Features

10 Strategies to Stay Motivated

When the market lulls, use these 10 strategies to keep yourself and your team motivated—all year long.

BY MATT ALDERTON

Sometime in late 2014, Bill Carter, CRS, woke up with a bad case of burnout. A REALTOR® since 1980, he recognized the symptoms instantly because he'd felt them before: restlessness, boredom, anxiety, fatigue. He'd always loved real estate: Instead of feeling enthusiasm for his work, however, he suddenly felt exhausted by it.

"Being in real estate for 35 years, I've experienced the highs and lows of the business before," says Carter, of RE/MAX Ability Plus in Yorktown, Indiana. "I was part owner and managing broker for an office that had about 15 agents. I had to do everything, and that took me away from my love for listing and selling real estate. I knew I needed a change."

The self-prescribed change was swift and substantial: Carter divested himself of ownership and management in his previous RE/MAX office and associated instead with RE/MAX Ability Plus, which has 200 agents in nine offices across central and northern Indiana. Although he once again has assumed a managing broker role, the organization's larger size means he has ample resources to delegate the tasks he doesn't enjoy in order to focus on the ones he does.

"Being in a new office has revitalized my business and my career," Carter says. "It's given me new legs, so to speak. I'm excited about real estate again."

Many REALTORS® experience the same listlessness—especially at that time of year when the sprint of the spring and summer selling season starts to give way to the slow crawl of fall and winter. The doldrums aren't permanent, though. Whether they're caused by a season in the market or a season in your career, you can overcome them. Sometimes the solution is drastic, like Carter's. Oftentimes, however, even small tweaks to your daily routine can make a big impact by giving you newfound energy to build relationships, get organized, make sales and otherwise grow your business.

Here are 10 ways to refill your motivation tank when it's empty:

1. Seek Inspiration

Mike Hughes, CRS, is a self-described "self-help junkie." When he needs an extra dose of motivation, he therefore turns to magazines, YouTube videos, podcasts and other on-demand sources of inspiration.

"If I'm in the car on the way to a showing, or even just over lunch, I'll pop on a podcast to hear about people overcoming adversity," says Hughes, of Mike Hughes Team in Waltham, Massachusetts, who subscribes to podcasts and TED Talks featuring the people on SUCCESS magazine's list of the 25-most influential people in personal development.

In the same spirit, Sasha Farmer, CRS, sends her team a weekly "Monday Motivation" email containing an inspirational quote or video. "We do whatever we can to create a pervasive environment that's upbeat and positive," says Farmer, owner of The Sasha Farmer Team and vice president of innovation at Montague, Miller & Co. REALTORS® of Charlottesville, Virginia.

2. Know Your 'Why'

San Antonio-based RE/MAX of Texas REALTOR® Lisa Weissgarber Harder, CRS, constantly dangles carrots to remain motivated. When she started her career, she taped the brochure for a new car on the wall in front of her desk; less than a year later, the car was in her driveway. Today, she puts folders on top of all her active and pending files; on each folder she writes the date of something she's looking forward to—a party, for example, or vacation. "Every time I'm in my office I'm reminded, 'OK, this is why I'm doing this,'" she says.

A member of Hughes' team similarly created a "dream board." The board includes clusters of images around team members' names, representing everyone's motivations and goals—including boats, cars, vacations, money and family. "The board is a reminder of why we wake up and face the challenges that we may not want to face," Hughes says. "It's exciting to see others' dreams and goals ... I don't want to be the weak link in their journey to success."

3. Team Up

Farmer also leverages the power of the group for motivation. Her team meets weekly to share successes and frustrations, convenes monthly outside the office to develop personal relationships, and even has a mutual incentive—a group trip to the Caribbean if the office meets its annual sales goal.

The team also communicates regularly via group text—as opposed to email—to foster an atmosphere that's more "family" than "corporate." "When something really great happens, we send each other congratulations and accolades, and when people are struggling we offer support," Farmer says. "We're here to lift each other up. Because that mentality pervades the whole office, when someone's having a rough time it's harder for them to get stuck in a negative pattern and a lot more likely that they'll snap out of it."

Hughes echoes the sentiment: "The more we come together as a team, the more we can channel each other's excitement and momentum into motivation for ourselves."

4. Track Your Performance

One of Hughes' biggest motivators is data. He therefore tracks and shares his team's performance at every opportunity. "We vigorously track our numbers—daily dials, calls, contacts, appointments and closings—so we can see exactly where we are individually and as a team in relation to where we want to be for the month, quarter and year," he says. "Some of these numbers are posted in the office and most of them are reviewed weekly so we don't lose sight of our goals."

5. Get Educated

Something that's helped Carter stay motivated in the past is continuing education, which has kept him engaged and excited by exposing him to new knowledge and emerging trends. The Council of Residential Specialists, for example, offers on-demand webinars, online classes and live classroom courses that can make bored REALTORS® excited about real estate again.

"Learning can re-energize you by giving you some new things to think about and try in your business," Carter says, citing both the social and educational benefits of professional development.

6. Hire a Coach

If being held accountable to your goals motivates you, consider hiring a business coach.

"I've had several coaches," Hughes says. "Sometimes we have blinders on, so having a coach gives you an outside perspective that can be really helpful. That person can often see around the corner when you can't."

A mentor or even a friend can serve the same purpose, challenging you when you need to be challenged and encouraging you when you need encouragement.

7. Create a Competition

Something he's found especially motivating at his new office is a companywide contest called "The Big Push," according to Carter, who says agents in each of the company's offices get together weekly over a period of weeks to work their respective databases. A lender is onsite, and agents receive points for various activities over the course of the campaign, such as showing up prepared, making a call, securing a buyer or seller appointment, and getting a prospect to discuss preapproval with the onsite lender. At the end of the campaign, the agent with the most points receives a reward.

"It's been really successful," Carter says. "It's a great way to get like-minded agents together in a competitive atmosphere; it gives you a good reason to work your database."

8. Keep Good Company

Farmer's No. 1 source of motivation is the people with whom she works. She therefore staffs her office carefully. "The most important thing is to have the right people on the bus," she says. "There were times in my past where there were people on my team who sucked the energy out of me because they came in with dismal attitudes, or I always had to cheer them up. Now I surround myself with team members who are generally happy, optimistic people. That really helps."

9. Look Your Best

Harder motivates herself to be successful by looking successful.

"There's an old saying: It's better to look good than to feel good," says Harder, whose perpetually professional wardrobe ensures she's always ready to meet clients on short notice. "If you look marvelous, that's the first step to having a good day."

10. Stay Busy

It's hard to feel "stuck" if you're always moving. For that reason, Harder always has a full to-do list. "At the end of the day, I write down everything I have to do for the next day," she says, adding that her agenda during slow periods might include planning events or making phone calls to check in with past clients. "When I go to bed, I know I have a plan for the next day and will succeed as long as I achieve what I've planned to achieve."

Burnout is inevitable for everyone at some point, but having motivational strategies ready when it strikes can help you rebound quickly. "This business ebbs and flows, but it's important to control your own mindset," Farmer says, "because the most successful people in real estate are those who bounce back quickly from failure."

Matt Alderton is a Chicago-based freelance writer specializing in business, travel and technology.

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