

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

STAYING MOTIVATED: FIVE RENEWAL RITUALS

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributor: G. Richard Shell, Thomas Gerrity Professor, Professor of Legal Studies and Business Ethics and Management, The Wharton School; author of *Springboard: Launching Your Personal Search for Success* (Portfolio Penguin: 2013)

THE GOAL:

Boost your success and satisfaction by keeping your motivation level high.

NANOTOOL:

What motivated David Ferrucci and his team at IBM to stay committed, despite years of challenges, to create an artificial intelligence system (Watson) that could beat the smartest Jeopardy! players in the world? Renewal rituals.

The inner satisfaction that comes from doing what you love, also known as intrinsic motivation, acts like slow-burning fuel, allowing for sustained effort over a long period of time.

But outer reward-based drives are equally necessary, providing the intensity you need to do your best work. In fact, the highest levels of performance result from a combination of both inner and outer motivations. To continually power yourself and your team toward your goals as you encounter obstacles large and small, create motivational springboards incorporating your own unique set of renewal rituals into your routine.

These rituals can be as simple as listening to a favorite song before every high-stakes meeting or rewarding yourself for hitting financial targets by buying a new suit. For some, motivation comes from external sources, which can be positive (inspiring role models) or negative (nay-sayers who “challenge” you by declaring something too difficult or impossible to achieve). Identify one or more that provide you with intense, short-term motivation, and then make it a habit.

HOW COMPANIES USE IT:

- Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay, Inc. one of the world’s top direct sellers of beauty products, said, “Competition can be a very strong motivation.” Company salespeople are motivated by sales awards of jewelery, furs, trips, and the ubiquitous pink Cadillac.
- A high-ranking non-profit executive interviewed in The New York Times admitted that she was still running on the energy provided by a professor who had once refused to give her a summer internship decades earlier. “I have been trying to prove that guy wrong my whole adult life,” she reported.



- The Posse Foundation was founded by Deborah Biel to send bright but underachieving inner-city kids to college. It was born from an insight that these teenagers tend to orient their lives around a peer group (their “posse”). So she created a program in which specially screened low-income kids from the same city — all smart but with grades and test scores that would not get them into top colleges — are admitted to the same school as a group. She then provides them with a set of social bonding experiences in high school that continue once they are enrolled in college. The posse holds its members accountable, motivating everyone to do their homework and take pride in their group identity. Biel now has six hundred students from eight cities attending forty different colleges, and boasts a 90 percent graduation rate.

ACTION STEPS:

Using these five techniques, and turning them into regular rituals, can make the difference between success and failure. Incorporate one or more as part of your routine to help you stay energized and working toward your goals.

1. **Make yourself accountable.** Use the power of relationship to keep yourself on track. Set up a support team with a focus on helping each member reach their goals. Small groups of 4-6 people work best. For accountability that’s even more focused, hire a coach, or create a peer coaching pair or triad with people who are fully committed and who bring energy and enthusiasm to the process.
2. **Connect with role models.** Find ways to regularly connect with people whose lives inspire you. If you know the role models, invite them to lunch or set up regular “check-in” phone calls. If you can’t connect directly, subscribe to their tweets and read their blog posts, articles, biographies, or books; listen to their podcasts, CDs, or YouTube clips. Immerse yourself in the engaging messages they offer.
3. **Create a motivational routine.** Make a playlist of music that energizes and inspires you to start your day. On important occasions, dress for success with a power suit or jewellery. Re-energize yourself throughout the day with a few deep breaths, a brisk walk down the hall, or by adopting a “power pose.” Use powerful quotes or success stories that you find inspiring by repeating one or more to yourself when you need motivation, such as before a big meeting or presentation.
4. **Compete with yourself.** If you’re motivated more by “carrots” than “sticks,” decide on a prize for yourself when you reach an important goal. Then reward yourself along the way with little incentives for reaching specific milestones. If you’re more of a “stick” person, set penalties for yourself if you miss key check points. Knowing the rewards or penalties ahead of time will keep your inner competitor “on fire.”
5. **Prove someone wrong.** Identify your favorite nay-sayer, someone who has said, “You’ll never make it,” or “You might as well give up now.” The joy of being able to prove them wrong can be high-octane fuel for the challenging journey to success. Teams can prove the top-ranked competitor wrong by stealing their market share or by designing a game-changing product.

Motivation is the energy that gets you up every day and keeps powering you past the obstacles and towards your goals. With only one life to live, why not live it with purpose and energy? Why not make it memorable? What have you got to lose?

SHARE YOUR BEST PRACTICES:

Do you have a best practice for motivating yourself? If so, please share it on our blog at Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. <http://whartonleadership.wordpress.com/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Springboard: Launching Your Personal Search for Success, G. Richard Shell (Portfolio/Penguin, 2013). Provides scientific insights and personal assessments for determining a personal definition of success and focusing on what gives meaning and excitement to your life.
- Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard, Chip and Dan Heath (Crown Business, 2010). Offers a system for aligning people's rational and emotional sides by changing the work environment, making it easier for them to change their behavior.
- "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Direction," Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, Contemporary Educational Psychology, Vol. 25, No. 1: 54-67. Discusses the relations of both classes of motives to basic human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- "Self-Discipline Outdoes IQ in Predicting Academic Performance of Adolescents," Angela L. Duckworth and Martin E.P. Seligman, Psychological Science, December 2005, Vol. 16, No. 12: 939-944. Reveals the findings of two studies that suggest a major reason for students falling short of their intellectual potential: their failure to exercise self-discipline.
- Richard Shell teaches in Wharton Executive Education's [*Executive Negotiation Workshop: Bargaining for Advantage*](#), [*Strategic Persuasion Workshop: The Art and Science of Selling Ideas*](#), [*Advanced Management Program*](#) and many others.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools' Academic Director is John Paul MacDuffie, Wharton Associate Professor of Management.