

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

CONVICT CHRONICLES: Getting (and staying) Motivated

By Leo Cardez

He was my celly back in 2017. You know the guy: up at the crack of dawn, works-out before breakfast, has a full-time job, volunteers for another, is taking a correspondence class, learning a new language, and painting portraits as a side hustle in the evenings. He's pushing 40, sleeps 4 hours a night, and he always looks like he has energy to spare. How is this possible one may think. I begrudgingly drag myself out of my bunk around 9ish, slug around all day like a human sloth eating and napping until it's time to veg out in front of my TV for my nightly stories. But that was the old me. I've read the research and compiled an easy 5-step plan to spur my butt into gear. You can to.

Step 1: Clarify.

Prisoner's lives have been dominated by extended pandemic lockdowns for what feel like an eternity. What seemed important before seems wholly insignificant

today. We need to take some time to really evaluate what we want from this experience, now and in the future. Think about what you would consider a perfect day. Would you learn something new? Work on your legal appeal? Work-out? Eat healthy? Whatever it is, align your goal settings with what already influences and encourages your future self. Do you want to leave prison with your GED or college degree? Think about how to add more study time to your schedule; find a study buddy or tutor. Want to get Brad Pitt in "Fight Club" ripped? Subscribe to fitness magazines or read the literature; find a like-minded work-out buddy that will help motivate and push you. When you align what excites you and your goals it will not only be easier to get started, it will make the odds of staying with it that much higher.

Step 2: Start Small.

Now that you've made your list of goals, breakdown each of those goals into 10 sub-goals you will need to accomplish each one. Done? Okay. Now, break down your sub-goals into 10 even smaller steps necessary to get each sub-goal accomplished. For example, if one of your top line goals is Get in Shape, a sub-goal may be Lose Weight, then a step under that sub-goal could be Drink More Water and so forth. You start with the first smallest, easiest step and simply begin to start checking off items from your list. The next day you try to check another item off the list and so forth. One day, maybe a month, maybe a year, down the line you will have checked off all the items from that one larger goal. Now you move on to the next goal and repeat the process.

See, motivation is like a snowball rolling down hill gaining momentum and size. The trick is not to overwhelm yourself too early. Don't even think about your end destination, just focus on the small task in front of you.

In the earlier example that would have meant having an extra couple glasses of water. That's not too hard is it?

The beauty is, as you go along checking off your to-do steps you are building your inner drive. No one just wakes up with motivation. There is no get-shit-done-today pill we can take (not legally anyway). Motivation is something you slowly build over time and effort within yourself until the day comes when you're a beast. The envy of everyone around you, all wondering how you do it and make it look so easy. Which leads me to step 3.

Step 3: Make it easy.

What stops us from moving forward with our goals are the obstacles we either create for ourselves or are created for us due to our environment or circumstances. Our job is to remove or avoid as many of these obstacles as possible. Continuing with "my drink more water" example. We could stop buying coffee or pop at Commissary and instead buy bottled water. We could buy a new large cup for our new water habit and keep it handy next to the sink--in plain view. The point is, you want to make it as easy as possible to accomplish your steps. Remove excuses. Also, remind yourself you're keeping up with your habit, a sort-of constant self-congratulations for your effort. Over time all these cues and positive re-inforcement will create new neuro pathways in your brain making it easier to keep up your new habits. FYI- that's how habits are created: repetition and positive feedback.

Step 4: Don't push it.

The easiest and fastest way to quit any new endeavor is to feel overwhelmed. In the past, I've tried working out and pushed myself too hard too fast only to quickly quit when the soreness set in the next morning. Instead I should have taken it slow, like the snowball, the goal is sustained long-term drive. That's how big lofty, seeming impossible, dreams are fulfilled. In Outliers, author Malcolm Gladwell argues that to become an expert in any field requires ten thousand hours of dedicated effort--that's between five and ten years of

fulltime practice. My point? It's a marathon. Go easy on yourself if you have a slip up. Don't fret about a missed day or any other set-back. You need a cheat day? Take it. The key is to keep moving forward a little bit at a time. If you need to break a rule--break it. (Preferably just bend it.) Remember, you're in it for the long haul and no journey is without its ups and downs. Accept that and move on.

Step 5: Like Nike's cliché slogan dictates: Just Do It.

Whatever it is make a decision and just get started. No more excuses. No more putting it off. Do one simple step--start now. Soon enough you'll be running that 6-minute mile, finishing your degree, or whatever. Most importantly, you'll be living your life with hope and purpose. Can there be any greater motivation than that?

Sources:

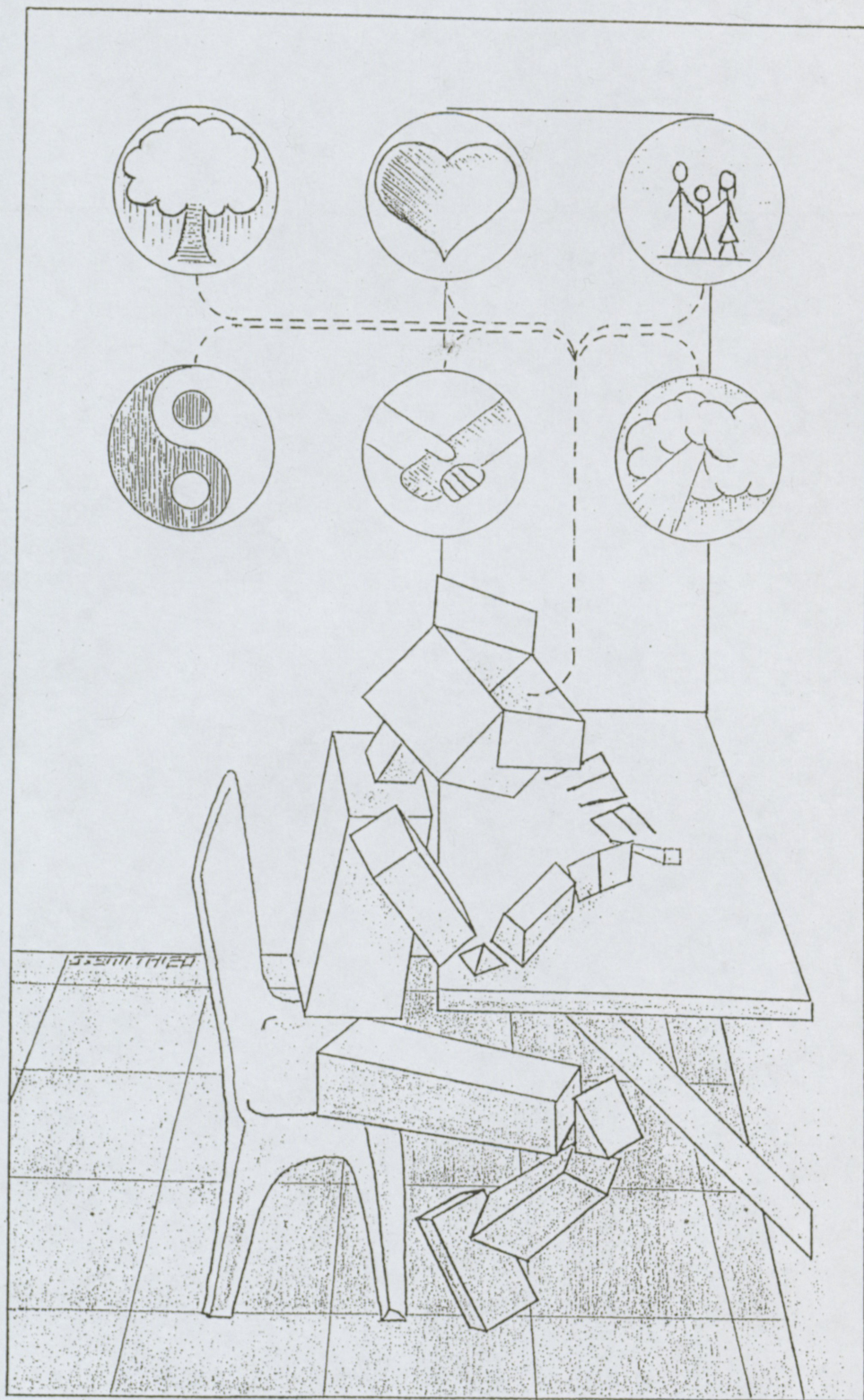
Peak Performance, Steve Magness

Atomic Habits, James Clear

get it Done: Surprising Lessons from the Science of Motivation, Ayelet Fishbach

The Practice of Groundedness, Brad Stulberg

- h. c. -



I.C