

Starting career conversations with demotivated students

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Lack of motivation is a common obstacle to career decision-making and goal-setting. According to Martin Ford's (1992) model of motivation, a person needs:

- 1 a goal that is clear, important and holds priority over other concerns;
- 2 the belief that they can achieve their goal, given their skills and the context they live in; and
- 3 emotions (positive or negative) that will give them the energy to take action toward achieving their goal.

Of course, motivation alone is not enough to achieve an objective. It also depends on skills, physical and mental health and abilities, and contextual factors such as family, school, community, and the labour market.

Using the goal, agency beliefs, and emotion framework

This worksheet is designed to help pinpoint gaps in students' motivation. To use the framework:

- 1 Print or draw the diagram on the next page and briefly explain the three elements of motivation.
- 2 Ask your student to reflect on which part of the diagram, in general, presents the greatest challenge.
- 3 Encourage them by asking general questions for each component. For example, "how clear is your career goal to you?" or "how do you feel when you think about your goal?".
- 4 As the conversation evolves, refer to the suggested questions to help your student explore their goals, their situation, and the resources they have to draw on.

Some tips for productive motivational career conversations

- Genuine curiosity and compassion underpin a trusting relationship. Show your student that you care about helping them achieve an outcome that means something to them.
- People who lack motivation are still full of resources, knowledge, skills and values. Be on the lookout for these and highlight them for your student when you see them.
- No insight is stronger than one that a person discovers for themselves. Avoid imposing opinions or solutions and focus on helping your student discover theirs.
- Students will defend their freedom if they feel it is threatened. Avoid speaking in a directive manner or trying to lead them too much.
- Remember that wanting to avoid an outcome is also a goal. If your student struggles to identify what they want from their career, turn the conversation to what they don't want.

Learn more about motivation in career development:

Ford, M. E. (1992). *Motivating humans: Goals, emotions and personal agency beliefs*. Sage.

Rochat, S. (2018). Examining motivational interviewing in career counselling from a motivational system theory perspective. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46(5), 632–643. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2018.1483005>

Rochat, S. (2022). *Mapping career counseling interventions: A guide for career practitioners*. Routledge.





**Motivation requires all three ingredients: goals, agency, and emotion.
If one ingredient is missing, motivation is impossible.**

Goal-related challenges:

Lack of goal clarity:

- What could help make your goal clearer?
- What are you unsure about?

Lack of goal importance:

- What could make this goal more important?
- What if the goal never became important?

Lack of goal priority:

- What are the more important goals?
- How would achieving this goal help achieve other ones?

Agency-related challenges:

Lack of self-confidence:

- What goals have you achieved in the past?
- What helped you then, that can help you now?

Lack of confidence in context:

- What could get in the way of achieving your goal?
- What might help you achieve your goal?
- Who do you know who could help you?

Emotion-related challenges:

Lack of positive emotions:

- What is the best thing that could happen if you achieve your goal?
- How would that make you feel?

Too many negative emotions:

- What is the worst thing that could happen if you don't achieve your career goal?
- How likely is this?
- What can you do to avoid that outcome?
- Who can you talk to about how you're feeling?

