

There's no excuse when it comes to procrastinating over self-development, says Hugh Greenway

When I was young there was a children's television programme called *Why Don't You Just Switch Off The Television Set And Do Something Less Boring Instead?* There was a delightful irony in the fact that we, of course, stayed glued to the box and didn't go out, and there's a parallel with learning and self improvement. It is much easier to read, watch or listen to people telling us how to be better than it is to actually do something.

The trouble with much in life is motivation. If you are not motivated, it is difficult to do anything well. Moreover, motivation is not something that is easily bought or obtained, although the personal development sections of the publishing and media industries do not let this stop them making lots of money from books and TV programmes that tell you how to get motivated.

The size of any given self-improvement task can be so large that to buy a book on the subject can be seen as taking steps to achieve it, whereas, in fact, it is just another exercise in procrastination. The trick is to break any challenge into bite-size pieces that are less daunting than the whole, so that finding the energy to do them is less of a Herculean effort.

With this in mind, here are some quick, easy and free tips to snapping out of the winter rut:

1. Sit down and write or draw a list or picture of things you want to be better at. You can use headings or prompts such as financial wellbeing, mental wellbeing and emotional wellbeing. Then try to split each one up into smaller pieces.
2. If this is too much, or the white page is too daunting, ask three people whose opinions you trust what you should do to be a better person. Don't question their responses. Then ask them how you might go about achieving what they suggest.
3. Find something that you are passionate about. According to a recent survey by Investors in People, almost two thirds of the UK workforce is de-motivated in their jobs. If you can't find

something in your work that you are really enthusiastic about, it might not be your boss or your company's fault. You may just be in the wrong job. And motivation makes a difference – according to a survey of US retail businesses by Kaizen Consulting Ltd, the difference between the top and bottom 25 per cent of stores, in a measure of how happy and motivated staff were, equated to \$104 million worth of sales.

Still too much? All right – the next one is really easy.

4. Get lost in Wikipedia. Look up anything on Wikipedia and then just follow the links where they take you. Chances are you will find something that enthuses you and might provoke ideas.
5. If you liked that, try looking up a new skill on YouTube. You can find clips on anything from learning how to knit to mastering macros in Excel.
6. Do something that other people are already doing. It's much easier than going it alone. The technical term for this is 'integrative motivation' but it's just a posh way of saying 'peer pressure'. Going to the gym, giving up smoking, joining a book club or learning a new skill is much easier if you are doing it with people you like.
7. Share what you are doing. Writing down your resolutions on a scrap of paper that you show to no-one just makes it easier to pretend to yourself that you didn't really plan to do it in the first place. Blog about your intended change, tell your friends or mention it on Facebook.
8. Engage a friend (not a relative... seriously, this way lies madness) to ask you on a regular basis how you are progressing towards your goals. I stole this idea from a marvellous book by Marshall Goldsmith:
What got you here, won't get you there.
"I have been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened."
Mark Twain
9. Above all, apply the Dr Pepper Principle. Fear of failure or embarrassment is the biggest barrier to change and yet these things are much worse in anticipation than in reality. Failure doesn't last forever and embarrassment is often self-inflicted. As the Dr Pepper ads say: "Try it. What's the worst that could happen?" ■



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