

StrengthsGenius™

The Seven Motivations



StrengthsGenius™

Preface

Have you ever wondered why you do the things that you do? Maybe you've spent hours contemplating why you're unable to accomplish personal goals despite having an understanding of the actions needed to achieve them. What determines whether we act or delay action is known as motivation.

Most of us have a basic understanding of motivation: we know that the beginning of a New Year brings opportunities to jumpstart our motivation by setting resolutions meant to help us accomplish our goals; we know that certain incentives (like bonuses or vacations) can inspire us to go the extra mile; we know that giving a loved one flowers makes them feel good, and it also makes us feel good. All of us, too, are familiar with feeling a lack of motivation. What's more difficult than a Monday morning, getting to the gym, or making that dreaded phone call to deliver bad news?

We confront our motivational centers every single day when we make decisions, but since much of decision-making is instinctive, we often don't give a second thought to the subconscious factors influencing our behavior.

In this edition of StrengthsGenius™ Blueprint for Success, we outline each of the seven motivational factors that affect our behavior. It is our hope that having a deeper understanding of motivation broadly described will allow our readers to develop a sense of their motivational makeup.

You may have guessed by our title that we are a strengths-based resource. When we discuss strengths, we are referring to the 34 Themes of Talent as specified by the CliftonStrengths© assessment. If you have not had the opportunity to take the CliftonStrengths© assessment, you may find it helpful to do so before proceeding to have a fuller understanding of how your individual talents correspond to your motivational framework and comprise your Unique Genius. To learn more about how you can take the assessment, see the last page of this pamphlet. We'd be happy to help!

What is the StrengthsGenius™ Blueprint for Success?

The StrengthsGenius™ Blueprint for Success is a series of guidebooks that provide information and activities that explore various themes related to personal, professional, and leadership development. In this edition, we explore The Seven Motivations. To begin applying the information within each guidebook, we suggest taking a moment to first go through the following exercise.

Take a moment to jot down 3-5 goals. They can be personal goals, professional goals, short-term, or long-term goals. For each of the goals, repeat the following steps:

1. **Define It** – What is your goal? In clear terms, write down: what you want, why you want it, and what you get out of attaining it.
2. **Decide It** – Deciding to start is often the hardest part of action. Make the commitment now to achieve your goal. Until you commit to action, success is only a dream.
3. **Design It** – Plan accordingly. Determine what your deadline is. What do you already have to accomplish the goal? What do you need? Outline the steps you need to take to make your dream a reality.
4. **Do It** – The previous 3 steps take the guesswork out of goal-achievement. Follow your plan. Do it. You'll feel better, we promise.

The 7 Types of Motivation Overview

Motivation is a complex variable in human decision-making. Like the logic behind CliftonStrengths©, which posits that the likelihood of two individuals having the exact same talent themes in the exact same order is 1:33,000,000, two individuals sharing the exact same motivational makeup is extremely rare. While behavioral psychologists agree on what the seven motivational types are, the way that these factors present themselves in our daily lives is dependent on our individual fields of experience and is heavily determined by the situation at hand.

Below is a brief overview of each of the seven types of motivation. We will go deeper into each type in subsequent sections.

(i) Social Motivation – refers to the need to belong and be accepted by others. The underlying drive comes from sociocultural influences that make people want to align their behavior with the expectations of an important group/individual.

(ii) Recognition Motivation – based in the premise that we want to be recognized for our hard work and contributions. Importantly, not everyone likes to be recognized in the same manner. For instance, while one person may revel in being recognized at a banquet thrown in their honor, another might quiver in fear at the thought of public praise.

(iii) Money Motivation – because money is necessary to survive in our society, it stands to reason that people can be incentivized and motivated by compensation for their efforts. Money can and does motivate people, however, as we discuss later, monetary rewards have limits in terms of motivating behavior.

(iv) Influence Motivation – people may be motivated by their ability to impact situations or people in such a way that brings about change. This can refer to impacting changes in behavior, attitudes, policy, outcomes, organizational structure, and more. One key fact to note here is that influence does not necessitate having power. More on that in sections to come.

(v) Achievement Motivation – people motivated by achievement seek to attain set goals. They thrive in structures that provide consistent feedback on where they stand in goal completion.

(vi) Power Motivation – people motivated by power have a strong need to be influential and make a noticeable impact. They like to take the lead and see their ideas come to fruition. Personal recognition and prestige are common rewards that inspire this type of personality.

(vii) Purpose Motivation- people who are motivated by purpose consider how their actions can make a positive contribution to the world. They are motivated to act in service of good will, spirituality, and heart.

While each of us possess a bit of each of these motivations, we tend to make decisions based on the ones that are more dominant within us. Do you know what your dominant motivators are? More detail in the following sections may help you discover your motivational makeup.

The Seven Motivations

1. Social Motivation

Social motivation is rooted in the need to belong and be accepted by others. Research has shown that as early as nine months old, people can distinguish the emotional reactions of others and begin emoting specific cues designed to get the attention of the individuals around them to meet their needs.

Some experts tie our need to belong to survival instincts. In early anthropological history, humans had to rely on others in their tribes to meet their most basic needs of attaining food, shelter, warmth, and assisting in rearing children. Thus, social motivation evolved as a means of helping us fit into the tribes to which we belonged. As our society evolved, social motivation stayed adapted to meet the needs of our current culture.

The following examples demonstrate some of the ways in which we are motivated by social factors:

Belonging to social media

Maintaining personal and professional relationships

Valuing achievement in a public forum (e.g. Nobel Peace Prize)

Prizing celebrity or fame

Seeking elected office in politics or gaining political influence

Understanding the Unconscious Mind

Freud theorized that most human behavior is a result of a combination of desires, impulses, and memories that have been repressed into an unconscious state, and while these motivations are largely subconscious, they still control our actions.

Freud also believed that there is a part of the mind that is always working consciously, and that when we become aware of the way in which we think, we can tap into that to direct or control our unconscious thoughts and behaviors.

Thus, if we are noticing that our actions are producing negative results, we have the capacity to look into our minds eye and consider our thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Becoming aware of how we think can allow us to challenge unproductive thoughts and the unconscious will follow suit with time and practice.

Let's say that you've been assigned to work on a project with a co-worker. You know that you want to do your best, but you find that the presence of your co-worker is compromising your ability to put your best foot forward. When you get home, you consider why you're having these negative feelings and piece together that you feel that your co-worker is favored by your boss and feel that by working on a project together, you will automatically be seen as the weaker link. Your social motivation wants you to fit in and belong, but you can't help feeling less-than, so you may feel less motivated to complete the project at hand. One way to ameliorate this is to reframe your perception. Maybe your boss put you on this project because (s)he thinks you'd make a great partner for your favored co-worker. The more you introduce positive thought into your conscious mind, the more your unconscious mind will work to make that perspective make sense.

Once we become aware of the ways that motivation shows up in different arenas, we can use it to our own advantage instead of being resistant or allowing it to demotivate us.

Let's look at another example. Someone high in social motivation would likely value being named Employee of the Month. While it may be true that we do not know all of the unconscious desires driving us to attain Employee of the Month, we know that we want it – thus, the drive moves from the unconscious to the conscious. From there, we can identify specific actions that can be taken to achieve this title, such as volunteering to take on extra projects, looking for innovative ways to save the company money, and undergoing extra training. By consciously deciding to act, we demonstrate that we are “in sync” with what our supervisors hold as the standard for Employee of the Month and are more likely to reach our goal of earning the accolade.

Tapping into Social Motivation

In order to clarify what factors within the social motivation framework drives you, refer to the goals you listed as part of your Success Blueprint and ask yourself the following questions:

- (1.) What conscious and unconscious factors (e.g. behaviors, feelings, outside influences, past experiences) are at play?
- (2.) Which of the above factors can be controlled/changed/managed to reach the desired goal?
- (3.) What outcome is being sought (e.g. fame, recognition, comradery, prestige, love, etc.)

If our readers are high in social motivation, they will feel a strong desire to have their sense of place recognized and validated within the social group. If our readers are not dominant in social motivation, it is important to recognize that our co-workers, partners, children, and others who we interact with may have these needs and social rewards should be considered as a source of motivating behavior.

Sources Cited in this Section

**Social Motivation* edited by David Dunning. From the series *Frontiers of Social Psychology* by Psychology Press, a Taylor & Francis group imprint.

2. Influence Motivation

Influence is to be measured not by the extent it covers, but by its kind. - William Channing

The word influence is a noun that means, “to have the capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on, or produce effects on, the actions, behaviors, or opinions of others.”

There are a couple of things to keep in mind about influence motivation as it relates to the discussion here:

(1.) influence can cause change in a variety of ways such as changes in behavior, attitude, goals, values, organizational structure, etc.; and,

(2.) a person who is motivated by influence doesn't necessarily have power, at least not in the traditional sense. For example, the supervisor of an organization may have more power but less influence than a charismatic and hardworking co-worker.

Types of Influence

People exert influence in a variety of ways. Below are a few examples of strategies that individuals motivated to influence others may employ:

Reward - people use reward-based incentives to influence others to do something. This could be explicitly stated or implicitly implied. For example, a mother might reward her son's effort to keep his room clean with an allowance (explicit) or reward her daughter's good performance in school by giving her more leeway time to get her homework done (implicit).

Expertise – those who are experts in subject areas influence others to comply with their direction simply because their knowledge and skills are trusted to support their desired outcomes.

Personal Charisma- people who are highly charming and likable tend to exert greater influence over people than those low in charisma. Charismatic people tend to be highly sensitive to the needs of others, thus, once they understand what makes a person tick, they can tap into that to affect change among their peers/subordinates.

Relationship- this refers to the network of relationships we cultivate with people. Often, our relationships or the perception that we have high-quality and/or high-power relationships can be used to influence others and motivate them to act. This plays into social motivation as well in that people value being seen with others perceived as relationally strong.

Power- power can be explicit or implicit. A boss/parent/head of committee has explicit power dictated by his/her role whereas an individual can have implicit power by being trusted, liked, etc. Power has the potential to influence behavior, however, power in and of itself can be an ineffective factor if people do not trust your influence.

What Happens When You Exert Influence?

Experts state that there are three things that usually happen when a person exerts influence:

(1.) *Compliance*- soliciting others to adhere to your rules/suggestions is known as compliance. Compliance can be achieved begrudgingly or happily depending on the approach used to gain influence, what the objective was/is, and how it affects those who are in the position to comply.

Good leaders are aware that compliance can be coercive, and they take measure to adjust their influence tactics to achieve the best possible outcome for all.

(2.) *Resistance* - resistance refers to the reluctance or refusal of people or groups to adhere to suggestions of influence.

(3.) *Commitment*- in terms of influence, commitment is more valuable than compliance because it suggests that those who are being influenced are aligned with the objectives of the influencer and will modify their behavior to achieve the desired results.

Which Types of Influence Do You Wield?

Those motivated to influence others tend to move fluidly through the types of influence listed above to achieve their desired outcomes. Some goals lend themselves to certain types of influence more than others. For example, in the workforce, people may be more inclined to rely on their relationships with others to gain support for their initiatives, parents may use a reward structure to influence their children to behave in certain ways, and famous people may rely on their charisma to get audiences to donate to their charitable campaigns.

How to Maximize Influence Motivation

Knowing which types of influence you have in various scenarios is helpful to motivate others in helping you accomplish your goals.

Think about the goal exercise from the Success Blueprint. How might you use the different types of influence to meet desired outcomes? Do you need to pull on your relationships to help gain momentum towards your outcome? Could your charisma land a meeting with an important leader in your community? Revisit your goals and ask yourself if you are motivated to influence others and what that influence can do for you.

Sources Cited in this Section

Leadership & Different Types of Influence Processes, by Alfred Sarkissian, Demand Media.

Influence: The Essence of Leadership, Anita Hall, Extension Educator & Leverne Barrett, Extension Leadership Specialist. The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska.

3. Recognition Influence

Recognition Influence posits that people want to be recognized for their work and/or contributions. Already, it is clear that the seven domains of motivation overlap as recognition is also a piece of social motivation, but it is distinct in that recognition can be a pursuit individual of social factors. For example, a writer might adopt a pen name to remain anonymous but still be motivated to receive recognition as a good writer by winning a literary prize.

The Five Levels of Recognition

Much of the motivation-based theories around recognition are grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 1):



Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs essentially states that we start at the bottom level of the pyramid and only can advance to the next level once the needs are met within the level below. So, for example, we cannot concern ourselves with meeting social needs unless our physiological and safety needs are first met. The recognition motivation comes into play in the top levels of this hierarchy. It's helpful to explore each level of need to glean a better understanding of recognition motivation.

Physiological Needs - these are basic needs like food, water, sleep, shelter, and clothing.

Safety Needs – as humans, we seek security and safety. In modern times, this takes many forms including: a good job, a loving family, a nice home in a good neighborhood, etc.

Social Needs – like social motivation, we have social needs centered around our desire to belong. We need to be involved in interpersonal relationships to feel that we are well in our current society. Nowadays, having active social media pages is one way we meet our social needs.

Esteem Needs - this refers to the desire to be accepted, respected, and autonomous. If a person feels valued by others, they will tend to have higher self-esteem and more self-confidence.

Self-Actualization – to actualize something means to bring it to its highest form of transformation. In Maslow's theory, self-actualization means that a person has mastered their basic needs to a manageable enough extent that they can pursue higher-level goals such as channeling creativity,

spirituality, letting go of prejudice, and more. This is the level on which people meet their highest possible potential.

Recognition Motivation posits that we are motivated to make sure our needs are met at the bottom levels of Maslow's pyramid in order to attain higher-level recognition from our peers, ourselves, and society around us. Essentially, we are subconsciously motivated (and sometimes overtly motivated) to make sure we have food, shelter, and security. If those things fall out of balance, we prioritize them, scaling back our efforts to attain social recognition or pulling back from self-actualization goals such as understanding the meaning of life and instead focus on securing the immediate need of feeding, clothing, and sheltering ourselves.

We are constantly in flux between the levels of the pyramid as things shift throughout our lives.

Maximizing Recognition Motivation

What level of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs are you in? Think back to your Success Blueprint. Are you able to set out to meet your goals because you have your physiological needs met? Are you moving towards self-actualization? Take a moment to write down what you are grateful for, what you may have taken for granted, and recognize the things that you already have and how far you've already come.

4. Money Motivation

Money is only a tool. It will take you wherever you wish, but it will not replace you as the driver. - Ayn Rand

Money motivates. It's a simple fact of the society that we live in that is heavily dependent on commerce and capitalism. However, as has been the case with most of the motivations we have explored, using money to motivate has its own limitations.

An Unexpected Finding about Money as a Motivator

A growing number of studies in psychology and economics show that increasing financial rewards may not lead to better performance. Pioneering work in the field was carried out in the early 1970s by Edward Deci, a psychologist at Rochester University in New York. He found that students offered cash prizes to solve puzzles were less likely to continue working on them after the payments had been made compared to students who were offered no money to complete the puzzles.

Deci's work helped clarify the relationship between intrinsic (doing things because you like doing them) and extrinsic (doing things because you've been told to by an external source) motivation.

Using Money as a Motivator

Some research suggests extrinsic rewards such as money help reinforce our intrinsic rewards systems as well. For example, working hard to attain the company bonus trip to Jamaica may look like an extrinsic reward, but in the process of working towards attaining it, an employee may experience intrinsic rewards such as feeling more competent, more energized, and feel more eager to participate in their workplace environment.

Maximizing Money Motivation

What do you stand to gain if you accomplish the goals laid out in the Success Blueprint? Were any of the results monetarily motivated? How dominant is your drive to succeed based on financial rewards or other perks? Consider this when looking into new jobs or projects – how much return on investment will you get? What is the bonus structure? What entertainment/travel options come as part of the job? Do you get a relocation bonus? Consider these questions to determine the level of dominance money motivation has for you.

Sources Cited in this Section

Does money really motivate people? By Carinne Pikema for BBC.com

5. Achievement Motivation

When your desires are strong enough, you will appear to possess superhuman powers to achieve.
- Napoleon Hill

Achievement motivation can best be defined as an individual's desire for substantial accomplishment and/or the mastering of skills. It is different from other forms of motivation in that the goal of achievement motivation is to be or to feel competent – there is as much joy in the journey to achievement as there is achieving the actual goal.

People highly motivated by achievement often seek feedback or progress reports to ensure that they are on track when working towards their goals.

Two Driving Factors in Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation types are described as being passionate about setting high goals and meeting them. Experts say that achievement-motivated individuals are both intrinsically and extrinsically driven. The intrinsic drive comes from an inner need to succeed while the extrinsic drive stems from a need to live up to the expectation of others.

Characteristics of Achievement-Motivated Individuals

Ability to set goals – a person high in achievement is always setting new goals

Focus – once a goal is set, the individual remains focused on the task until it is complete

Likes to be challenged – because these types want to feel competent, this type of motivation enjoys having their capabilities challenged and overcoming that challenge

Resilient – those motivated to achieve don't stay down for long if they fail, they pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and keep moving

Pragmatic – achievement-motivated individuals focus on what works well and are quick to either tweak an existing method or start from scratch with a different approach if what they are doing isn't working. The focus is always on achieving the most desirable outcome.

Demanding - One criticism of achievement-oriented individuals is that, because they assume everyone is as driven as they are, they can be demanding and abrasive towards others.

Maximizing Achievement Motivation

Think back to your Success Blueprint. Are you requiring lots of feedback on meeting your goals? Have you already tweaked your method and are frustrated by what isn't working to get you closer to your goals? If your focus on the end result is of singular concern, you might be motivated by achievement. Careful here. Take a moment to cultivate empathy for those who are working with you who might not be on the same level of passion as you have for your projects. Remember that to influence others, you need them to like and respect you, so be sure you're being conscientious of others' needs as well.

6. Power Motivation

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. - Abraham Lincoln.

People who are motivated by power have a strong desire to have an impact on others, to be influential, and to bring about change to be effective at achieving set goals.

Character Traits of Those Motivated by Power

People motivated by power tend to be excellent communicators, competitive, focused, responsible, inquisitive, perceptive, and analytical. Some of the criticisms leveled at this type of personality is that they can be critical, impatient, status seekers, and conniving.

Like achievement-motivated people, power-motivated people tend to enjoy going after their goals and invest a lot of time and focus in pursuit of them.

Importantly, those who are motivated to attain power don't necessarily seek to be dominant. Rather, they view power as a resource, and they seek to be in direct control of the influence they exert.

Take, for example, a person who seeks to be the most powerful player in the waste-reduction effort in a city. This person wants to attain power in order to effect change in the way that people in the city reduce, reuse, and recycle their goods. To attain this power means that this person needs to network with other environmental organizations, educate the public about recycling processes, gain traction amongst community and political leaders to have their initiatives passed, and often will not rest until they see that their goals are coming to fruition.

Maximizing Power Motivation

Think about your Success Blueprint – what goals would benefit from attaining more power in certain domains? Do you have a community initiative that needs support? Would it benefit your cause to meet with a leader with more power than you currently have? Just holding that meeting would allow you to gain more power than you have now and spread your influence. If you feel averse to gaining power, ask yourself what your relationship is to that word. Do you feel motivated by power in certain structures (such as a community group) but less motivated by power in social settings? Identify which of your goals would benefit from accessing the power you have within you and where you stand to grow your influence in service of your goals.

7. Purpose Motivation

Your purpose in life is to find your purpose and give your whole heart and soul to it. - Gautama Buddha

Those who are motivated by purpose seek to align their goals and behavior with a kind of higher calling. They are most called to action when motivated by something larger than themselves. Indeed, purpose drives us to do a great many good things in the world, but be careful! Just because a motivation is aligned with purpose doesn't mean that the purpose is wholeheartedly good – there are plenty of groups whose purpose is to seek and destroy those who they deem weaker than they are. Still, purpose is most aligned with intrinsic sources of motivation and can be a powerful tool in motivating us to act.

For most of us, having purpose has a positive connotation and generally refers to exerting influence in the world in a way that aligns with our higher-level values. As mentioned alongside recognition motivation, purpose motivation fits into the self-actualization category on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. If you've ever volunteered to feed the homeless or donate blood, it's often because you were motivated by a purpose motivation (unless you were just in it to get out of work/school, in which case... we suppose that was purposeful as well).

People who are purpose-motivated often strive to align their behaviors with their beliefs and will take any opportunity to pair this with influence-motivation in order to more effectively spread their viewpoints and gain traction towards their goals. Indeed, being intrinsically motivated to accomplish a goal that is in service to something greater than oneself ends up benefiting the self more than any other pursuit.

Maximizing Your Purpose Motivation

Visiting your Success Blueprint one last time, ask yourself, are any of my goals in service of my purpose here on Earth? What is my purpose on Earth? Are my behaviors and goals in line with that purpose? If any goal stands in direct opposition to the beliefs that you hold, that may help explain why you could be having trouble bringing that outcome to fruition. Of the goals listed, do any of them fulfill what you believe to be your purpose in life? If not, we recommend adding one more goal to the list in service of this. Over the next few months, compare and contrast the goals you've listed for yourself and evaluate which ones you have more energy towards. We would venture to guess that any goals that are located more in intrinsically-oriented motivations might feel easier to accomplish.

Conclusion

We hope that this guidebook allowed for a deeper understanding of what motivates you. With this knowledge at your disposal, we hope that you can make decisions with more ease. Moreover, we hope that by understanding the seven motivations, you will be more adept at setting goals and working in your sweet spots. If you encounter conflict along the way, try to remember that your counterparts may be moving from a different motivational center and work to create dialogue to promote understanding and increased collaboration.

Contact Us

We'd love to help support you on your journey to discovering your Unique Genius! If you're interested in taking the CliftonStrengths© assessment or bringing StrengthsGenius™ to your business, team, or community, please reach out!

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