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175 — Friday Fix: How to Keep Going When You Don’t Feel Like It

Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I’m Amy Morin, editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I’m also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You’re listening to The Friday Fix! Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Now, let’s dive into today’s episode!

- Does your brain try to convince you to quit your goals?
- Do you have a hard time staying motivated to work on tough tasks?
- Do you give up when the going gets tough?

If you answered yes to any of those questions, today’s episode is for you! And trust, you’re not alone in this. It’s hard to keep going when you feel like giving up.

It might be something that you want to quit right this second — like you’re cycling and you’re tired. Or, it might be a longer-term goal that you’re tempted to abandon — like launching your own business.
Fortunately, there are some psychological tricks you can use to keep going even when you don’t feel like it. Here are 7 of my favorite strategies:

1. **Write a list of all the reasons why you should keep going.**

   This is a helpful strategy when you’re able to do some work ahead of time. Consider it planning ahead for those times when your brain is going to try and talk you into quitting.

   So let’s say you’re launching a little side hustle business. And there are times when you’re frustrated and times when you’re overwhelmed. In those moments, you want to quit.

   What can really help in those times is a list you’ve already written of all the reasons why you should keep going. Keep that list handy—you’re going to need it. Read it as often as you need to. It can help you combat all those negative thoughts in your brain.

2. **Develop a quick mantra.**

   Speaking of negative thoughts, your brain will tell you, “You can’t do this any longer,” or “There’s no sense in continuing.” A quick little catchphrase that you repeat to yourself can help drown out the negative thoughts that try to hijack your behavior.

   Your mantra might include something like, “I got this,” or “Just keep going.” Those little sayings can remind your body to keep moving even though your brain is screaming at you to stop.

3. **Prove your brain wrong when it says, “I can’t stand this.”**

   Whether you’re thinking about a job you don’t love or you’re trying to walk another half mile, your brain will tell you that you can’t stand to keep going.

   The truth is, your brain will underestimate you. It will try to get you to quit long before you actually need to.

   Your brain is looking out for danger. It wants you to stay safe. That’s a good thing. That helped your ancestors survive.
It will tell you to stop exercising long before you need to. That’s because it doesn’t want you to die from exhaustion. But, you need to know that your brain is going to tell you to stop long before you need to.

So whenever your brain thinks, “I can’t stand this!” it’s helpful to push yourself—even if it’s just a little longer to prove your brain wrong. Over time, you’ll learn that your brain’s early warning signs to quit don’t mean you actually should. And you’ll train your brain to see you as more capable and competent.

4. **Visualize yourself doing the hard work.**

So often people visualize themselves winning the race or getting the award. They think that imagining how good that is going to feel will motivate them to keep going.

But science says that’s not true at all. When you visualize yourself getting that reward at the end, your brain responds as if you had actually accomplished your goal. It starts celebrating now—and usually when you’re doing this, it’s not the time to celebrate. It’s the time when you want to double-down and muster more motivation, not take your foot off the gas.

Visualization can help you stay the course. But it’s important to visualize yourself working hard, not reaping the rewards.

You might spend some time imagining yourself working hard, encountering obstacles, tolerating frustration, and enduring hardship. Of course, it’s not as much fun to visualize those things. But, studies show that kind of visualization can increase the chances that you’ll be able to endure the tough times when you actually face them.

5. **Break it down into smaller chunks of time.**

Whether your goal is to pay down $50,000 in debt or you want to launch a business in two years, break down a big goal into smaller more manageable chunks.

Let’s say you’re running a 100 mile ultra marathon. Focus on getting through one mile at a time. That will make what seems like an impossible task feel doable.
If you’re cleaning or working on a boring task, you might practice the 10-minute rule.

That might involve telling yourself to just keep doing something for 10 minutes. This is often the best way to get started on a task. Just tell yourself to work on that boring report or walk on the treadmill for 10 minutes. Once you get to the 10 minute mark, you might decide to go for another 10 minutes. Your goal might feel more manageable when you are only looking at what you need to do right now, not the big picture.

6. **Name your feelings.**

We’ve talked about this on the show before. Just putting a name to your emotion takes some of the sting out of it. Whether you’re anxious, frustrated, or overwhelmed, labeling your emotion helps your brain and your body make more sense of your experience.

After you name your emotion, you can spend a minute reflecting on how that feeling is likely to affect your thoughts.

When you feel anxious, your brain will try to convince you that things are going to go wrong. When you feel overwhelmed, your brain will tell you that you lack the skills and resources you need to accomplish something.

So after you name your emotion, spend a minute thinking about that feeling is likely to distort your thoughts. This can help you see that your feelings are temporary but they can convince you to make a permanent decision if you’re not careful.

7. **Accept that your brain is going to try and talk you out of it.**

Rather than fight all those thoughts, you might be better off accepting the fact that your brain is going to try and convince you to quit. But you don’t have to listen. In fact, you don’t have to believe everything you think.

That doesn’t mean you have to be filled with lots of positive thoughts though if you want to keep going. Instead, you can accept my brain is going to try and convince me to stop. I’m going to keep going anyway.
It can be helpful to establish a regular practice where you keep doing something after your brain tells you to stop. I do this with running a timed mile. I run as fast as I can in an effort to break my own personal record almost every day. And never fail, at the ¾ mile mark, my brain tells me to just give up. And now, I’ve come to accept that this is going to happen probably every time I run but it doesn’t mean I have to listen. Instead, when my brain doubts me, I just think, “Challenge accepted,” and keep going. Some days, when my brain says, “You’re too tired,” I think, “Oh yeah? Watch this!” and make myself run a little faster…just because I can.

So those are 7 things you can do when you feel like giving up: write a list of all the reasons why you should keep going, repeat a mantra to yourself, prove your brain wrong, visualize yourself doing the hard work, break a big task down into smaller chunks, name your feelings, and just accept that your brain will try to convince you to quit.

Now with all that said, let’s be clear. There are plenty of times when you should quit something. Quit a job that isn’t good for your mental health. Quit a relationship that is bad for you. Quit a goal that is way more effort than it’s worth. And remember that quitting those sorts of things can be a sign of strength, not weakness.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger!

Do you want free access to my online course? It’s called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Podcasts. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We’ll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast!

And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer, Nick Valentin.