How to Conduct a **Motivational Interview**

**Decide for yourself what you really want, even when your will is weakest. Then use this worksheet to write powerful Personal Motivational Statements to keep you on track.**

**How it Works:** A motivational interview helps you increase your personal motivation to change by helping you focus on what you want for yourself, instead of what others may want for you. People often feel pushed and nagged to change, and their natural reaction is to push back, to assert their independence. However, this kind of reactive independence isn’t really independent—it’s a response to someone else’s pressure. These reactions sometimes get us to act in ways we don’t really want and produces results we don’t really like.

A motivational interview asks what you want for you, and it acknowledges that the answer will be complicated. Often, what you want in a moment of temptation will be different from what you want for yourself long term. You can even think of yourself as you at your best and you at your worst. These two aspects of yourself are both genuine and need to be acknowledged. These complications are what make self control such a challenge.

The motivational interview takes these complications into account, and then asks you to make the tough decisions about what you really want for yourself. This clarity can be a powerful tool to keep yourself motivated in coming months and years as you work to make your goals a reality. Once you’ve decided on what you really want, you become the master of your change plan. You set your own course and invite others to help as you see fit.

**The Motivational Interview**

Set aside 20-30 minutes for your motivational interview. The interview includes four sections, each with a series of questions. You can answer these questions on your own, or ask a trusted friend to interview you. Involving a trusted friend is a good idea because it raises the stakes and forces you to examine yourself in a stronger light. We recommend it—if you dare!

Be sure to write down your answers to the interview questions. As important as the interview process is, the **product** is even more so. Don’t just think about your answers, actually type them in. The simple act of putting your plan on paper will improve your chances of success by as much as 30 percent. And translating your answers into a brief but powerful Personal Motivation Statement can help you reconnect with your true desires when moments of temptation hit.

1. **Begin by clarifying your long-term goals. Picture yourself in five, ten, or twenty years. What goals would you like to accomplish?**

   **Sample:** My wife and I plan to retire when we’re 65, stay close to our children and grandchildren, take a cruise every couple of years, and continue our current lifestyle—but with more leisure.

   Next, add details to this picture. Who do you want to be with? What do you want to be doing? Where do you want to be? What do you want to have accomplished? How do you want to feel about yourself?

   **Sample:** My wife and I will retire together. We’ll sell our home and buy a condo close to wherever our children and grandchildren are living. We’d like to be able to golf a couple times a week, so maybe we’ll live on a golf course. I’d like to have the time to write a book about my grandfather based on his journals. We’d like to be known as the world’s best grandparents.
2. Consider the ways your own behavior could prevent you from accomplishing your long-term goals. If you don’t change, if you stay on the track you are currently on, then what will your future be? We call this your default future. Describe your default future as accurately and in as much detail as you can. Don’t sugarcoat it. Use vivid, strong language that will provoke yourself into acknowledging the truth about your future choices.

Sample: We’re in our late 50’s, have $50K in savings, and owe $200K on our home—which has dropped enough in value that we probably have no equity at all. We also have $15K in credit card debt. Together, our combined income is about $100K, but we don’t seem to be able to save more than about $5K a year. We waste our money on fancy cars, expensive trips, and new clothes. At this rate we won’t be able to afford to take cruises, to golf, or to quit our jobs—at all! Instead, our default future is to keep slogging to work when we’re in our late 60’s and maybe into our 70’s just so we can stay in our home. But it’s probably even worse than that, because my wife has enough physical ailments that she can’t keep working more than a few years. I have a gnawing fear of having to choose between making a mortgage payment and getting my wife her medications.

On a scale from 1 to 10, how ready are you to change? Not at all ready 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very ready

Why did you pick this number instead of one that is lower? What are some of the reasons you are ready to make a change?

Sample: We really need to cut back on our spending. I don’t see how we can increase our income, especially with my wife’s health problems. She is going to need to stop working within a few years and she doesn’t want to sit home alone.

3. Pick the one or two reasons that are most important to you. Rewrite them in a way that is more detailed, concrete, and vivid. For example instead of, “I want to be there for my children.” Write, “I want to dance with my daughter, Marie, at her wedding.”

Sample: I want to spend quality time with my wife, Sally, instead of working full time for years while she sits alone in a home we still don’t own. Our time together is more precious than any car, trip, article of clothing, fancy meal, or other expense. And I refuse to trade today’s pleasure for my wife’s medications tomorrow.
4. Think about what you currently say to yourself during crucial moments of temptation. These are often justifications for giving in to the temptation. Make a list of the things you say to yourself.

Sample: I say things like, “I make good money. I can afford this.” “My future raises will all go towards retirement.” “If I skip a restaurant meal or two, this will be paid for.” “My brother, Charlie, has one of these.” “My wife overspent so I can, too.”

How do you feel about these excuses? Are they good enough reasons to give in to the temptation? Do you believe they should let you off the hook? Look at each excuse and decide how valid it is.

Sample: None of them are valid—except maybe the one about my brother. Nope, not even that one.

5. Determine what you will say to yourself during crucial moments of temptation. Take each of the excuses you just identified and develop the strongest, truest, and most vivid response to them you can. Write down what you will say to yourself to counteract any of the excuses that you don’t think are valid.

Sample:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excuse</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I make good money. I can afford this.</td>
<td>I am in debt. I can’t borrow money to buy this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My future raises will all go to retirement.</td>
<td>If I can’t save today I won’t save tomorrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I skip a restaurant meal or two, this will be paid for.</td>
<td>This is not a small problem, it’s a BIG problem. I am 2/3 of the way to retirement and have no real net worth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My brother, Charlie, has one of these.</td>
<td>My brother, Charlie, also has no savings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My wife overspent, so I can too.</td>
<td>We need to help each other not justify each other.</td>
</tr>
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Now create a Personal Motivation Statement. Read over the points you made in parts 1, 2, 3, and 5 of your motivational interview. Take the most powerful reasons to change from those parts of the interview and distill them into brief but vivid, jarring, or inspiring statements that capture your personal motivation to change. Write them below. Then read them slowly and thoughtfully during crucial moments when you need to reconnect with your reasons to change.

Sample:

- I owe it to my grandfather to write his story.
- Today’s pleasures are not worth my wife’s medication tomorrow.
- We can’t earn our way out of debt.
- I want to spend quality time with Sally rather than work in our older years while she is alone in a home we don’t own.
- If I can’t save today, I won’t save tomorrow.
- If we love each other, we will help each other not justify each other.
- I want a future of peace and fun with my wife, my children, and my grandchildren.