

Motivation Versus Inspiration

Being inspired is not enough. Motivation drives inspiration into action.

If you have a task that you must complete, you need the resources to accomplish that. Of these resources, motivation, which can be defined as a ‘motive in action’, is the most important. This driving force will help you achieve anything you aspire to, even in the face of obstacles. Motivation can help you persist and perform difficult tasks. No matter the goal you’re working towards—health, career, relationship—you’re driven by a motive. Every single goal has a reason behind it that compels you to act. For example, you may be inspired to build a website for your small business, but you should also feel motivated to complete it in a few months so you can move on to other projects and goals you need to take care of. While your level of inspiration may not have increased, postponing the completion of the website isn’t an option, so motivation drives you to the finish line. This is an example of how motivation influences the outcomes of our lives.

Motivation and Inspiration: Definitions and Differences

While inspiration is *always* internal, motivation typically involves incentives, some of which are external. For example, you motivate a dog to learn a new trick by offering a treat at even the slightest effort towards the goal. You might motivate your children to finish their homework early by offering to increase their playtime if they do so.

You are inspired *to think* and motivated *to do*. You may be inspired when you read a quote on social media or a passage from a book that opens your mind and touches your heart. Words and images can trigger an epiphany that inspires you to think and then motivates you to act. What inspires you may touch your heart so deeply that it pulls you towards it. When this happens, we say it is a calling.

Inspiration often leads us to a creative place. The word inspiration, also considered ‘divine guidance’, comes from the Latin root verb *inspirare*, which means ‘to breathe in’. Figurative definitions of inspiration include ‘a breathing or infusion into the mind or soul’¹ or a ‘special immediate action or influence of the Spirit of God (or of some divinity or supernatural being) upon the human mind or soul’.² Now you may wonder whether motivation is as great as inspiration or if one is simply a stepping stone to the other. Both inspiration and motivation are positive and necessary to living a life of purpose and excellence. Inspiration is comparable to the vision statement in a corporation and motivation to a mission statement.

Industrialist Henry Ford grew up on a farm. Many of the farmers in the area could not afford the expensive

trucks needed to transport large quantities of their harvest to market. Their transportation challenges motivated Henry to ease their burden. He set out to manufacture a reliable mode of transportation that they could afford. Ford Motor Company's mission statement reflects his initial motivation: 'to make people's lives better by making mobility accessible and affordable'. Affordability was a challenge, but by implementing the assembly line, making automobiles became less expensive. When Ford was inspired to create this new kind of manufacturing process, he revolutionized travel and trucking for middle-class Americans. He provided the foundation for continually making smart vehicles for the smart world on a scale previously unimagined when he founded the company.³

Let me give you another example. Madame Curie was a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who coined the term radioactivity. Intrigued by the X-rays discovered by the German physicist Sir Wilhelm Röntgen and by Antoine Henri Becquerel's studies of phosphorescence and light absorption, she chose this new field of investigation for her thesis. She went on to discover radium and polonium and made many more significant contributions to the fields of chemistry and physics. Inspiration—a vague motivating feeling that propels us to explore the unknown—may have been the primary and deepest reason for Curie's ultimate success. The examples of Henry Ford and Madame Curie show that inspiration drives motivation and motivation drives perseverance and excellence. A clear vision drives a strong mission. Together, they are the driving forces for our chosen purpose in life.

Staying Motivated

Now, it is not possible for us to stay motivated or get inspired constantly. We *do* face rejections and failures along the way. How can we regain clarity and confidence and continue the journey towards our original purpose? Let me share a few tips for getting into the zone that fuels your inspiration or motivation.

1. **Recognize all those things that are already going well in your life.** This helps us develop a grateful, appreciative and positive attitude, which will de-stress our heart and unclutter our mind, leaving it relaxed, receptive and creative.
2. **Develop lateral thinking.** The ability to use an indirect, creative and imaginative method of solving problems is called lateral thinking. It involves 360-degree awareness and alertness.
3. **Observe the little things in life with wonder and appreciation.** We often say 'Don't sweat the small stuff.' We also say, 'Pay attention to details.' While the details are small and at times tedious, it is the small and simple things that inspire us the most. A grateful and awe-inspiring approach, which involves appreciating all that is wildly diverse around us, is both quite fascinating and a precursor for an inspired life.
4. **Develop motivation to inspire those you deeply care about,** such as a friend, colleague or relative. A long time ago, I read a quote from Booker T. Washington, an educator, author and reformer

who was born into slavery and became the most influential spokesperson for Black Americans between 1895 and 1915: 'The best way to lift oneself up is to help someone else.'⁴ This is generosity. We never know the impact of a small act of kindness and generosity. It could trigger a great work of philanthropy helping millions of people. By putting a little bit of heart into our lives, our attitudes will change and we will embrace our society and humanity. That is the power of inspiration enabled by proper motivation.

5. **Daily meditation and introspection** will also provide the space in your heart for inspiration to sprout.

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These tips will give you a good start. With constant exposure to inspiration, our motivations find refinement and expansion. In this journey of life, we can expand our perspective from 'me' to 'we' and 'mine' to 'ours' and begin to feel more connected to others. Then, like those renowned individuals who led inspired lives, such as Mother Teresa, Madame Curie and Martin Luther King, Jr., we too can make a significant difference to humanity. Motivated and inventive people such as Henry Ford, Alexander Graham Bell and Nikola Tesla improved the material well-being of generations and advanced our civilization. Why could you and I not do the same if we pursue our passions?

The clear distinction of inspiration is that it comes from the qualitative part of the heart that gives energy to

the search for truth and betterment of life. The deeply motivated person acts on ideas that are essential for prosperity and progress for the self and others. However, being inspired is not enough, motivation is what drives inspiration to action. Constant inspiration and consistent motivation can help us achieve our purpose and find meaning in our lives.