

about the
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Suzie Tuffey Riewald received her degrees in Sport Psychology/ Exercise Science from the University of North Carolina—Greensboro. She has worked for USA Swimming as the Sport Psychology and Sport Science Director, and most recently as the Associate Director of Coaching with the USOC where she worked with various sport national governing bodies (NGBs) to develop and enhance coaching education and training. Suzie currently works as a sport psychology consultant to several NGBs.

Keep the Fire Burning

Ah, winter is finally here. And with it (at least in most parts of the country) comes colder temperatures, snow, sleet, fires in the fireplace and fewer daylight hours. If, like most people, you workout before or after work (or school), you are getting bundled up in winter gear to hit the streets or go to the gym when it is dark and cold. Such conditions can challenge even the most highly motivated athlete.

Motivation—you know what that means, right? Athletes often use terms such as “drive,” “desire,” or “going after something with intensity” to describe or define motivation and motivated behavior. While we often think that motivation comes entirely from within the individual, it is important to recognize that motivation is actually a function of both the individual (you) and the situation. So, to enhance your motivation, you will want to not only address the ‘you’ part of the equation (i.e., what motivates you? why do you exercise/ compete/ train? what can you do differently) but also look at situational factors such as your coach, training partner or the facility where you train, as these can play a role in your motivation as well.

Now, let us take a look at some strategies to “keep the fire burning” during the winter months.

Goals, Goals, Goals

At times, athletes are found to consistently workout but do not really see any results. That is, they train day-in and day-out but tend to just go through the motions. In such situations, it is tough to stay motivated as the athlete has no ‘destination’ in mind. To use a driving analogy, the athlete is driving aimlessly—getting in the car everyday but just meandering about with no purpose or objective. Contrast that with the driver who has a clear goal (i.e., getting to New York) and a roadmap to get him there. He is focused and purposeful as he gets behind the wheel. He knows where he wants to go, how he is going to get there, and when he wants to arrive, which makes for motivated driving, right? Similarly, the athlete who has a clear goal is going to be more purposeful and motivated to get the job done as he has a clear reason behind what he is doing in the gym, on the roads, or on the court each and every day.

So, to keep your fire burning, identify daily training goals that tell you where you are going and how you are going to get there.

Reinforcement Works—Use it

A swim club I visited years ago kept an attendance chart for their younger aged swimmers. For each practice session attended, an athlete received a sticker. After two weeks of practice, if she had eight stickers she got a reward. Similar tactics are used by parents and teachers to encourage appropriate behavior. The reward for “good behavior” serves as a motivation to the youngster. Why not use this reward strategy for yourself? If you struggle getting out of bed when it is dark, do not like working out in the snow, or find it easy to skip a day since the next competition is not for months, identify a reward that will provide you with the necessary motivation (i.e., going to see your favorite movie after five quality training sessions, going out to dinner, etc.). Be very specific. Commit to paper what you need to do, how often you need to do it and do not sell yourself short. If you achieve your goal, treat yourself with a meaningful reward. If you do not reach your goal, don’t say “I was close. I’ll reward myself anyway.” Withhold the reward and try harder the next week.

Look Around You

What about the environment? Are there things in the environment that can be changed to enhance your motivation? It may be that simple changes can be made that can have a positive influence on your motivation. Some examples to get you thinking:

For those that have a workout room in their home, maybe putting posters on the wall, changing the music you listen to or adding mirrors can influence your motivation.

Do you train alone? It may be that running, swimming or lifting with a training partner can bring a positive change to your motivation.

If you have a training partner, let her know things she can do and say to enhance your motivation. Ask the same of her.

What about something as simple as putting together a CD with songs that will motivate and get you energized as you drive to the gym?

Write your long-term goals on a piece of paper and tape it where you will see it prior to a workout or training session—in your bathroom, on the refrigerator, in your car—to serve as a reminder of why you do what you do.

Do the “little things” in order to succeed in achieving your goals. If you know you have an early morning workout, do not stay up late if you

can help it. Lay out your workout clothes the night before. Put the coffee pot on auto-brew so the aroma of a freshly brewed pot will entice you from the bed.

Share your goals with your family and friends. Allow them to hold you accountable and do not get mad when they challenge you as to why you didn't work out today like you said you would. Take that energy and use it as motivation for the next time you consider blowing off a workout.

We have all experienced those days where the last thing we want to do is get out there and put in the effort to have a good training session. But we have also all experienced the positive feelings that come with completing the workout

once it's done. And most of us have also shared moments where we have been able to do something spectacular in a training session we were prepared to just blow off. There are many things you can do to enhance your motivation. Take control of yourself and the environment and give yourself the best chance for success. ■

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