Motivation as a Muscle

Motivation is like a muscle which means you can train it, strengthen it, and rely on it when you need it most. It isn't something you're simply born with or without; it's built through practice and consistency. When your motivation feels low, that doesn't mean you've failed, it just means the muscle needs exercise. By understanding what motivation is and learning strategies to grow it, you can push through challenges, stay focused on your goals, and build confidence in your ability to succeed.

What Is Motivation?

Motivation is the drive that pushes you to take action and keep going, even when tasks feel challenging. It gives your goals energy and direction, helping you connect what you do today with what you want in the future.

Two Types of Motivation

There are two main kinds of motivation: intrinsic (internal) motivation, which comes from within (like curiosity, enjoyment, or personal growth), and extrinsic (external) motivation, which comes from outside influences (like grades, rewards, or recognition). Both play an important role in helping you stay focused and move toward success.

Fostering Internal Motivation

While both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are useful, research shows that intrinsic motivation is stronger and longer lasting. When you're motivated from within because you're curious, passionate, or personally invested, you're more likely to stick with a task, enjoy the process, and remember what you've learned. In fact, studies in psychology and neuroscience suggest that intrinsic motivation activates the brain's reward systems in a way that builds positive emotions and deeper learning. By contrast, extrinsic motivation, like grades or deadlines, can get you started, but it often fades once the reward is gone.

Building an Internal Motivation Muscle

The good news is that you can build more intrinsic motivation, just like exercising a muscle. You can:

- Connect your work to personal goals or values (e.g., "Studying biology helps me prepare for my future in healthcare").
- Look for meaning in the process, not just the outcome (e.g., "I like solving problems because it challenges me").
- Celebrate progress, no matter how small, to reinforce the satisfaction of learning.
- Give yourself choice and autonomy, which makes the work feel more self-directed and enjoyable.

By training yourself to notice and create these connections, you'll strengthen the motivation muscle that keeps you moving forward even when things get tough.

Use the space below to "tap in" to your vaiues and reconnect with your intrinsic motivation.

1. Write down your top 3 values (examples: growth, creativity, freedom, kindness, success, learning).
   - Why does this value matter to me?
   - How do I live this out (or forget it) in my daily routine?

2. Circle the value that feels the most energizing right now.
   - Under this, write one small action you can take this week that aligns with this value?