

SAMPLE

SUSAN FOWLER

Author of *Why Motivating People Doesn't Work... and What Does*

**MASTER
YOUR
*MOTIVATION***



**Three Scientific Truths
for Achieving Your Goals**

MASTER YOUR *MOTIVATION*

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for Achieving Your Goals

Susan Fowler



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Three Scientific Truths

Are you lazy? Do you think most people are basically lazy? Do you enjoy being disengaged at work? Do you think millions of people worldwide enjoy being disengaged? Is that why we need to be prodded, bribed, praised, and pushed into doing what we're tasked to do? If managers did not hold us accountable for achieving our goals, do you think we would slack off? If you answer any of these questions yes, maybe your basic beliefs about human motivation need updating.

You have a natural yearning to thrive—thriving is your human nature. Being bored or disengaged isn't thriving. Being lazy isn't thriving. Resenting hard work isn't thriving. The truth is, no one wants to be bored, disengaged, or lazy. At our core, we don't resent hard work. We welcome productive and meaningful work, even when it's hard. We appreciate meaningful challenges. We even want to be accountable—we just don't like being *held* accountable! We want to contribute, feel fulfilled, and grow and learn every day. We long to thrive.

Recognizing our nature to thrive leads to a critical question: How do I thrive? Now, thanks to groundbreaking research, we know the answer. And, it's different than what we've been led to believe. Thriving doesn't depend on money, power, or status. Thriving doesn't come from promotions, perks, or driving for results. Thriving certainly doesn't happen through pressure,

tension, or fear—or even willpower or discipline. Thriving requires Choice, Connection, and Competence.

Motivation is the energy to act. Choice, connection, and competence generate the high-quality motivation (energy) you need to thrive. Your high-quality motivation—and the energy to achieve your goals and find meaning in their pursuit—depends on creating choice, connection, and competence.

**To master your motivation, create choice,
connection, and competence.**

Our need for choice, connection, and competence has been verified scientifically, and I think you'll resonate personally with the definition and description of each scientific truth.

1. *First scientific truth: you need to create choice.* You have an innate need to perceive you have choices, recognize and feel you have options within boundaries, and have a sense of control over what is happening at any time: "I am the source of my behavior." When you don't create choice, your energy is diminished, and you are less likely to achieve your goals.
2. *Second scientific truth: you need to create connection.* You have an innate need to feel a sense of belonging and genuine connection to others without concerns about ulterior motives, pursue goals aligned to meaningful values and a noble purpose, and contribute to something greater than yourself. When you don't create connection, your energy is compromised, and even if you

achieve your goals, you are less likely to find the experience meaningful or worth repeating.

3. *Third scientific truth: you need to create competence.* You have an innate need to feel effective at managing everyday situations, demonstrate skill over time, and feel a sense of growth and learning every day. When you don't create competence, your energy is blocked, and your frustration at not being able to meet challenges or make progress puts achieving long-term goals at risk.

The evidence supporting the three scientific truths at the center of your motivation is compelling, but all you need to do is look around you. Notice that when you create choice, connection, and competence, you feel a sense of well-being, are in a flow state, or experience deep-seated peace. On the flip side, observe that when one or more of the three truths are diminished, you feel pressure, tension, stress, loneliness, pride, superiority, despair, fear, anger, or frustration.

When you create choice, connection, and competence, you flourish. When they are eroded, you languish.

The Three Truths—Everywhere You Look

Have you ever bought a new car and then noticed every car on the road that looks like yours? This phenomenon is called reticular activation—a function of your brain that filters information. Your reticular activating system is at work when you are in a noisy room, someone mentions your name, and you snap to attention. You can use reticular activation to confirm the power of creating choice, connection, and competence.

Through reticular activation, you will probably see children through new eyes. A baby grabbing a spoon to feed himself—even when he can't find his mouth—is creating choice. A two-year-old who's talking to you when you're not looking at her creates connection by grabbing your face and turning it so she can see your eyes. A toddler learning to walk creates competence when he gets up after he falls, without crying—expressing his joy of learning something new and exciting.

You can also recognize how creating choice, connection, and competence plays a role when you are moved emotionally by a movie, book, or news story. In 2011, I teared up while watching a CNN interview of fourteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai. She had gained fame in Pakistan by speaking out for her rights. She claimed her right to play, sing, and go to the market. But her voice was loudest for her right to education, which was forbidden to females by the Taliban. She explained how her people needed her and how, by speaking out, she could make a difference, especially to young girls who she felt had the right to learn. My reticular activating system went on high alert: Malala was clearly articulating her need to create choice (to choose her own path), connection (to make a difference in the world), and competence (to learn, grow, and be educated).

A year later, Malala was shot in the head by a terrorist to silence her voice. But she didn't die. Her story, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, is an eloquent expression of our need for choice, connection, and competence. In 2014, she became the youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize. As an international advocate for children standing up for their rights, finding meaning in their lives, and making education a priority, Malala continues to inspire millions to create choice, connection, and competence.

The Three Truths—Gone Missing

Has someone ever tripped your trigger, pushing all the right buttons, and you didn't handle it well? Unfortunately, my story—how I failed to self-regulate and eroded any chance of creating choice, connection, and competence—may sound too familiar.

A director of sales, whom we will call Stacy because that's her real name, asked me to consult as a subject-matter expert (SME) with a potential new client. We'll call the potential client Diane, which isn't her real name. Stacy scheduled a one-hour call for 2:00 p.m. the following Wednesday. I prepared diligently, as I don't take being an SME lightly. I studied the notes Stacy sent me. I reviewed information about the organization from a variety of sources, including its website and latest annual report. I took the time to generate thoughtful ideas to discuss.

Stacy and I were on the call early to be sure we were prepared. At 2:10 p.m., Stacy pinged Diane to see if there was a problem or misunderstanding about the time. We were about to give up when a beep-beep announced Diane was finally joining the call. Stacy graciously greeted Diane: "Diane, I am so glad you could make the call today. As you know, I invited Susan Fowler, our subject-matter expert on motivation and engagement, to discuss ideas with you. She's read the notes from our previous meeting and done her homework, but first, let me introduce you and clarify your expectations for today."

Before Stacy could complete her introduction, Diane interrupted: "Stacy, I don't have time for this. I have a hard stop at 2:30. Besides, I have changed my mind. I've decided to go in a different direction."

I was stunned—not just at Diane's sudden change in direction but at her rude behavior. I didn't know what to say in

that moment, but it didn't matter because Diane launched into what she was thinking and what she wanted to do. None of it made any sense to me. I had questions and concerns, but I couldn't get a word in edgewise, and we were coming up on her 2:30 p.m. hard stop. That's when I noticed a *physiological disturbance*. I use this term to describe my body's reaction to a highly emotional experience. The disturbance started in my gut. As I got more frustrated with Diane, I could feel the negative energy rise into my chest. My frustration grew into anger, and as the roiling energy reached my face, I could feel it flush.

Suddenly, I heard myself boldly (and loudly) interrupting: "Stacy, Diane, excuse me. It seems Diane knows exactly what she wants; there's nothing I can do to help her, so I'll let you two finish the call." Then I hung up.

Again I was stunned. I had just hung up on a potential new client and abandoned Stacy. Yes, Diane was aggravating, but I had never done anything like this before. I was beside myself. I paced around my home office to let off steam. I was infuriated—at Diane and myself. Before I knew it, I found myself in my kitchen with the refrigerator door open, declaring "*I am so hungry!*"

The blast of cold air from the fridge induced a moment of mindfulness. I realized nothing in that refrigerator could possibly satisfy my hunger. Everything I'd learned about motivation came to light. I suddenly understood what happened during that short phone call. My choice, connection, and competence had been eroded:

- I didn't perceive that I had any options—in fact, just the opposite. I felt Diane unfairly controlled the situation, which eroded my sense of choice.
- Diane and I obviously did not align in any meaningful way—in fact, just the opposite. She made no attempt to

collaborate or show appreciation for my efforts, which undermined my sense of connection.

- After all my efforts, I didn't have the opportunity to demonstrate my subject-matter expertise or discuss my great ideas—in fact, just the opposite. I felt inadequate and dealt with the situation by hanging up, which destroyed my sense of competence.

Staring into my fridge, I came face-to-face with the truth: I needed to master my motivation. I realized how my motivation had fluctuated during my Diane debacle because my sense of choice, connection, and competence had fluctuated.

When Stacy first asked for my help, I freely and consciously made the decision to engage with her and her client (I created choice). I was energized by the value of being of service and felt grateful that Stacy had reached out to me for help (I created connection). I was eager for the opportunity to teach the client what I knew about her organization's issues, explain how our approach could make a difference, and learn something new about her situation in the process (I created competence). By creating choice, connection, and competence, I felt optimal motivation.

Within minutes after Diane joined the call, I lost control of my emotions, felt powerless, and in the end failed to self-regulate (choice was eroded). My image and ego were crushed, I felt isolated and ashamed, and I realized I'd done more harm than good (connection was eroded). I was devastated that I had failed to practice what I teach—I questioned the validity of my knowledge and skill, wondering if I was a fraud (competence was eroded). By not creating choice, connection, and competence, I felt suboptimal motivation.

I hadn't yet learned to master my motivation. But recognizing what happened was a major learning moment.

Acknowledging my alternatives, I wrote a confessional email to Stacy—creating choice. I asked for forgiveness and offered to serve behind the scenes in any way I could—creating connection. Stacy took me up on my offer, and I coached one of my colleagues as she took on the account—creating competence. (Stacy gave me permission to share this story and has become an advocate for teaching others how to create choice, connection, and competence.)

**Create choice, connection, and competence
to master your motivation and thrive.
Their absence is literally bad for your health.**

You might be wondering, If the three truths of choice, connection, and competence are the magic elixirs for mastering your motivation, why isn't everyone taking advantage of them? The answer lies in how deeply embedded outdated ideas about motivation are in our beliefs and traditional approaches to motivation. The time has come to challenge what we think motivation is and isn't.

SCIENCE SAYS

Self-determination theory is an encompassing and overarching theory of human motivation that has been tested and refined for the last forty-five years. This way of seeing human beings as having a natural tendency toward growth, thriving, and self-actualization can be applied in domains as varied as health, education, psychotherapy,

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counseling, video games, parenting, physical activity, and sports, as well as work, where most adults spend the biggest part of their lives.

This theory, tested in dozens of countries in all spheres of life, tells us that we can have high-quality reasons (joy and meaning) but lower-quality reasons (ego and rewards) to do what we do. We reap benefits (optimal functioning and happiness) by promoting the high-quality reasons but will not promote these positive consequences, and even promote negative consequences (suboptimal functioning and sadness), by inviting the low-quality reasons.

Global studies of these high-quality and low-quality motivations show that no matter your culture, age, gender, job, or organization, joy and meaning are better than ego and rewards.

Your brain needs “psychological vitamins” to increase the high-quality motivations. These nutrients are the universal basic psychological needs of autonomy (being self-directed and authentic, which I refer to as choice), relatedness (having a sense of belonging and meaning, which I refer to as connection), and competence (feeling and being efficient at what we do, which I also refer to as competence). These needs are important for everyone, everywhere, all the time, just as a plant needs sun, soil, and water to grow. When you have sufficient psychological vitamins (i.e., your psychological needs are satisfied), you increase the likelihood of experiencing joy and high performance. Moreover, when you do not have psychological vitamins and rely on psychological junk food (i.e., your psychological needs are frustrated), ego and rewards are more likely to be the main

drivers of your action, leading you to experience more negative experiences.¹



Discover more about the three scientific truths by visiting the *Master Your Motivation* page at www.susanfowler.com.

Questions to Ponder

1. What is the choice you face at NMA as you consider the 2022 challenges before you?
2. To be successful in 2022, what connections do you need to make?
3. What are the competencies you will need to develop to ensure success for the challenges in 2022?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ryan Talbot

In her bestselling book, *Why Motivating People Doesn't Work . . . and What Does*, Susan implored leaders to stop trying to motivate people because it just doesn't work and aggravates everyone involved. She provided best practices for increasing productivity and work passion through a tested framework and process for helping people shift the quality of their motivation. Thousands of managers worldwide have learned how to activate their staff members' optimal motivation. Now Susan is on a mission to help individuals master their own motivation, achieve their goals, and flourish as they succeed.

Widely known as one of the foremost experts on motivation and personal empowerment, Susan gained her knowledge through extensive experience in business, advertising, sales, production, marketing, executive and lifestyle coaching, and leadership training in all fifty states and forty foreign countries with clients as diverse as AARP, AkzoNobel, Alix Partners, Apple, Bayer Healthcare, Chamberlain Group, Dow, Eli Lilly, Fruit of the Loom, Google, Harley-Davidson, Kawasaki, McGill University Health Center, Mattel, the National Basketball Association, and Xerox.

Susan is the coauthor of the innovative Optimal Motivation product line for The Ken Blanchard Companies as well as the creator and lead developer of Self Leadership, its best-in-class self leadership and personal empowerment program.

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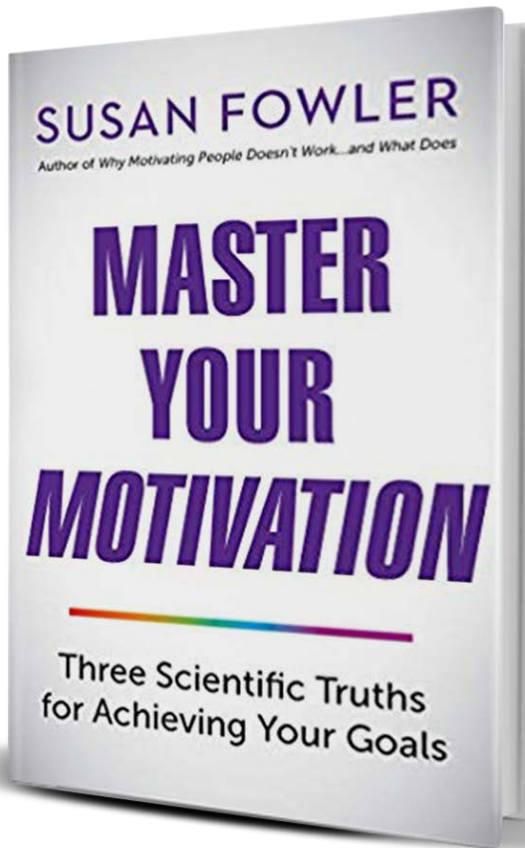
She was given the Lifetime Achievement Award for instructional design from the North American Simulations and Gaming Association.

Susan has published in peer-reviewed academic journals and is the coauthor of three books with Ken Blanchard: *Self Leadership and The One Minute Manager*[®], *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on Leadership and Creating High Performing Organizations*, and *Empowerment*. She coauthored *Achieve Leadership Genius: How You Lead Depends on Who, What, Where, and When You Lead* with Drea Zigarmi and Dick Lyles.

Susan lives with her husband, Drea Zigarmi, in San Diego where she is a senior consulting partner for The Ken Blanchard Companies, a leadership consultant and motivation coach, and a professor in the Master of Science in Executive Leadership program at the University of San Diego. Susan is a rotating board member for Angel Faces, a non-profit organization serving adolescent girls with severe burn trauma and disfigurements.

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