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Motivation and Performance, Blog 6

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<https://rampages.us/ianferguson/>

Ian Ferguson

Final Project

Hi all, here is my final project video for the class! I am relatively unfamiliar with Screencast.com so I'm hoping no one will have trouble in viewing it. Let me know if you have any technical issues. Thanks!

<http://screencast.com/t/khQeQEn5y08>



Day 10

Final Project



The constructs outlined in “Willpower” were all exceptionally interesting, and I think that a fundamental understanding of *what* motivates us is crucial when setting goals for ourselves. For my final project, I’m planning on focusing on three main points: setting realistic points for myself weekly, strengthening my self-control with flow activities and small challenges throughout the day, and utilizing my body’s store of glucose as efficiently as possible.

The format of my project is still undecided – I don’t have a lot of experience with Jing or other narrating applications, so I’m considering either filming a short video discussion or creating a Prezi presentation online. I’ve always like Prezi because it’s very interactive, with the only downside being the inability to verbally express my thoughts. If you have any thoughts please post them below!

This class has taught me a lot about human nature, and what we are ultimately capable of. I’m more aware now than ever that any goal we set for ourselves is possible if we are autonomously motivated, and I think that knowledge is really empowering. I’m looking forward to applying these concepts to more goals in the future.

Day 9

Moral Gunpowder

The story of Henry Morton Stanley’s explorations in Africa was fascinating, and they highlighted a number of interesting psychological constructs at work. In particular, I thought Baumeister’s discussion of the empathy gap was really enlightening; the concept reminds me quite a bit of social

forecasting, in that we are often wildly inaccurate in guessing how we will feel in the future (especially given a change in stimulus or environment). Especially in situations where we would expect to be highly reactive – a physical altercation, receiving bad news – more often than not our emotional reactivity *underwhelms*. Especially given the goal-oriented nature of this class, I found Baumeister’s assertion that we may not be able to maintain our mental rigidity to be very telling. I would feel remiss if I could not exercise more self-control than the members of the commune in pursuing my own goals.

My biggest takeaway from this chapter was the notion of preconception; Stanley’s survival was largely determined by the thought of his bride-to-be waiting for him at home. By taking one’s mind off the unpleasantness of the task at hand, accomplishing it becomes that much easier. In the pursuit of my own goals, I think this method of mind-body separation could really work to my advantage: the physical nature of lifting heavy weights taxes the body, but a large setback for me has been the mental progress. My training volume dictates that I add 5 pounds to the bar every time I squat (i.e. if I lift 230 on Monday, I’ll lift 235 on Wednesday, then 240 the next day, etc). Thus far, the biggest setback that I have encountered is motivating myself to keep adding weight day after day, especially after a bad training session. Having a training partner gives me an opportunity to take my mind off my own progress and focus on his instead; this makes it easier to consistently add weight, and gets me closer to my goal of 315.

Day 8

Good Company

My goals – squatting 315 pounds and writing a new record with my band – will both benefit

from social support, though in markedly different ways. I think that having a close group of friends is always important, but when you set your sights on accomplishing a difficult goal that social support becomes even more imperative. In my case, the fundamental difference lies in the function of the support – for my fitness goal the presence of others will supplement my own, personal drive, whereas my musical goals will rely on social interaction within the group itself (with the outcomes reliant on the support itself).

Health psychologists will be the first to extoll the virtues of social interaction at the gym, and it’s easy to see why: enhanced physiological arousal tends to improve our affect, and, as social creatures, we are inclined to share these good feelings with other. Especially in childhood and early adolescence, the social conditioning provided by team sports and physical activities can go a long way in reducing sedentary behaviors that are becoming more and more commonplace. In regards to my own goal, having a lifting partner has benefitted me tremendously: by including someone else in my progress, I find that I have to hold myself to a consistently higher standard. In that sense, there are no real negative influences to speak of – I find myself motivated and energized every day as a result. Maximizing the positive outcomes, therefore, relies on surrounding oneself with supportive people in order to facilitate success.

In regards to my musical goal, the social support from those close to me comes from the group itself. I'm very fortunate to be close friends with the other members of the group, and, considering the fact that we share a unified goal, the likelihood of inherent negative influences from within the group is slim. It's more likely, in fact, that we'll experience negative influences from *outside* our own musical circle (friends, employers, and the like), and that excess stress may impede our ability to create. By focusing solely on the goal of creating our art, and turning out non-essential outside noise, we stand the best chance of success.

Day 7

The Center Stage

As with any team sport, or group activity for that matter, the mere presence of others

dramatically changes the nature of certain psychological phenomenon. Social facilitation, which can be broken down into co-action effects and audience effects, enhances personal performance in a group context. Early social psychology work heavily emphasized the intricacies of group dynamics – in fact, research conducted by Triplett in 1898 (based on the competitive nature of cycling, ironically) was one of the first controlled social psychology experiments. The co-action effect comes into play when increases in performance stem from those around you doing similar tasks; the example that comes to mind would be workers in a factory who remain productive throughout the day due to their proximity to other workers. In contrast, the audience effect occurs when the task at hand is performed in front of a spectator (or group of spectators) – for example, athletes performing on the field are under intense scrutiny from fans and analysts, which drives their performance to otherworldly levels.

I think the connection between this year's bike race and components of social facilitation is fairly clear-cut. The competitors represent their team and country, but the performance aspect in itself is individual. When the cyclists are pedaling together in large groups, it is very likely that the co-action effect is playing a role – in other words, the exertion from the other riders is motivating each individual to perform at a higher level. I think this theory can explain certain aspects of competition in general, especially in instances where we can't identify the source of *why* we are so motivated to perform. Especially given the psychosocial nature of professional cycling, I think that these constructs manifesting themselves throughout the races makes a lot of sense. Performing in front of a crowd is inherently different than practicing on a closed course – the physiological changes that take place when you are the center of attention (elevated heart rate, blood pressure, and increased secretion of adrenaline) may correlate with the audience effect suggested by social facilitation, and I think we can all agree that for the last several days these riders have been the sole center of attention in Richmond.

Day 6

Moving Squares

My goals – squatting 315 pounds and writing a record with my band – would certainly benefit

from an increased capacity for self-control. Baumeister discussed how setting small, easily achievable challenges throughout the day could strengthen the brain's capacity for self-control in the long run; for example, challenging yourself to switch from right- to left-hand dominant for an afternoon, or to remove non-essential words from your vernacular (i.e. "like", "um"). I would imagine that much of this could be explained as a conditioned glucose response – as the brain gets used to the amount of glucose it needs to sustain self-control it gradually needs less to yield the same result.

I was pleasantly surprised to read that increases in self-control yielded positive behavioral outcomes across the board: less smoking and drinking, healthier eating, cleaner homes, and a myriad of other great changes. In regards to my fitness goals, the path to 315 will be largely determined by my own self-control. Setting smaller goals throughout the week in between training sessions will likely yield greater success in the gym (practicing self-control in my diet, for example, by resisting the urge to eat sweets, or by challenging myself to hit my macro-nutrient goals). My musical self-control, however, can be more directly improved. Similarly to the moving squares experiment, I will have to practice focusing on the task at hand, as well as tuning certain things out of my life in order to cultivate a good, creative headspace. Really honing in on what inspires you is a critical step in the creative process, and doing so will either make or break my own (and, truthfully, the group's) ability to create something honest and true.

As a bit of an aside, switching from right- to left-hand dominant is a challenge that I have given myself on my own instrument (the drum set) in the past in an attempt to spark some creativity. Small challenges like this keep things interesting, and I'm eager to apply them to my own life in my pursuit of accomplishment.

Day 5

Smile and Wave: Glucose + Self-Regulation

Ego depletion, characterized by a period of diminished self-control following an extended

exertion of will, surely plays a role in all of our lives at one time or another. In my own experience, I find that my ego is most depleted after a long shift at work. I am employed as a cashier at a health food store, and there is a high standard of customer service that is expected to be upheld. Often, after

a long shift of smiling and projecting positivity I find myself less motivated to socialize, attend to schoolwork, or prepare food for myself. I've noticed that this phenomenon is especially common after particularly busy or otherwise stressful shifts.

Baumeister referenced the *Mondo Cane* experiment, in which participants were told their facial expressions were being recorded; they were then asked to show no emotion, show amplified emotions, or react as they normally would. Participants in the control group showed no ego depletion following the completion of the film, and performed similarly on the endurance task as they had before the film; the participants in both experimental groups, however, gave up quickly on the endurance task. This experiment suggests that attempting to manually override our implicit emotions may result in a diminished degree of self-control. I think this assertion is quite valid; as I have experienced in my line of work, projecting a certain mood that is not harmonious with your actual affective state will take its toll after the fact.

The phenomenon of ego depletion has little effect on my ability to achieve my set goals directly (squatting 315 pounds and successfully writing a new record), but it has the potential to influence my state of mind leading up to my progress. If, for example, I walk into a gym on Monday morning still depleted from a weekend shift, I might be less inclined to push myself to increase the weight I'm lifting. Similarly, if we're writing music as a group and one – or all – of us is feeling depleted, we'll be much more likely to give up on the task at hand and try and come back to it. Writing music is highly dependent on the nature of the environment at the time, so for us to walk away from a productive energy due to ego depletion could be a huge setback.

The major task at hand, therefore, is *reducing* ego depletion when it's experienced and *preventing* it in the first place. Mark Muraven's work suggests that when we are aware of energy-sapping activities on the horizon we tend to act more conservatively in an attempt to make it through both activities (those in the present and in the future); this may be useful in preventing ego depletion in certain situations, but it is probably not a great long-term solution. One of the bigger takeaways from "Willpower" was the effect of glucose on our ability to self regulate; since reading the text I have made a point to have a snack on hand before trying to accomplish small tasks throughout the day. The difference between success and failure may depend on a cup of juice.

Day 4

Tracking Macros

The growing emphasis on metrics and progress tracking has influenced my goal of squatting 315 pounds quite directly. Baumeister referenced wearable technologies such as the FitBit and Nike FuelBands that allow the user to quantify and visualize their progress; while I don't use these devices myself, it's fascinating to see the societal paradigm shift to include these metrics as an indicator of progress.

While I don't use wearable technologies – which are designed more for cardio than strength exercises – I have turned my progress upside down with the mobile application MyFitnessPal. The app allows you to input foods you eat throughout the day and compare the nutrient information to goals that you set ahead of time. For example, I like to eat 2,600 calories a day, with 35% coming from protein (which equates to about 190 grams): when I want to eat a particular meal I can look it up in the app, which displays the nutritional breakdown. From there, I can determine if the ratio of calories to fat and protein is acceptable, and thereby ensuring that I am giving my body everything it needs to grow. The use of this app as a fitness resource has guided my progress for the last several months, and I have seen better results in that period than ever before.

I think a big reason that visual metrics have spiked in popularity is because, objectively, people are very bad at estimating such things; you may run a mile and say “wow, that was my best time yet”, even though you ran a faster time the day before. The principle of subjective reality plays a role here, as does the fundamental attribution error – you may have good days and attribute them to your continued progress, and you may have bad days that you attribute to the weather, a crowded gym, etc. Wearable technology keeps the user grounded in objectivity, and negates the opportunity to make excuses.

Day 3

David Allen's Master Plan

Baumeister's chapter on scheduling goals (“A Brief History of the To-Do List, from God to Drew Carey”) offers a very interesting hypothesis about why we don't accomplish things we set out to do.

The writing suggests that more often than not we lack the self-regulation to set realistic goals, and when we fail we lose the implicit drive that motivated us in the first place. Health psychologists refer to this as the *abstinence violation effect*, which occurs when the individual fails to meet a goal they have set for themselves and give up entirely as a result. For example, when people decide to quit smoking they might vow to never smoke another cigarette; when they relapse they are likely to abandon the long-term goal and slide back into the habit. Granted, this example is influenced largely by physiological factors (while others may not be), but the cognitive dissonance experienced by the individual. In regards to Baumeister's theory, and the GTD system developed by David Allen, when we set too many goals for ourselves at once we become overwhelmed and less inclined to accomplish anything at all.

This chapter made me think long and hard about what goals I want to set for myself and when I want to plan on accomplishing them. For me personally, I think the determining factor is self-regulation. I'm convinced of my own motivation, and I know my goals are attainable; regulating myself – in this case maintaining my diet, listening to my body as the weight continues to increase, and crafting a realistic workout schedule – will be critical. If I try and increase the amount that I lift too fast I increase the risk of a plateau, but if I don't increase it fast enough I might burn myself out mentally. By maintaining self-control I think I stand the best chance of success.

Lastly, I was fascinated by Allen's tickler file system. By compartmentalizing every day, week, and month of the year, the individual has every opportunity to set goals that can be accomplished one at a time. I would imagine this would result in improved self-efficacy and job autonomy, both of which would do wonders for one's drive and motivation. I like the concept so much that I want to try applying it to my own schedule, the success stories are almost too good to be true.

Day 2

Autonomous Motivation

Deci and Ryan's article "Self-Determination Theory: A Macrotheory of Human Motivation, Development, and Health" suggests a departure from the historical, unitary concept of human motivation, and describes instead a composite drive that is an aggregate of internal and external forces. The authors distinguish between *autonomous* and *controlled* motivation; autonomous motivation factors include self-efficacy (the sense that individuals have willful control over their behavioral outcomes) and extrinsic and intrinsic motivations as they fit into one's sense of self. Conversely, controlled motivation adopts more of a deterministic view, with motivation being propelled by environmental factors (approval seeking, avoiding shame, and concepts of operant conditioning such as punishment and rewards).

The goals I have set for myself both represent good examples of autonomous motivation. My desire to improve my squat is fundamentally a drive to become a stronger version of myself (intrinsic), though I'm also very interested in improving my physique and looking good (extrinsic). The experience of volition is abundantly present already, even as I make marginal, weekly progress. Similarly, the drive to finish another full-length record rests on a foundation of self-efficacy: as a group, we believe that our success is heavily dependent on the work we put into the process (in other words, success or failure is left entirely up to us). Autonomous motivation requires a sense of self-assuredness, and (when compared to controlled motivation) an understanding of free will.

Flow activities – those that occur routinely and offer optimal experiences – offer immediate feedback, which balances with the inherent challenge of the task to yield a highly pleasurable, individual experience. Personally, my flow activity of choice is cooking; there is a tremendous amount of variety in choosing ingredients, preparation styles, and presentation. Feedback, either from myself or from others, is often concise in its positivity (or lack thereof). The food I put in my body directly contributes to my fitness goals (optimally, a diet high in protein and good fats), and by supplementing my long-term goals with beneficial flow activities I feel that I will be more poised to succeed.

Heroism + Upcoming Goals

Heroism, by definition, denotes a heightened degree of bravery or courage. Society values

heroics regardless of the context – athletes and musicians are weighed equally with good Samaritans and volunteers; The allocation of admiration that we offer to heroes is not limited by one’s personal recognition, though it may be enhanced by it. I felt that Scott Allison’s blog on heroes was very succinct, yet informative. I particularly enjoyed the piece on John Chapman (better known as Johnny Appleseed); his willingness to live modestly and put plant and animal lives before his own is truly a mark of courage. An important component of heroism, in my opinion, is the ability to inspire others, and Chapman’s heroics very likely influenced environmental movements such as the Sierra Club, Rivers Without Borders, and the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

My goals for the next few months are lofty, but surely within reach. My first goal is a culmination of the work I have accrued over the last few months – to squat 315 pounds. Currently, my squat tops out around 275, but I am making solid weekly progress (between 5-10 pounds a week). I have a very solid nutrition plan in place, great social support (both in and out of the gym), and, most importantly, I am highly motivated. Baumeister would suggest that these factors are interdependent – my ambition stemming from a diet high in protein and good fats and low in sugar coupled with ample sleep and beneficial social interactions – and I would tend to agree that success is more attainable when the necessary fundamentals are taken care of. An obvious obstacle that I will have to overcome is the physical plateau, at which point my body will not want to continue adding weight. I am optimistic that my force of will can assist in meeting this goal, and I look forward to the challenge.

My second goal is to write and record a second full-length record with my band (The Concussion Theory). This goal is somewhat more multi-faceted, as success is less reliant on my own ability, but rather the ability of the group as a composite. Though Baumeister’s work seems to focus heavily on the motivational tendencies of individuals, I suspect that his theories of motivation apply to a group dynamic as well. As a group we can approach this goal with a unitary mindset, despite the fact that our personal motivations may differ. The potential obstacles can be explained by physiological phenomenon discussed in “Willpower”: low-glucose levels, decision fatigue, and violating the GTD system (i.e. deliberating over half-written concepts without acting on them) could all affect the writing process adversely. An early awareness of these potential obstacles will be key to avoiding them. For me personally, attaining this goal will require inspiration from a variety of sources, so my plan is stay very open-minded over the next few months and allow this new inspired energy to manifest itself in our music.