



Get Momentum

How to Start When You're Stuck

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Rating

8 9 Applicability
8 Innovation
8 Style

Focus

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Take-Aways

- You may get stuck as you try to pursue your most important goals.
- You need momentum to get unstuck and move ahead.
- Develop a “momentum journal” to manage your activities as you pursue your goals.
- Momentum goes through five stages: “motivation, mentors, milestones, monitor” and “modify.”
- Motivation: You know why you want to accomplish something.
- Mentors: Senior advisers provide guidance and direction as you pursue your goals.
- Milestones: Break your project into manageable “subprojects.”
- Monitor: Keep track of your progress.
- Modify: Be ready to change processes and tactics that aren’t working.
- Find time in your life for the people and activities that count the most to you.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) Why you need momentum, 2) How to work through the five stages of momentum, and 3) How you can build and sustain momentum in the face of obstacles.

Review

In politics, sports, business and life, momentum is often crucial to achieving your goals. Calling on 20 years of experience as professional development experts, Jason Womack and Jodi Womack explain how you can secure, maintain and expand your momentum to complete your professional projects and reach your personal goals. They present useful recommendations on how to leverage your momentum in five stages: building up motivation, finding mentors, reaching milestones, monitoring your progress and making any needed modifications. The Womacks skillfully explain how to create, develop and sustain momentum in your work and your personal life. *getAbstract* recommends this insightful, practical, layered approach to anyone who faces internal or external obstacles to achieving their goals.

Summary

“If you’re the smartest person in the room, then you’re in the wrong room.”

“The safest road to hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.” (C.S. Lewis)

Achieve Your Dreams?

If you’re like many other people, when you strive for an important goal, you may come to feel bogged down. Maybe it seems that you’re not moving meaningfully toward reaching your most cherished objective. This may be a professional target, like making a dramatic career change. Or perhaps you have a personal bridge to cross, like living a healthier lifestyle. If you are overwhelmed or stuck, if what you want to accomplish seems too difficult, and if you don’t know how to begin, you need momentum.

People who are stuck often turn to familiar internal excuses:

- **“I don’t know”** – You have no idea about how or when or where to start. You don’t know anyone who can provide useful guidance. You’re not sure that your goal is possible. You don’t know what your final results might be.
- **“What I have is fine”** – Things aren’t so bad that you need to change anything. You tell yourself, “don’t fix what isn’t broken.”
- **“I’ve failed before”** – You tried making progress already and it didn’t work. Why would things be any different this time? What’s the point of making this effort?
- **“I’m confused”** – You have no guarantee that if you achieve your goal, things will be any better; maybe they’ll be worse.
- **“I’m overwhelmed”** – Life is complicated enough. It may become even more difficult if you push ahead.

The three external reasons people may not achieve their goals are:

1. **“The people who offered support aren’t showing up for you”** – This can be a problem if you rely too heavily on others to accomplish your goals.
2. **“You’re getting information; just too much at the wrong time”** – You can’t concentrate on what’s most important to you because you’re overwhelmed by an avalanche of digital, print and broadcast data.

3. **“You’re striving for perfect work-life balance”** – You think you must be an exceptional professional, a great parent, an ideal partner and a brilliant performer in a wide range of activities. Few people are quite so perfect.

“Nonessential” Activities

Many special goals are personal, that is not work-related, and that may make them seem less important. Perhaps you want to write a novel, or sculpt, or plant a garden. People often categorize such goals as “nonessential.”

While they may not be income producing, these goals could be vital to your sense of fulfillment. Not reaching for them could eventually provoke deep regret. Nonessential goals usually lack deadlines, so people don’t prioritize them. They are “someday” activities, but someday never seems to arrive. It’s up to you to prioritize what matters most to you.

People who are stuck often resort to a common – and counterproductive – habit: They do “what used to work.” For example, to reach a fresh professional goal with new time demands, your natural tendency might be to work extra hours. With today’s routinely heavy work schedules, spending extra hours on a single new project may well mean having fewer hours for other work or for the requirements of your personal life. To make progress on achieving a new goal, you need to do things differently, not just pile on the prospect of putting in more hours.

The Stages of Momentum

To attain your goal, you need momentum. Having momentum means that you understand that you can and will do what you must do, that you feel a daily sense of accomplishment, and that you make notable progress toward the goals you most want to achieve. Momentum has five stages:

1. “Motivation”

In the first stage of momentum, ask yourself: “What do I want to be known for?” Think of this as your legacy. Define what motivates you. Once you understand your motivation, you will know what you should do with your life – and you’ll also know where you shouldn’t waste your time. To secure and maintain your momentum, know why you are going after specific goals.

Develop a “momentum journal.” List all the projects you want to pursue. Discuss them with your family, friends and colleagues. The more you talk about your potential projects, the more real they will become and the more excited you will be about the outstanding ones. As your excitement increases, so will your motivation to focus on one of these projects and make its successful conclusion your primary objective.

To build motivation, “make it easy to see where you’re going.” The clearer your goal is, the more likely you are to achieve it. Pursue what leadership expert Jim Collins calls a “BHAG... a big, hairy, audacious goal.” Once you define your goal, read everything you can about how others reached similar goals. Use your momentum journal to log your “progress a month at a time.” Sometimes, creating a written record is motivational. To stay motivated, honor each accomplishment along the way.

Expect to encounter obstacles as you work toward completing your project or reaching your goal. List five obstacles that obstruct your progress now or that might in the future. Consider the steps you can take to eliminate these roadblocks or to minimize their negative

“Most crises can be anticipated and avoided with the right planning and attention.”

“Old-school motivation got you pumped up and excited but didn’t always give you the tools to take action.”

“Create a small group of powerful mentors to support you and keep you going.”

“When you know why you’re doing what you do, it makes it easier to stay the course, do what needs to be done, and... ask for help when you need it.”

effects. Track how you spend your time for a week. Drop time-wasting activities; use that saved time to pursue your goal.

2. “Mentors”

In the second stage of momentum, ask yourself: “Whom can I learn from?” Turn to a mentor for information and guidance. Mentors are people “with experience you’re looking to gain.” Your mentors should be able to share their knowledge with you, either one on one or through the examples and information in their public work or writings. Seek a mentor who can guide you, perhaps a boss, a teacher, a relative or a friend.

Experienced mentors can help you build momentum and can assist you in three main ways:

- **“Mentors help you build resilience”** – They can share stories about other people who overcame the obstacles you now confront. Such stories will help you gain a more objective viewpoint about the challenges you face.
- **“Mentors can give you productivity and workplace performance ideas”** – They have an independent perspective that can help you see your goal in different, innovative ways.
- **“Mentors help you find smart people”** – A mentor helps you meet leaders who can assist you in pursuit of your project or objective.

If one mentor can help, a team of mentors offers multiple possibilities. Try to connect with at least three mentors who can share their knowledge and experience. Expand your network to include people you can learn from and emulate. Select the new people in your life carefully. Choose those who influence you positively.

3. “Milestones”

In the third stage of momentum, ask yourself: “What are three subprojects I can complete?” To meet any goal, you need milestones, “significant events in the progress or development” of the objective you’re pursuing. Break your projects down into manageable segments.

Divide a long-term project into three-month intervals with deadlines. Further apportion your goals into one-month segments. These segments will become your subprojects or milestones. Organizing your overall project into milestones makes it more manageable. Milestones help you avoid trying to do everything at once. They make a project’s scope more manageable and less intimidating.

Progressing “little by little” gives you the opportunity to realize success each time you complete three-month subprojects – and that builds momentum. Set “achievable and believable” milestone deadlines. As you make plans, create lists of tasks and people associated with your overall project. Your list should have 50 to 100 items. If you have fewer, your project may not be big enough to require segmentation.

Follow the “30/30 rule” to manage your project, and the “90/90 rule” to guide your planning. Each day, spend 30 minutes working on some aspect of your project that will occur at least 30 days in the future. This gives you fewer deadlines to meet later.

To follow the 90/90 rule, once a month spend 90 minutes working on an aspect of your project that will occur 90 or more days from today. This hour and a half of work is an investment in your future. The 30/30 and the 90/90 rules help you avoid getting stuck, since “momentum creates more momentum.”

“When you lay out the work you need to do and organize your activity (and deadlines) three months at a time, in one-month intervals, even the largest projects feel more doable.”

“In most cases, people get stuck trying to complete the entire project instead of working on subprojects that – when completed – could get them closer to the finish line.”

“You modify your strategy when you’re not achieving your goals. You modify your tactics when the way you’re working isn’t achieving the results you want.”

“If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.” (Albert Einstein)

“The more closely you monitor the progress you make on the milestones you set, the sooner you’ll know when you’re on target to achieve a goal or about to drift off course.”

“Not everything, not all at once. Now that you’ve gotten started, keep the momentum you have by implementing small changes, one at a time. You can sustain this style of change over time.”

“Momentum means you’re moving, and things are happening. It means you’re making progress, and it feels good!”

4. “Monitor”

At the fourth stage of momentum examine: “What positive things are happening that I can acknowledge?” To keep moving forward, monitor your progress regularly. Otherwise, you may slip backward and lose momentum. Proper monitoring requires that you “identify the indicators” that show your concrete progress. Make these “quantitative terms – numbers, time, money, distances, total products, clicks, pages written, anything that you can measure.” If your project involves other people, monitor their progress, too.

Employ three to five specific indicators. Put them in a handy dashboard you can easily review. This monitoring will keep you on top of your project on an ongoing basis since you’ll be tracking what works and what doesn’t. With this data, you can adjust your course if necessary, and you can acknowledge and celebrate your progress at building momentum.

Once you complete your project, show gratitude to the people who contributed to its overall success. A formal debriefing is the best way to gather solid, useful data about what you did right and wrong. As part of your personal debriefing, examine four topics in your momentum journal:

- **“What worked especially well?”** – These are actions to repeat in the future.
- **“What aspects did not work?”** – Avoid these actions in the future.
- **“What were the biggest risks you took?”** – Did they play out as you hoped?
- **“If money, time and resources were not a factor, what would you do differently?”** – Imagine the ideal project and what factors would help make it perfect.

5. “Modify”

The fifth stage of momentum addresses the question: “What one change can I make to keep moving forward?” Sometimes, you must modify your approach to stay on track. Monitoring your progress matters. When you see that something is not going well, you can adjust your project plan. As you consider whether a change is necessary, also ask what you need to do more or less of as you go forward. Solicit the advice of experts and your mentors. Ask other people for help in reaching your goal.

Make only one change at a time, in your objective, or in the information you seek, or in your processes. If your goal is proving to be so difficult that you can’t make minimal progress, consider revising it. If you need new information, then read extra newspapers and magazines, and carry out more research on the Internet and through other sources. As you examine your processes, calculate what you can “automate, delegate or eliminate.” Add your findings to your momentum journal.

Momentum Maintenance

Use your journal to list of all the ideas and concerns on your mind about your projects and goals. Choose one at a time to focus on; don’t try to do everything at once. Seek sustainable progress, little by little, a step at a time. Regularly note your progress.

About the Authors

Jason Womack started the Womack Company and the Get Momentum Leadership Academy, where **Jodi Womack** is CEO. She also founded the women’s business leadership coaching program, No More Nylons.