

WILD DOG ATHLETICS

# THE MOTIVATION MYTH



*TAKE CONTROL AND SET  
YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS*

**BY ABBY HEFFERN**

# INTRODUCTION

When I first started coaching, I thought it was pretty simple; write workouts for people that match their goals and address their weaknesses, give them good coaching, and they'll see results. I started my coaching career in a gym that did group classes, and while we took pride in making each individual feel seen and attended to, it wasn't until I started my own personal coaching business that I began to realize how much more was needed to help most individuals succeed.

**"WHAT I'VE NOTICED IS GLARINGLY NEGLECTED FROM THIS EDUCATION...IS HOW TO COACH ADHERENCE."**

As a coach, you're taught how to assess people's movement patterns, correct faults, and write different types of workouts that fit the individual. Sometimes, if you're taught really well, you learn a bit about effective communication. What I've noticed that is glaringly neglected in this education, and have learned is probably the most important piece to helping anyone achieve their goals, is how to coach ADHERENCE.

**If someone can't adhere to showing up every day, eating right, getting 8 hours of sleep, managing their stress, doing their mobility, etc. it doesn't matter if I'm the best coach in the world. I can write the perfect workout, but if they can't get into the habit of showing up and adhering to other healthy habits, it means nothing.**

**This is something I already knew when I first started coaching. Obviously my coaching abilities are useless if I can't get the person through the door. What I didn't realize until I started working very closely with each unique individual at Wild Dog Athletics, is that adherence- like squatting, deadlifting, snatching, or anything else- needs to be coached as a skill. What I didn't realize, was how much people got in their own way, not because they're undisciplined, unmotivated, or lazy, but because they believe themselves to be. What I didn't realize, was how much of the narrative in the fitness industry is set up to make people feel guilty and incapable, instead of giving them the tools and knowledge they need to be successful.**

**I'm writing this e-book for the person who believes that they have a character flaw because they can't get themselves to show up to the gym every day. I'm writing this e-book for the person who feels like there's something wrong with them because they can't seem to get their nutrition dialed in. I'm writing this e-book for the person who has tried so many times to pick up the same habit, they're now starting to wonder if they should give up and accept that they're "just not disciplined enough." I'm writing this e-book for the hopeless, deflated, and discouraged, the person who thinks they aren't good enough, the person who wishes they were someone else, someone else more "motivated."**

**You don't need discipline, you don't need motivation, you don't need to be someone else. You just need a little help. Let me help.**



# MOTIVATION, DISCIPLINE, AND WILL POWER:

## IT'S ALL A LIE

The narrative of our society today revolves around praising the motivated, the disciplined, and the people who can will themselves to do difficult things. Actually, we don't just praise them - we use them to define the pinnacle of human character. With seemingly nothing else needed but the power of his own mind, we're in awe of people like David Goggins who has endured Navy SEAL training, wakes up at 4 AM, and runs hundreds of miles just because he can. There is no doubt that Goggins has extraordinary mental fortitude and an incredible ability to harness will power and discipline. I have no problem with recognizing that fact, and acknowledging it as a powerful source of inspiration.

**The problem is that in marveling at the discipline, will power, and motivation of people like Goggins, in putting him on a pedestal and labeling his character as above everybody else's as we tend to do in this "sleep when you're dead" era of society, the inspiration can sometimes turn into discouragement. If we define "discipline" as you can either wake up at 4 AM every day or you can't, as something you either have or you don't, it starts to feel unattainable, more than human, intimidating, and impossible.**

**While stories like Goggins' have inspired many people to change their lives, I believe the harsh, all or nothing, "suck it up and do it" narrative has led just as many to feel overwhelmed by all the discipline, will power, and motivation they seemingly don't have. Because of that, they begin to believe themselves to be of weak character and therefore incapable of changing their lives.**



**"IF WE DEFINE  
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If you've read Goggins' story, you know that discipline, will power, and motivation are not things that came naturally to him. His book is actually littered with challenges and actionable ways to improve your discipline that match some of the methods you'll read in this e-book. But instead of recognizing that his success was not really the result of being able to grit his teeth and force himself to do the things he didn't want to do day in and day out, but rather the result of small, actionable steps he took over a span of YEARS to improve his ability to adhere to new habits - we take his story and glorify it as an example of pure mental toughness, pure discipline and will power - and nothing else.

**DISCIPLINE, WILL POWER, AND  
MOTIVATION ARE NOT FACETS OF  
CHARACTER BUT SKILLS THAT CAN BE  
LEARNED, SHARPENED, AND IMPROVED  
OVER TIME.**

**The lie is not that discipline and motivation exist, but that they're character traits that some people have, and other people don't. Even David Goggins doesn't have more discipline, will power, or motivation than the next guy - he's just spent years and years and years and years on learning how to develop those traits, as you would when you want to get good at any new skill.**

**Unfortunately, words like discipline and motivation are so often associated with flaws in character and what we *can't control*, that it can be difficult to reprogram what they mean in our brain. Instead of being a cause for excitement and inspiration, the thought of the "discipline" and "motivation" required to start and stick to new habits often creates feelings of discouragement and inability, before we've even gotten out of the starting gate.**

That's why I use the word ADHERENCE when discussing starting and sticking to new habits with my clients. A few of the definitions of adherence are:

- "The process of sticking to an object or surface."
- "The act, action, or quality of adhering."
- "The act of doing something according to a particular rule."

Note the use of words like PROCESS and ACT that makes "adherence" a more accurate description of what it takes to start and stick to a new habit. It takes action, it takes a process, it takes TIME- not some unalterable character trait.

*You are 100% in control of your adherence to whatever it is you've always wished you could add to your routine* - working out more, eating better, yoga, meditation - they're all products of small actions you can take every day to improve your ability to do those things consistently over time.

**I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but I am saying it's not about just gritting your teeth and sucking it up. It's about taking one small step, then another, then another, until miles down the road from where you started you look back and can't believe you almost didn't get out the door because you thought you weren't "disciplined enough."**



# YOU CAN'T SPELL ADHERENCE WITHOUT THREE "E"s

**ENJOYMENT, ENVIRONMENT, EFFECTIVENESS**

What then, goes into being able to adhere to a new habit? If we're taking motivation, will power, and discipline out of the equation, what does it take to begin this process of learning and developing adherence? The next few chapters are going to break down the three "Es" that I've come to identify as the three pillars of successful habit adherence.

**E**

If you don't enjoy the new habit in some way, you're not going to stick with it. Sometimes, this comes easy -

**N**

you find every bit of doing yoga, riding a bike, going for a daily walk in nature fun or enjoyable. If the

**J**

activity isn't inherently "fun" to you and is actually quite challenging, like running or working out or eating healthy, you have three options:

**O**

- **CREATE YOUR FUN**

**Y**

Add your favorite podcast to your daily run. Grab a buddy to run with you and get coffee or a bite to eat together after.

**M**

Find a new trail to run on and explore.

**E**

Instead of going to a public gym alone, join a group class gym that makes going to the gym fun, even if the workouts are hard. Start up a clean eating bet or challenge with friends or co workers

**N**

that makes it more interesting and competitive. Sign up for cooking classes with your partner or a friend, or learn some new healthy recipes online.

**T**

E

- **KNOW YOUR WHY**

N

**Dig deeper than surface level “fun.”**

**Running, working out, and lifting can all be very challenging - but for me, the**

J

**enjoyment IS IN knowing I’m**

**challenging myself and pushing my**

O

**limits. Running 50 miles involves a lot of physical suffering, but I’m able to keep**

**going because I get excited about finding**

Y

**out what my body is capable of. Take**

**some time to reflect on a meaningful**

**“why” that keeps you going when what you’re doing isn’t your typical “fun.”**

M

**Whether it’s finding out what you’re**

**capable of, staying healthy and living**

**long enough to meet your grandkids one**

E

**day, or improving your mental health so**

**you can be happier and more present in**

**your daily life - find something that**

N

**drives you from within. Just because the**

**activity itself isn’t your typical “fun,” you**

**can find enjoyment in knowing you’re**

T

**living your “why.”**

**E**

- **REASSESS**

**N**

Reassess the activity you've chosen based on what you want to

**J**

accomplish. If you're trying to start running to lose weight but you hate running, there are other ways to lose weight that might be more enjoyable

**O**

to you than running. If you're meditating to decrease stress and not enjoying it, there are other types of

**Y**

meditation and mindful activities you can try. If you're choking down

**M**

spinach and broccoli every day as a way to improve your nutrition, there are other vegetables you can

**E**

incorporate into your diet that are just as good for you that you might actually enjoy eating. There are many

**N**

paths to the mountain top. Sometimes it's as simple as choosing a different habit that's more enjoyable and

**T**

therefore easier to adhere to, and still accomplishes the same goal.

## THE TAKEAWAY

It's going to be really hard to stick to something that's completely miserable for you to do and you get no enjoyment out of - but the reality is that the best, most life changing habits aren't always our typical definition of "fun". They often involve work, challenging ourselves, and being out of our comfort zones. In order to ensure that you're setting yourself up to be able to adhere successfully, you're going to need to get creative and add something that IS fun to the activity, dig deep for a "why" that makes the challenge enjoyable and worth it, and be willing to do some trial and error to figure out what works best for you.

E  
N  
V  
I  
R  
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E  
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T

There's a perception that the people who are succeeding in incorporating healthy habits into their daily lives like meditating, working out, and eating clean are naturally more disciplined, motivated, or have some unseen advantage over the people who struggle to be consistent.

## WHAT PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE

Most successful people set themselves up for success by creating an environment that makes it harder for them to fail. If they struggle with self control and eating clean, they don't have junk food in the house. If they can't hold themselves accountable to going to the gym every day, they hire a personal trainer who will hold them accountable. If they struggle with meditating, they find an app or a class that makes it easy to do every day.

**E**  
**N**  
**V**  
**I**  
**R**  
**O**  
**N**  
**M**  
**E**  
**N**  
**T**

**Even things like not keeping your phone in your room if you struggle with screen time before bed, having self control locks on your phone if you can't get yourself off social media, or going straight to the gym after work can all be small, but monumentally helpful ways to set yourself up for success on a daily basis.**

## **THE TAKEAWAY**

**The people who are the most successful with prioritizing their health and the things they want to be better at are the people who know themselves well enough to manipulate their environment and make it much easier to succeed. This requires being honest with yourself about what your weaknesses are, being thoughtful, and getting creative with how to design an environment that will set you up for success.**

**E**  
**F**  
**F**  
**E**  
You need to make sure that whatever habit you've chosen to incorporate into your life is effective in helping you reach the goal you have in mind. If you're not seeing results- if it's not effective- it's going to be hard to convince yourself to keep showing up.

## **ASSESS YOUR METHOD**

**C**  
**T**  
**I**  
**V**  
**E**  
**N**  
**E**  
**S**  
**S**  
If what you're doing isn't effective, sometimes you need to change your method. If you started lifting weights to get stronger, but the numbers on the bar aren't going up, you probably need to change your program or consult a coach. If you started meditating to improve your mental health but you aren't noticing any change, you might need a different type of meditation, the help of a teacher in case you're practicing "incorrectly," or to explore another avenue of mental health improvement entirely.

# BE REALISTIC

That being said, it's just as important to make sure you have realistic expectations. Sometimes what you're doing is effective, but you have an unrealistic expectation of faster results, or there's something else you're missing that's required to see the results you want. If you're running or working out to lose weight or change your physique, and you expect that to happen in a week or two, you'll be disappointed and discouraged because that's not a realistic timeline. If you're running or working out to lose weight, but you're not eating well, you won't see the results you want because you're neglecting an important piece of what it takes to hit that goal.

E  
F  
F  
E  
C  
T  
I  
V  
E  
N  
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S  
S

**E** This is where it can be really useful  
**F** to have a coach, or set up a  
**F** consultation with a coach. Without  
**E** knowledge and experience, it can be  
**C** difficult to figure out on your own  
**T** what needs to change; the method,  
**I** your expectations, or something  
**V** else outside of what you're already  
**E** doing that you haven't thought  
**N** about yet. A coach will ensure that  
**S** what you're doing is effective, while  
**S** checking unrealistic expectations -  
which will keep you confident and  
on track.

## **THE TAKEAWAY**

**E** There is nothing more motivating  
**N** than seeing results. If what  
**E** you're doing is effective in  
**S** reaching your goal, you'll be  
**S** much more likely to adhere to  
the habit consistently. If you  
aren't seeing the results you  
want, check your method,  
expectations, and outside factors.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF BABY STEPS

## START SMALL TO MAKE BIG CHANGES

**Most people mistakenly think that change takes big, sweeping gestures - like going from working out zero days/week to six days/week, eating fast food all day long to eating a zero junk, zero carb, zero sugar diet, not doing anything to manage their stress to meditating three times/day, etc. One could call this the “cold turkey” strategy - going from zero to 60, all or nothing.**

Every now and then this strategy works out for someone. But more often what happens is one of two things; the step they're trying to take is so intimidatingly big that they don't even get out of the starting gate, or they make it out of the gate but the step is too big and overwhelming to maintain consistently in the beginning. What happens next is a story you may already be familiar with - they get discouraged, they beat up on themselves, they feel like if it's already hard they'll never get to where they want to be - and they give up when they've barely begun.

**SIMILAR TO “SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE,” BABY STEPS GET YOU MOVING FORWARD AND KEEP YOU MOVING FORWARD.**

The steps you take toward reaching a goal, incorporating a new habit into your life, or making a change should challenge you - but they should never be so intimidating that you can't get yourself started, or that you're so overwhelmed you can't keep up.

I always tell my clients to start with the smallest, most manageable step, and go from there. Start with two days of working out/week instead of six, start with eliminating just one unhealthy meal from your day, start with eliminating junk food every other day, start with meditating 1 minute per day...the possibilities are endless but the objective is the same; to make your first move something so doable and manageable that it becomes a question of “How could I not...?” instead of “How am I going to...?”

**WHATEVER YOU CAN DO TO START, IS A START, NO MATTER HOW SMALL THE STEP MAY SEEM. THE START IS THE HARDEST PART, AND STARTING WITH A SMALL STEP, IS FAR BETTER THAN NEVER STARTING AT ALL EVERY. SINGLE. TIME.**

# START YOUR JOURNEY TOWARD ADHERENCE

## SETTING GOALS AND ADDRESSING YOUR WEAKNESSES

Now's the time! The following worksheet will allow you to apply everything you just learned about adherence and habit building to your own goals. I encourage you to print it out and spend some time making a plan and building a framework, but remember, plans are always subject to change as you learn more about yourself and what works for you! Sometimes what we initially think is going to set us up for success doesn't quite do the trick, which **DOESN'T MEAN** we're hopeless and should quit, it just means we need to do some more learning about ourselves and adjust as necessary! A lot of this process is trial and error, so try not to get discouraged and take comfort in knowing you are not alone in your experience - nothing good ever comes easy for ANYONE.

- **MY MAIN GOAL(S) IS(ARE)...**

*What is the umbrella goal of the changes you're trying to make?*

*Lose weight, get stronger, run a 5K, run a marathon, bring your cholesterol down, manage stress, be more positive, learn how to lift...etc.*

- **MY HABIT GOAL(S) IS(ARE)...**

*What are the habits you need to incorporate into your life to help you achieve your main goals?*

*Going to the gym everyday, running everyday, eliminating sugar from your diet, eliminating fast food from your diet, starting meditation or yoga...etc.*

- **I ENJOY \*X HABIT/ACTIVITY\*  
BECAUSE...**

*Here is where you can ensure that what you're trying to do will be enjoyable in some way before you even start. I enjoy running because I get to listen to my favorite playlist, I enjoy going to the gym because I meet up with my best friend, I enjoy yoga because it's the only alone time I have all day, I enjoy improving my diet because I get to cook and try new foods, I enjoy eating well because I know it will allow me to live long enough to meet my grandkids, I enjoy working out because it makes me feel empowered and strong...etc.*

*Remember this can be surface level, "typical" enjoyment, or it can be enjoyable because it aligns you with a much deeper "why."*

*If you don't know yet since it's a completely new activity, that's okay, you can come back to this later. Just keep it in mind.*

- **I CAN SET MYSELF UP FOR SUCCESS BY...**

*This is where you want to think about changes you can make in your environment that will make your chances of adhering successfully much more likely. Not buying junk food or keeping it in the house, hiring a personal trainer to hold you accountable, doing group classes that hold you accountable, not going home before you go to the gym, starting a meal service that makes it easier for you to eat well, starting a meditation app with a friend and holding each other accountable, etc.*

- **MY FIRST BABY STEP IS...**

*This is where you make an actionable plan. Starting the gym membership and going 2x/week, calling and booking the personal trainer, cooking two days of healthy meal prep/week, 1 minute/day of meditation, 2x/week of yoga, etc.*

# CONCLUSION

If there's one thing I want you to get from this e-book, it's that you have the power to take control and make real changes in your life. If you feel like you've been unsuccessful up until this point with incorporating healthy habits into your life, making positive changes, and reaching your goals - it's most likely because of a flaw in your system, not a flaw in your character. I hope this e-book has given you some practical insight into where you could have faltered in the past, and what will help you adhere in the future - whether it's one of the Three E's, taking smaller steps, or just taking the time to put a plan onto paper.

Most of all I hope it has inspired and encouraged you to act. I hope it has lifted you out of your rut if you were in one, renewed your sense of competence and ability, and put you on the path you thought you had given up on. Or perhaps, put you on a completely new path, that you never believed you were capable of walking, until now.

Abby Heffern

Wild Dog Athletics



# INTERESTED IN INDIVIDUALIZED IN PERSON OR REMOTE COACHING?

*Wild Dog Athletics offers coaching in-person or remote for strength and conditioning, weightlifting, and running.*

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