would rather be doing for later. When you look back at the list after the task is done you may be surprised how much or little of it you still want to do.

TURN LISTS INTO A GAME

Some people don't like lists and find them oppressive. One client turned lists in to a game. They drew a horizontal line on a board. New tasks were written below the line. Completed tasks were moved above the line. The game every day was to get "*something above the line*".

SEE THE END RESULT

Can you see the end of the task clearly? Some people find a task overwhelming if it's not clear what the completed task looks like. (*I look at my last few tax returns before starting this year's, so I know what the end result looks like.*)

WHAT'S THE POINT?

You probably won't want to start a task if you don't understand why you're doing it. Can you find out a reason, or come up with a reason that works for you?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Some of us are more motivated when we can tell someone when we've achieved a goal. Is there someone you can promise you'll do the task, and will hold you accountable? Some folk use 'google tasks' for this, and get a dopamine hit when they tell google something's been done.

TASK PAIRING

Have someone work alongside you. They don't have to be doing the same task, but they commit to doing something at the same time as you (*virtually or in the same room*). Some people say this helps them with concentration.

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REPLACING "SMOG" WORDS (SHOULD/ MUST/ OUGHT/ GOT TO)

There is a theory that telling yourself *"I should/ got to/ ought to/ have to/ need to do it"* increases your guilt and is counter-productive. It's full of self-criticism and makes you less likely to do a task.

If you can change that sentence to include values you admire, or something positive that you'd like more of in your life, then there's more chance of you doing it. For example: *"It would be confident/ wise/ creative/ strong to do ..."*

(Credit: Thanks to Hattie Voelcker for this idea - <https://www.findyourtruevoice.co.uk>)

BE VISUAL

If I have a black and white word document to type, I'll start with a spider graph on a big sheet of paper with coloured pens - or a different coloured post-it notes for different thoughts. When I've worked out what I want to say, my last step is typing it in black and white. The more colourful and creative I can be, the more likely I am to do the task.

These are only suggestions and we are all different, so don't worry if these ideas don't appeal or work for you.

If you don't mind a challenge: **Each time you don't want to do something - take some time to work out *why* you don't want to do it.**

The answers to that question can help us develop strategies that **do** work for you.

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