



# Maintaining motivation and purpose through change

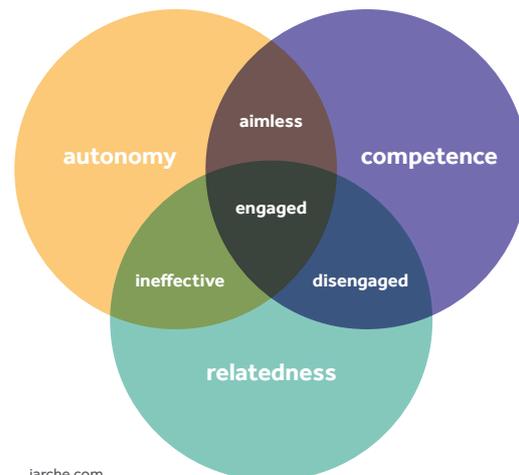
**It's not surprising many of us are struggling to stay motivated at the moment, either at work or keeping up with our fitness routine. Olympian Lizzie Simmonds faced a similar struggle when she retired from elite sport, but through the process she learned some valuable lessons around motivation and purpose. We've caught up with Lizzie and pulled together this useful factsheet which outlines the lessons she learned and provides some top tips to help you consider your purpose and spark motivation.**

To many of us, it seems like elite athletes have a superhuman ability to motivate themselves. We watch them gearing up towards a major competition, like an Olympic Games, and it's hard to relate to the hours of effort they're putting towards the pursuit of their goal. This can lead to the misconception that motivation is innate; you either have it or you don't. What Lizzie discovered through retiring from sport was that motivation isn't something athletes are born with, but a product of their environment and the goals they have in place. This is good news for anyone wishing they had higher levels of motivation—we can learn from the systems that athletes have in place in order to increase our own motivation!

## The three components of motivation

In order to understand why motivation fluctuates, we can explore the principles set out by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in their 'Self-Determination Theory'.

The theory states that human beings need three fundamental components in order to feel motivated and driven.



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\*SDT: Deci & Ryan 1971-2017

### • **Autonomy**

The control we have over the direction of our lives; the freedom to make our own choices.

### • **Competence**

Our ability to effectively manage ourselves and our environment. We can also think of this as confidence or belief in our skillset.

### • **Relatedness**

Our connection with others; our feelings of belonging and togetherness.

We're all different so our balance of these components will differ, but most people need some level of all three in order to feel motivated. Athletes are no different—they also need to have control over the direction of their career, knowledge that their skillset is developing and a sense of connection with the team around them.

## The impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on our motivation

The challenge we're faced with right now is that all three of these components have been significantly impacted by the restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

### Autonomy

We no longer have the freedom to go to the office, visit clients, see a movie or engage in social interactions. Many of us are also feeling frustrated that we don't have clarity on when the restrictions will end etc.

### Competence

Although our skillset technically hasn't changed, the environment under which we're being asked to perform has shifted. This can lead to a loss in confidence as people have to re-familiarise themselves with new ways of working.

### Relatedness

With social distancing measures in place, we no longer have the freedom to interact physically with our colleagues. Many of us are missing informal catch ups over the coffee machine, or having a team huddle where everyone can check in.

## So, how can we improve our motivation?

### 1. 'Control the controllable'

Whilst we can't control what happens with COVID-19, we still have a number of elements under our control each day. These include: routine, attitude, application to challenges, learning, exercise, and nutrition. This is an important notion in sport, as it's usually wasted energy for athletes to worry about things they have no control over. So, find the things you can control, and focus on those instead.

### 2. Learn and develop

Be proactive about learning and developing your skills in order to increase your confidence. This could be work related: finding online courses or articles to help you hone your skillset for your job. Or it could be recreational: learning a language, yoga, clay modelling etc.

### 3. Stay connected

Make time in your diary for informal check-ins with your colleagues and team. Whether it's a mid-morning coffee catch up or a virtual lunch, this is really important for maintaining a sense of togetherness whilst we're physically apart.

### 4. Get clear on your goals

The reality is some of your objectives may have changed quite significantly. Again, focus on what you can control and break the big goals down into processes and smaller tasks that are achievable each day. It may seem like athletes spend all day thinking about their Olympic dream, but the majority of training is spent focusing on the small, incremental improvements that will take them closer to their goal!

### 5. Reconnect with you

Your identity plays a key part in your levels of motivation; deciding who you want to be each morning is just as important as deciding what you want to achieve.

### 6. Remember your purpose

Make sure you connect back with your purpose, both individually and with your team.

## Together, #wecandothis

Lizzie Simmonds



Lizzie is a retired British swimmer who has won medals at a number of World, Commonwealth and European Championships, and has represented Great Britain at two Olympic Games. She retired from professional competition in 2018 but still has many roles within high-performance sport, including supporting fellow athletes throughout and beyond their sporting careers. Lizzie has also developed a successful programme transferring the systems and habits of elite performers into the corporate world and works with companies to help staff find ways to prioritise their own physical and mental health.

Follow Lizzie's story on Twitter  
[@LizzieSimmonds1](https://twitter.com/LizzieSimmonds1)