Action before motivation

Why acting first works better than waiting until you feel like it.

We usually assume it goes like this: feel motivated, then act. When you are low, motivation does not arrive. If you wait for it, you do less and less.

Usual order
Feel like it, then do it

→

In depression
The feeling does not come

→

What works
Do it first. The feeling follows.

Working from the outside in

- **Follow the plan, not the mood.** Decide in advance what you will do and when. Then do it because it is 11 o'clock, not because you feel up to it.
- **Start smaller than seems worth it.** Five minutes of a walk. One dish washed. One text sent.
- **Expect little at first.** Things may feel flat or pointless. Do them anyway. Pleasure and energy come back with repetition, usually later than you would like.
- **Count the effort.** When you are low, getting dressed can be a real achievement. Judge by how hard it was, not by what you used to manage.

Three kinds of activity to include

Achievement
Things that give a sense of having done something: a chore, a form, a task at work.

Closeness
Things that connect you with others: a text, a coffee, a chat over the wall.

Enjoyment
Things that used to give pleasure, or might: music, a bath, a walk, a match on TV.

What to expect

Some days it will help and some days it will not. Look at the trend over two or three weeks, not at any single day.

> **Tell yourself**
> "I do not have to feel like it. I only have to start."

My notes and questions

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The five-minute start

A way to get started on a task you keep putting off.

When something feels too big, commit to less. Agree to do it for five minutes. You are not agreeing to finish it.

1. **Pick one task.** Just one.
2. **Decide the very first physical action.** Not "sort the kitchen". "Put the cups in the sink."
3. **Set a timer for five minutes.**
4. **Start.** Do only that task until the timer goes.
5. **Then choose.** Stop, with no guilt. Or carry on for another five.

Why it works

- Starting is the hardest part. Once you are moving, continuing takes far less effort.
- Five minutes is too small for your mind to argue with.
- Stopping after five minutes still counts. You did what you said you would.

Task	First action	Did I start?	Did I carry on?	How I felt afterwards

On the worst days, make it two minutes.

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