

How to stay productive

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By **Dr Janki Santoke**

Struggling to remain motivated? An ancient text can show the way, says a Vedanta teacher.

Most people believe they haven't had enough success. Even though it's vastly relative, the feeling of 'I could have done better' inevitably persists. The question one is often asked during sessions and workshops is whether there is any way to up our success. Each person is different and each person's idea of success is different. People differ in capabilities and desires. But whatever one's idea of success may be, whatever one's capacities may be, there are some common aspects of success.

Success is the achievement of one's objective. You get what you want. But how is this done?

Examine the nature of success

Success belongs to the future. It is an effect. One cannot get it directly. To get the effect, we must address the cause. The cause of success is action. While circumstances may contribute to it, ultimately it is our actions that deliver the success. The better the quality of the action, the better the result (i.e. success). Hence, the study of success is the study, really, of the actions that cause it.

The Bhagavad Gita suggests aspects of the perfect action — the action that brings the desired reward. It is encapsulated in the 30th verse of the third chapter. A perfect action envisages two aspects — that it must generate energy and that it should not dissipate energy. Since energy is the fuel of action, this becomes important. Without energy, the action will stop. The cause will wither and the effect will not be created. People today lack the energy for work, hence there's an immense need for holidays, vacations, weekends and voluntary retirement. So, how do you generate energy and in-turn improve your productivity at work?

Action: Being active is the first method of generating energy. Daily exercise is part of it. Keeping active throughout the day is the other part — opening the door when the bell rings, taking the staircase, walking to a colleague's cabin. It is not unusual nowadays to call or message a spouse in the next room.

Avoidance of physical activity makes one feel disinclined to work. The more one moves, the more energy one has to move. Dynamic action itself is the first generator of energy.

Ideal: The second way to generate enormous amounts of energy is to work for a cause beyond one's selfish, self-centred interests. Selfcentredness saps energy. The more one thinks of oneself the more tired one gets. We all require some break from work. But have we ever heard of Mahatma Gandhi requiring a holiday? When one works for a higher cause — an ideal beyond oneself — tremendous energy is created. It creates the enthusiasm, the initiative for work. One goes for work all guns blazing. But when the work is selfish, even if initially there is enthusiasm, it wanes away and leaves fatigue in its wake. It leads to burnouts: a frequent occurrence in youngsters who are driven to make money for themselves. It leads to depression and other lifestyle ailments. But look around at all those who see something greater in the work than themselves. They seem limitless bundles of energy. But if their attention shifts to their income, perks or promotions, they become too fatigued to work.

Nobody can achieve anything on his or her own. It takes the participation of others. The best way to get the unstinting participation of others is for us to work for a higher ideal. People join in and work with initiative. If you're leading a team, don't bribe your people to work; inspire them to work. The greatest leaders of humanity have been those who had the vision to see beyond themselves.

Discipline: To achieve anything in life, we must have the discipline to direct all actions to our chosen goal. Goals are hard to achieve. They require the discipline of daily, constant action. They are never achieved with a day's or a week's work. It often takes many years. All those years have to have the discipline of all actions being directed to them. Anything in one direction has tremendous power. It gives geometric returns. Wind going in one direction is a tornado; water flowing in one direction gives rise to hydroelectric power.

Dissipation of energy

While action, ideal and discipline generate energy, the mind can dissipate it through three avenues: past, present and future. The mind aimlessly rambles into the worries of the past or anxieties of the future or excitement in the present. All of these merely distract attention from the work at hand. Action suffers and hence, success is impeded. To do what needs to be done for a wider cause, and to keep doing it, without dissipating energy by worrying about what has happened or has yet to happen, is the eternal mantra for success.

(The author takes classes on Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita)