

Ep #292: Why Motivation Is Bullshit and What You Should Do Instead



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With Your Host

Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Hey, hey, runners, how you doing this week? So I was recently interviewed on the *Find Your Strong* podcast with Christine Chessmen and we had the absolute best conversation. Seriously, it was so good. So good, you've got to check it out. We talked about Couch to 5K, all the bullshit standards of the fitness industry, how the whole BMI system is just complete trash, and why it can be so difficult for new runners to get started.

And so we were talking and talking, and then she asked me this question. I was like, oh shit. She said, how do you stay motivated? And I'm like, hmm, I'm a running coach. So I should probably say something inspirational. But the truth is, I am rarely motivated to go for a run or to lift weights, right? At least not in the traditional way that people think about it.

I have gotten to this point, after 25 years, where I just fucking do it most of the time, even though I'm not excited about it because I have finally learned that I will just feel better afterwards. But for sure, there are days where I just say fuck it. I just don't do it. And I think the difference between the me of even five or 10 years ago and the me today is that I used to feel immense guilt. If I skipped a workout, right, I'd just be so busy beating myself up that I'd skip another one and then another one.

And then one missed day would turn into five or 10 or a whole month. And I would be so down on myself for being a failure, for having no discipline, for being lazy, right, that my motivation would just go right out the window. And

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I'm sure you can relate, right? This is a pretty typical thought process, especially when we are socialized in a society that values certain things, right?

So that was my old pattern, right? I would miss a day, I'd feel guilty and be really mad at myself and beat myself up. And it would cause me to miss even more days. But eventually, I realized that adherence to a workout schedule doesn't make me morally superior to anyone else. It doesn't make me a good person or a bad person.

I figured out that lazy isn't really a thing. I mean, it's a word. But it's a word that people use to judge others who aren't behaving a certain way, right? It's judgmental, oh, you're just being lazy. You're not following my manual for how people should behave, right?

And so I fucking hate the word lazy. I try not to use it as much as possible. But anyway, I'm no more motivated now than I was five years ago, 10 years ago, 25 years ago. For real, I am no more motivated now, I just stopped judging myself. And that means when I have a day where I say, I'm not going to work out today, or I'm going to skip this workout, it's usually just one day, okay?

And then the next day, I'm like, all right, hey, let's go, because you always feel so awesome after you finish your workout, right? There's no judgment. I'm just like, oh, nope, remember, this is how good you feel. Let's just go and do it. There's very little drama. And that's kind of, I guess, my dirty little secret, right? I'm usually not motivated, but I do it anyway. Not because I'm some sort of discipline machine, but because I don't beat myself up when I miss a day. And so I don't have guilt and shame getting in my way.

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And here's the thing that I believe, like the concept of motivation, at least as it is shoved down our throats on Instagram and at the gym and all that, motivation when you think of it that way is bullshit. Okay? I mean, not really, but yeah, it kind of is. I said what I said.

I've said it a million times on this show, motivation is just an emotion that you create with your thoughts. It doesn't come and go like the weather, right? It doesn't make you a better person if you feel motivated. It doesn't make you a lazy person if you don't feel motivated. It literally is just an emotion you create with your thoughts, okay? That's it.

But I think most people are confused about what motivation is and they think that motivation is the same as being excited about something, right? They feel like if I'm motivated, I should be looking forward to the thing or I should actively want to do the thing. And that is not what motivation is, right? That's excitement. That's anticipation.

I am rarely excited to go for a run. I am rarely excited to lift weights. I mean, unless I'm going for a run with Andy or I'm hopping on the Peloton to do the Lizzo ride, right, in which case it's not the activity I'm excited about, it's the spending time with Andy or getting to see Lizzo on my Peloton screen that's fun and exciting. None of that is motivation, right? It's just I'm excited about this activity. I'm excited about what's going to happen when I do this activity.

Motivation is more like a decision. Motivation is like, okay, I'm just going to do this thing now. It's not fireworks, it's not sexy. It is just quiet, calm, certain, it's kind of boring, right? And I love thinking about motivation this way because it means I don't have to worry about getting all energetic and pumped up to do my workout.

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I don't have to worry if I get bored during my workout because it doesn't mean I'm not motivated. I don't need to grit my teeth and white knuckle through it. I can just put my shoes on and get started without any fanfare. And coach Jen in Run Your Best Life always says you don't need a fucking ticker tape parade, and I think that perfectly encapsulates motivation.

So this week I'm going to give you three mindset hacks to actually help you stay motivated. The real useful kind of motivation, not the excited kind of motivation. So basically, I'm going to give you three mindset hacks to help you calmly do your workouts most of the time without a lot of drama, okay? It's not sexy, it's not exciting, but it is effective.

But first, if you are a wanna be fat runner, or maybe you are already a fat runner and you are not making the progress you want to be making, I have something for you. So on Sunday, March 19th, I am teaching a free workshop about the most common mistakes that fat runners make and how to fix them.

Now, I have been coaching fat runners for 10 years, and I will be sharing the top three things that we usually get wrong. The things that keep you from getting the result that you want, which is basically to feel good about your running. Okay, so this class starts promptly at noon Eastern on Sunday, March 19th. That is just a few days from when this podcast drops. It's going to run about two hours.

You can sign up for this free class at notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes, okay? That's notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes, all one word, fat runner mistakes. Or you can go to the link in the show notes for this episode, we'll have it there.

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So let's talk about these mindset hacks. Let's set the scene, you make a plan to train for a race, to become a runner, whatever it is. You make a plan and it seems totally manageable, right? You get everything on your calendar, you're super excited thinking about how awesome it is going to be to run three times a week all summer long and do that half marathon. You're going to feel so proud of yourself.

And that feeling of excitement, you think that that feeling is motivation. You think, oh, I'm so motivated to do this. But actually, you are just feeling excited when you think about the results of having done it. That is a huge difference. There's a huge difference between feeling excited when you think about the finished results and feeling motivated about the act of going out for an individual training run. Big difference, okay?

But anyway, you are excited. You've created your plan. For the first week you do pretty good and you're like, yeah, I'm a runner. Fuck yeah, there's never going to be a time when I don't do this because it feels so amazing, right? You're telling everybody, you're stopping people on the street to be like, hey, did you know running is really awesome? And I'm a runner and you should be a runner too.

But then, I don't know, a couple weeks in maybe it starts to feel a little boring or you stay up late one night and the next morning you think I'm too tired to run today. And then, because you've been conditioned to feel this way when you're not perfect, you feel a little guilty, you feel a little mad at yourself. And then maybe you miss another run because you're kind of like wallowing in the guilt. Then maybe another one.

And then next thing you know, you're in a total pit of despair because suddenly it seems like you have to start all over, right? Like you've missed a week or two weeks and you're like, what the fuck? How did this happen?

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And your inner bully is right there to remind you how lazy and undisciplined you are.

And the next thing you know, summer's over, you didn't do nearly as much running as you wanted to. And you're just looking around like, wait, what has happened here? What just happened? I was so motivated, right? But actually, you were just excited when you were thinking about the result.

But this is a pretty familiar refrain. It has happened to me, I can't even tell you the number of times this has happened to me. And I think you can probably relate. So this spring and summer I want to help you try it a little bit differently. I want you to just give what I have to say in this podcast a chance, okay? Because I get asked all the time, right, I just got asked in a podcast interview the other day, how do I stay motivated? How do I make myself run when I don't want to do it?

And I actually think how do I make myself run when I don't want to is the wrong question to be asking. I want you to stop trying to make yourself do it, okay? Think about how that sounds, it's like, I'm going to force myself to do it like it's punishment. And when you were a kid and someone told you to do something you didn't want to do, you were like, make me, right? It's rebellious, it's resistant. It's a very natural response, emotional response when you're a child, somebody telling you to do something you don't want to do.

And it's definitely the opposite of ease and motivation. Making yourself do something you don't want to do feels awful. And for sure, it can work in the moment because you can yell at yourself and beat yourself up enough to go and do it. But it's not a long term strategy, all right? So let's just, for the rest of this podcast let's just agree you're going to stop treating yourself like a mule who doesn't want to plow a field, okay?

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You are a grown ass adult, you're in charge of your choices. You don't need to make yourself do anything because if it feels like you are forcing it, if it feels like you're making yourself do it like you're a toddler and you're just like, you're going to do this no matter what. If that's what it feels like, you're not going to stick with it for very long. It takes a lot of energy to maintain that level, right?

So today, I've got three simple thought shifts for you that are going to change, not just your running life, they're going to change your whole life. Seriously, this is some good shit. And you're no longer going to feel the need to make yourself do anything, okay? Because it doesn't feel good to say that, it doesn't feel good to hear it in your mind.

So, mind shift number one is to stop thinking that you have to be 100%, okay? Please, if nothing else, one of the biggest stumbling blocks to staying consistent with anything is thinking that if you miss one or two times, you've totally fucked up and you might as well quit. Or thinking that if you miss a couple times that you are doing it wrong, right?

I mentioned earlier that you are not a better or a worse person for doing something perfectly. Doing something perfectly, checking all the boxes is just a circumstance, right? You get to decide whether you are perfect or not perfect, and what you want to make that mean about yourself. But checking all of the boxes doesn't make you a better person. Not checking some of the boxes doesn't make you a worse person. There is no moral value in perfection. And consistency is not the same as perfection. Consistency is simply doing the thing most of the time.

Now, believing that you need to be perfect is the fastest way to becoming somebody who quits, because if your belief is that when you miss a workout, you think that means that you messed up, that you failed, that you

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can't do it, you're going to feel discouraged, you're going to feel frustrated and you're going to quit, all right? But if your belief is consistency means I do the thing like, I don't know, seven times out of 10, suddenly you've got room for some mistakes and still get to keep going.

Okay, they're no longer the end of the world. They're just part of the process. You still get to count yourself as a consistent exerciser, consistent runner if you do the thing like six out of 10 times or seven out of 10 times. And I promise you, doing the thing 70% of the time for six weeks is going to get you way better results than if you do something perfectly for two weeks and then miss a day and give up completely because you feel like you're a complete failure.

So I want you to imagine two different runners training for the same 5K. Same training plan, eight weeks long, three runs a week. So there's 24 runs total. Well, 23 runs plus the race, right? And there's two different runners.

Runner number one believes she has to be 100% compliant with her training plan for it to count, and I'm putting count in air quotes. So she does all of the runs for the first three weeks. The first three weeks are nine runs, she does them all. But then week four, something happens and she misses a couple runs.

And she says, well, shit. Now I messed up, it's not even worth continuing because I didn't do it right. So she's already done nine out of the 24 workouts. All those workouts happened in the first three weeks. And then for the last five weeks of the training plan, she doesn't do anything because she's like, well, what's the point? I missed a couple days. I messed up my streak. All right, so that's runner number one.

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Runner number two believes that consistency is 70% or more. That's her personal definition, is that consistency means I do it 70% of the time. So over the eight weeks and the 24 training runs, she does 17 runs, which is 71%, okay? It's a tiny bit more on average than two runs a week. It's not three runs a week, right? It's far from perfect. But at the end of the eight weeks, which runner is going to be more prepared for that 5K?

And I mean, beyond that, which of them is even more likely to show up at the start line? Now really think about this, runner number one was perfect for three weeks and then gave up because she couldn't be perfect for the rest of it because she'd missed a couple runs. And runner number two was like, 70%, that's good. I'm okay with a C plus or a C minus, whatever grade that is, right?

And so she was 70% consistent for the entire eight weeks. So she trained twice a week instead of three times a week for eight weeks. But she gets to show up, she has a fun race. Maybe she's not quite as fast as she wanted to be. But you know from listening to this podcast, fast is kind of not the best indicator of your progress as a runner. And runner number one isn't probably even going to show up to the race because she's like, well, I fucked it up. I couldn't do it perfectly, so I better not do it at all.

So consistency, when we define it as doing the thing more often than not doing it, gets results because we get better at what we repeatedly do. Consistency is not perfection. Again, it just means doing the thing more often than not. And if you believe that perfection is your only path to success, you are going to feel really, really unmotivated when you make a mistake, okay?

So unless you are a brain surgeon, or you are building a plane, or you're doing somebody's taxes, right, perfection, not so much necessary, okay?

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There's very little need for perfection in this world. Even nature is totally imperfect, and we love nature, okay? So motivation does not come from oh, I am perfect, so I feel motivated.

Motivation comes from thoughts like this, even if I make some mistakes, it's okay. I'm just going to do what I can. That's a great thought to keep you feeling motivated, all right? So I want you to explore the possibility that you could be consistent at running, consistent at whatever it is, and get actually some pretty awesome results without ever, ever having to be perfect, okay?

And if you can shift that belief in your mind, it is going to help you get out of your own way so that you can become an imperfect runner instead of an ex runner, okay? Big difference. I'd much, much rather you be an imperfect runner and do two of your three runs each week and make some progress instead of quitting and just sitting at home complaining to yourself because you failed, okay? So that's mindset shift number one, consistency. Is just doing the thing more often than not. It's not being perfect.

Now, mindset shift number two is to stop comparing your current self to your past self. And I hear this all the time from my runners, especially if they have been injured or they've had to take a break or, I don't know, maybe they had a baby, maybe they just fucking took a break, right?

So what they say is like, oh, I used to be able to run faster. I used to be able to go farther. It used to be easier. This one, I can't even. This is the worst, when I was thinner I could do all of these things. Here are all the things I could do when I was thinner, right? Stop it. Please stop, okay?

You are not your past self anymore. She does not exist. She's only in your mind at this point, right? And there is no, again, there's no moral value in getting back to where you used to be, in creating a result that you had in

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the past, creating it for yourself now. You're not a better person because you've maintained your high school weight for the past 30 years. You are not a worse person because you've gained weight. None of it has any impact on your worthiness as a human, okay?

So the only versions of yourself that you have any control over right now are who you are right now in this exact moment, who you're going to be tomorrow, next month, next year, okay? You do not have control over the past. The past has happened, the past is over. And living back there in the past, letting your brain just cry and whine about how much fitness you've lost or how much time you've wasted is the opposite of helpful, right?

It is the opposite of motivating because when you think that way, when you think I've wasted so much time, I've lost so much fitness, you feel inadequate, sad, guilty. And those emotions are motivation blockers. I mean, if you want to think, well, I did it once, I can do it again, right? I'm actually all for that. But that's a future looking way to frame the past, versus saying I've lost so much time, I've lost so much fitness. I want to get back to where I was, right?

Stop going backwards. Let's move forward. So you can use your past experiences as evidence that you can do whatever it is you want to do right now. But measuring your current self against your past self and finding everything lacking is going to make you feel really unmotivated.

So I want you to notice if this is a thought process that you indulge in frequently. Do you wish you could get your past body back, or your past running performance, or whatever it is in the past, right? When you think those thoughts, I wish I could have my old body back, how do you feel?

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And some people, I think, would say, oh, I feel motivated when I think about wanting to get my old body back. But do you really? Do you really? When your brain is saying, I wish I could get my old body back, are you feeling motivated or are you feeling defeated? Or do you feel discouraged, or sad, or wistful? I don't think I've ever used the word wistful on this podcast before. Because wishing your life was different is not motivating.

Wishing is just crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. Instead, I want you to practice deciding who you want to be right now, in this moment, with this body and these existing circumstances. That is your motivation. That is moving forward. Who do I want to be? What do I want to make out of my existing circumstances? And how do I want to move forward?

Wanting to go back in time is really unmotivating because it's not possible, okay? We don't have time machines yet. And I know there's all kinds of discussions about quantum this and quantum that, but right now the reality is we cannot time travel, okay? So your brain is like, we want this thing, but it's not possible. We want it but it's not possible, and you get stuck in this loop.

So there is a difference between comparing yourself to where you are now and where you used to be and despairing, right, compare and despair. And then there's deciding that you want your future self to be different from who you are now, okay?

So one of those is stuck wishing things were different right now, wishing you could bring the past back, right? And the other looks forward to what can I control? What can I make out of what I have in front of me in this moment? Not how can I get the past back? What am I going to do with today? And that is determined by your thoughts, feelings and actions right now.

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So wishing is different from creating. Wishing is not motivational, wishing is crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. Creating is deciding, all right, this is what I want and here's what I'm going to do to get it. Okay? So your past self is gone. I want you to spend your thoughts on what you want to create for yourself going forward, that's what's going to help you bring the motivation back. Okay?

And the third and final mindset shift, and this one's going to sound a little weird, because I often tell you to do the exact opposite. But I want you to start thinking about the immediate gratification instead of the long game.

So hear me out, very often I suggest if you make choices with your future self in mind, right, the version of you that's running a 5K or a half marathon, that it might help you stay on track. Because when you think to yourself, oh, I don't want to screw my future self over, you oftentimes get up and do that training run even when you're tired or you don't want to go because you're thinking, no, no, no, my future self really needs me to show up.

But sometimes, we just need a little immediate gratification, okay? Let's be honest. We're like I just want to feel good right now. I don't want to have to wait six months. I just want to feel good right now for Pete's sake. So when you're struggling to create some motivation for yourself, I want you to just forget about future you for a moment. Just let her go. We'll come back to her another day.

Focus on the current you who's feeling, I don't know, guilty, sad, frustrated, discouraged, overwhelmed, whatever it is. What's going to make you feel better right now in this moment? You know what it is? It's endorphins. They are magical. And how do we get endorphins? We get them through physical activity like running, lifting, cycling, walking, dancing, like moving your body.

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You cannot get endorphins from extra sleep, from Cheetos, from online shopping, Netflix, all of it. I have tried all of them, you do not get endorphins from them. None of that works because endorphins are chemicals produced by the body to relieve physical stress and pain, okay? They're like the body's painkillers. Endorphins are the reason that a mom whose child is trapped under a car can lift the car, even if she can't even lift 20 pounds normally, right?

Endorphins, they block physical stress and pain and they allow you to access even more of your body's strength. And they are released when we do hard exercise like running, okay? And they work similarly to a class of drugs called opioids. So we all know what opioids are. And if you get enough endorphins in your body, they can actually produce a feeling of euphoria. And that is your instant gratification, right?

Do you know that after you have a hard run, you feel that calm and relaxation, your whole body just feels good. Like yes, you might feel sore and achy, but you also have this just like, I don't know, this like lifted feeling. It's like a lightweight euphoria. And those are endorphins.

And contrary to popular belief, most people don't experience a runner's high during the run. It is afterwards when you finish and you get this flood of endorphins that you start to feel amazing. And technically, it's not immediate gratification because you do have to put in a little bit of effort for it. It takes a while to kick in, right?

It's not like you put your shoes on and boom, endorphins start showing up. They're like, okay, okay, the shoes are on, let's go. Endorphins head out, right? You've got to spend about 20 to 30 minutes for it to kick in. But it is so much more gratifying than the feeling of skipping that run and spending

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that 20 or 30 minutes doom scrolling. There's no endorphins in doom scrolling.

So if you decide to think about running as a way to just get the experience of that euphoria, that floaty, calm, relaxed feeling in like 30 minutes, it becomes a lot more like instant gratification and a lot less like work, okay?

All right, so let's recap real quick. Three mindset shifts to help you stay "motivated." Number one, consistency is not the same as perfection and there is no moral value in being perfect. Number two, stop comparing your current self to your past self. And number three, think of running as an endorphin delivery machine, as immediate gratification.

And I promise, if you work on making these adjustments to your thinking, motivation is going to be a lot easier for you. It really is, I promise. Just give it a try, okay? Okay.

Now before I go, I want to make sure that you've gotten yourself signed up or you get yourself signed up for the free workshop about the mistakes that most fat runners make. You can sign up at notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes or go to the link in the show notes. And yes, it will be recorded. So if you cannot make it live, I will be sending out the recording to everyone who registers, all right? So get yourself signed up, notyouraveragerunner.com/fatrunnermistakes.

Okay, my friend, that is it for this episode. I love you. Stay safe. Get your ass out there and run and I will talk to you next week.

Real quick, before you go, if you enjoyed this episode, you have to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you

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have always wanted to be. Head on over to runyourbestlife.com to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.