

Chapter 1 Two Forms of Human Motivation

Gain and Prevent Pain

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

—Mark Twain

What decisions or pursuits produce significant results in our lives—and are we giving them enough time and attention? Which of the many things that we do each day actually move us forward, and which just keep us running in place?

According to popular psychology, we all have the same reasons for doing the hundreds of tasks that we do each day. Many psychology studies have agreed that we can divide all sources of human motivation into two categories: to move toward Gain, or Prevent Pain. Every time you've felt compelled to do *anything*—from making a phone call, to getting up off the couch, to spending money, to going to work, to traveling, you were either motivated to move toward something you want (Gain), or prevent the loss of something you have (Prevent Pain).

We can illustrate this concept in almost any part of your life: health, finances, eating, career/work, even family and hobbies. Let's look at your health first. Do you exercise regularly, take vitamins or medications, or see doctors for checkups or when you feel ill? Every time you're motivated to do something about your health, it has either been to Gain in that category (get healthier than you are now, lose weight, lower cholesterol levels, tone muscles, heal injuries) or to Prevent Pain (prevent illness, weight gain, disease, muscle deterioration, and so forth). Sometimes you can have *both* motivations for doing something; for instance, you might exercise to lose weight *and* to prevent heart disease.

How about your finances? Everyone has been motivated by money at some point in his or her life. Are you trying to Gain in this category by getting a promotion and a raise, making a profitable investment, or increasing your savings? Or are you trying to Prevent Pain—that is, keep from losing the money you have—by buying insurance, clipping coupons, applying for a scholarship or grant, refinancing your mortgage, or finding a cheaper place to live?

Then, of course, there's food and eating. Sometimes you want to Gain a fine dining experience or try a new type of cuisine. Sometimes you are far too hungry or busy for that and just need to eat something to prevent hunger pains or headaches and be done with it so you can get back to work.

The Gain versus Pain question applies in business as well. Ask yourself: Is the purpose of your weekly meeting to identify new target clients or

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figure out how to improve the process of taking new orders? Or do you use it to go over meeting protocols and talk about employee lateness or inventory status? Is it a Gain meeting that will move your business forward, or is it a Prevent Pain meeting that will simply keep you from falling behind?

Consider any motivation you've recently had about your career. Has it been focused on Gain tasks that would benefit your career in the long term, such as pursuing an advanced degree, earning a professional certification, or closing a landmark deal that could put you in the running for a promotion? Or are you thinking more about how to avoid the next round of layoffs that may be coming or what needs to be done to meet expectations on your next performance appraisal?

Either Gain or Prevent Pain pushes you toward completing every decision and activity you pursue. And although it could be a combination of both, one is always in the majority. You have 51 percent or more of one of these motivations driving you to do that specific task. The most important difference between the two is the results they produce.

Tasks that you are driven toward by Gain produce more significant positive results in your life and your business than tasks that you are driven toward by Prevent Pain.

You might immediately wonder why. When you are thinking about Gain and you are being motivated by Gain, you are focusing on something you *want*. You are figuring out how to produce a result that you *desire* in your life. You are not thinking about losing something or maintaining the status quo. You are working to move your life forward from where it is now, making it better than what it is today, considering how you *desire* your life to be—and that's exciting! Gain gives you focus, a direction to head toward.

These aren't the thoughts that cross our mind as we do our everyday Prevent Pain tasks such as paying bills and doing laundry. Clean laundry isn't something we *desire* out of life. When we do laundry we are preventing the pain of having no clean clothes to wear. Similarly, paying

bills prevents the pain of having our electricity turned off or having to pay late fees to the credit card company. But focusing on a Gain is different. It pushes us to move toward something we *want*, something that will make our lives better. And those results are much more significant to our lives than the results that Prevent Pain tasks produce.

Take a minute to think of something you'd love to do or achieve in life that you haven't already done. There is no right or wrong answer; this is uniquely you. Have you always dreamed of getting an MBA or PhD, finishing a marathon, learning a new language, writing a book, opening a business, starting a foundation, or restoring a vintage car? What about learning a new sport, traveling to foreign countries, or researching your family tree? How about buying your first house, owning an income property, or running for political office? Think of one thing that stands out among all the others. What would you most love to do in life that you haven't already done?

Now, would you say that this goal or accomplishment is about moving toward something you want or preventing the loss of something you have? For most people, it's about *Gain*. Few people, when asked to identify something they would love to do in life, talk about paying their electric bill or filing an expense report. *When we think about things we want to accomplish in life, we are thinking about Gain.* Consider what your life would be like if you accomplished that Gain task. Would it bring you pride, a sense of accomplishment, and happy memories? Would your life be better than it is today?

That's what Gain is about: improving life and moving forward. It's about the experiences and accomplishments that you *want* to have as a part of your life.

PREVENT PAIN: I HAVE TO DO IT!

Prevent Pain tasks simply prompt us to do what we have to do. There's that old saying that the only certainties in life are death and taxes. However, I'm sure that if I asked you what you have to do today (or any day) in order to keep up, you would have a much longer list.

Everyone has responsibilities; some more than others based on our age, job, family, and so forth. There are many "have to" responsibilities that simply come with earning a paycheck; after all, your employer is paying

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you to take care of certain tasks. If you are in school, you have to study and take advantage of the opportunity to learn and prepare for your future. Things such as home ownership, car ownership, and even pet ownership come with big responsibilities. Parenting is in a category by itself when it comes to taking on responsibilities and all the “have to” tasks that come with it. Some responsibilities, such as dealing with illness or injury, may have come to you without your consent; some you may have willingly signed up for; others may have come as an indirect result of your decisions.

No matter how many “have to” tasks are on your plate, you can always fill your day with them. There’s always something to repair, maintain, clean, feed, keep up with, pay for, or care for. The reason that Prevent Pain tasks go on and on is that they never actually go away; they just eventually repeat. For example, you don’t really cross doing dishes off your to-do list; you just move it to the bottom because by the next night, you will have to wash them again. The same is true with checking e-mail or stocking inventory. You don’t cross it off; you move it down the list, because it’s coming back again at some point. Tasks such as putting gas in your car, doing laundry, and going grocery shopping all have to be done over and over again because the things necessary to maintain your life are never finished. By always focusing on getting them done and preventing pain, you don’t end up with Gain; you end up with no pain and unfortunately no progress.

Prevent Pain tasks come with varying degrees of urgency. You have to complete some, such as a certain assignment for work, according to deadlines. Others, such as housecleaning, have a bit more flexibility in terms of timeline; it’s your responsibility to get them done sometime or deal with the consequences of failing to complete them. There is one thing that all “have to” tasks have in common, which is our definition of a *have to*: a “have to” (or Prevent Pain task) is any task or activity that, if neglected, someone else will eventually bring to your attention.

For instance, let’s say someone is waiting for you to complete a task. If you don’t do it, the person waiting will eventually catch you at the elevator, call you on the phone, send you an e-mail, stop you in the hall, send a reminder in the mail, or come knocking on your door and say, “Hey, did you ever get a chance to . . . ?” Whether it’s a manager, colleague, client, family member, neighbor, roommate, bill collector, or someone else, that person will want to know if you did what you were

supposed to do. That is the nature of a “have to,” or Prevent Pain, task. The pain that you should have prevented will visit you eventually if you don’t complete it.

DO I REALLY HAVE TO?

When I say “have to,” you may think, “I don’t *have to* do anything; I am a free person!” And sure, the decision about whether or not to complete these tasks *is* technically up to you. However, if you decide *not* to do them, you will have to face the consequences of that decision. For example, if you decide you will stop paying your rent or mortgage, you will have to deal with the consequences of not being able to live in your home anymore and possibly not being able to get another one because of your destroyed credit. So you either have to pay it, or you have to deal with what happens if you don’t. The consequences are the pain you are preventing when you complete a Prevent Pain task.

Although I doubt anyone wants to risk becoming homeless, some unfinished Prevent Pain tasks have less severe consequences that you may choose to accept instead of doing the task. For example, if your neighbor knocks on your door and says, “Hey, did your yard become the Amazon? When are you going to mow it?” you could respond in any number of ways, including, “Hey, thanks for bringing that to my attention, *but I’m not doing it ever again!* It’s my yard, and I can do what I please with it!” You have made your decision to stop mowing the lawn, to not complete this Prevent Pain task. But now the pain that wasn’t prevented will start to roll in: your yard looks overgrown, and you can’t use it for anything; your grass might die; and your relationship with your neighbors will suffer. If you let it go long enough, your kids or pets might even get lost out there! If you can live with these consequences, then you might choose this course of action, but either way, mowing the lawn is a “have to” or Prevent Pain because you either have to do it or you have to deal with the consequences of not doing it.

This is how you can distinguish between Gain and Prevent Pain tasks. There is no “have to” with a Gain task, because there are no consequences if you choose not to pursue Gain in your life.

And yet it is the Gain tasks, the things that you *never* have to do, that will produce the most significant positive results in your life and in your

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business. It seems a little backward, doesn't it? You would think that if something is required, then you should be congratulated for getting it done. But that's not how it works. If you continue to do solely what is necessary to survive every day, all you will accomplish is preventing pain from coming your way. To move your life or your business forward from where it is today and to see an improvement, you must do something extraordinary—something that you didn't have to do at all. You must pursue Gain.

This concept first came to me when I was about to graduate from college. I did well in school, but I didn't have the highest grades in my graduating class. In addition to studying, taking tests, and writing research papers, I played football and volunteered a lot of my time with various groups. In particular, I had been a Big Brother to a great kid from the city since my freshman year. I always liked and was grateful for the fact that I had choices. Therefore, I thought a great way to spend my extra time would be to offer some positive choices to a kid who wouldn't otherwise have any. I spent a lot of time with him playing sports, going to movies, and helping him with his homework, among other things.

As graduation approached and I was scrambling to complete papers and exams like everyone else, I received a surprising call from the Graduation Committee. They chose me as the Valedictorian Speaker for the graduation ceremony. The committee, which was composed of faculty, advisors, and students, didn't choose me because of exam scores and academic prowess. They informed me that I had been chosen because of all the extra things I did while I was in college that I *didn't have to do*, like being in the Big Brother program, serving on student government, and hosting my own campus radio show. None of the activities they mentioned was required for graduation.

At the time, that struck me as strange. Some students in my class had higher grades than I did and were doing a better job at what was *required* to graduate, but they were not chosen for this high honor. Instead the committee chose me because of all the things I did that I *didn't have to do at all!* The more time I spent thinking about this, the more I began to understand. Everyone had to pass their classes to graduate, and many students had high grades; but that wasn't enough to differentiate them from everyone else. It was the Gain I pursued that separated me from my peers. The decisions I made regarding how to spend my time and energy is what built my identity. When those people on the committee thought of

me, they weren't asking, "Is he keeping up with what he has to do?"; they were asking, "What is different about him? What choices did he make? What did he do that he didn't have to do?"

This experience and this way of differentiating myself always stayed with me. It provided evidence of the power and the significant positive results that can come when we decide to do more than just what we have to do. These results can come only from Gain.

ATTRIBUTES OF A GAIN TASK

If we examine the attributes of a Gain task, we can discern exactly which tasks we can label as Gain and which we can label Prevent Pain. It will also help you figure out how you feel when you are doing each. (Hint: You'll soon see why one makes you feel *accomplished* while the other just makes you feel *busy*.) Once we identify these attributes, we can look at the results that are achieved from spending time doing each kind of task. We can then consider whether this difference in results should influence the decisions you make regarding how to spend your time.

1. A Gain Task Is *Never Urgent*

Urgency is a great human motivator. Just *labeling* something as urgent makes people sit up and stress over what they may have missed and what is due right away. But when it comes to results, urgency alone can't deliver. It is not a great criterion for deciding what is most important or what will produce the most significant results in your life.

For example, you've already identified something that you would love to do in life that you haven't already done. Think about that particular Gain task. Is it necessary for you to get started on it *today*? What if you are really busy this week; can it wait until next week, or even next month? What if you went an entire year without doing anything about that Gain task? Would anything bad happen? No. A Gain task can *always wait*; there are no deadlines or reports due for it. You don't owe it to anyone. There are no consequences for not doing it. Your only motivation to do it is to improve your life in some way. It is never an urgent situation. Therefore, if you base your decisions regarding what to do with your time

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solely on what is urgent, you won't be doing any Gain tasks—and you won't experience the significant positive results that come from Gain.

In contrast, you can't delay or ignore Prevent Pain tasks. For instance, how long can you go without food? People have made it 30 to 45 days in extreme circumstances without food. People have lived two to three days without water in extreme cases. The urgency of finding food and water, paying your mortgage, turning in a proposal on time, and showing up for work is obvious. These things have deadlines and consequences if you don't do them.

2. You Don't Have to Complete a Gain Task

The second attribute for a Gain task is *you don't have to do it*. Motivation to complete a Gain task comes from the opportunity to gain improvement and results in your life, not from fear of the consequences that may arise if you *don't* do it. No one will ever ask you about it or follow up on it. There's only one reason why you would do it: because you *want* to, not because you *have* to.

What happens if you *never* complete any Gain tasks? Well, nothing, really. If you never do anything about a goal, no one will ever impose a fine or penalty on you; no one will ever ask why you didn't do it. Nothing bad will happen, but *nothing great will happen either*. You will not experience that Gain in your life. You won't move toward that goal or enjoy improvement. Your life will stay the same for as long as you let it.

You can go through a lifetime without ever doing anything about your Gain task. People have lived a long, happy, full lifetime without ever accomplishing that particular goal. The reason to complete this goal is because you desire the results that task would bring. The difference between the Gain and the Prevent Pain tasks is the difference between *I want to* and *I have to*, the difference between *don't have to* and *have to*, and the difference between motivation stemming from the desire for results and motivation driven by the fear of consequences.

If you achieved the Gain task that you identified, would it produce significant or insignificant results? Don't think of *results* solely in terms of how much money you will make from it, how it will look on a résumé, or what other people will think. Think about how accomplishing or experiencing the Gain task makes you feel, and how it will enhance your life; in

that way, think of the results as the memories, feelings, progress, growth, and improvement in your life.

Completing a Gain task should produce *significant* results; otherwise, you wouldn't do it. If you are choosing to spend your time on something that you don't have to do but that you really *want* to do, you are working to enhance your life. Whether it's volunteering, developing a new skill, improving a process at work, or engaging in anything else that we "don't have to" do, *whenever we are motivated by Gain, we are thinking about the results our time and effort will bring us*—in our lives, in our relationships, and in our business.

3. You Can't Delegate a Gain Task to Anyone Else

The nature of a Gain goal or accomplishment means that *only you* can achieve the results you seek. And *only you* can experience the satisfaction and improvement that comes from them. You can't delegate your goals and dreams to another person.

We are all faced with the question of how to best spend our allotted 24 hours every day to get the most out of them. Every time you take on a task, you make a decision to spend the amount of time that the task will take. *And every time you do something that someone else could do for you, you are giving up the opportunity to pursue Gain.* Everything you hire or ask another person to do—from having your shirts dry-cleaned to hiring a lawn service to maintain your yard to ordering pizza for dinner—is delegation. Even when you buy clothes at a retail store, instead of making them yourself, you are delegating! Almost every time you spend money, you are delegating someone else to do something for you.

The question is, are you delegating *enough*? If you're spending time completing Prevent Pain tasks that someone else could complete, you're missing out on chances to advance your business, relationships, or life. You are giving up the opportunity to pursue Gain when you don't delegate effectively.

Of course, there is much to consider when you decide to delegate. Is there someone who is more *available* than you are? Do *time and urgency* matter? Is someone else *more talented or more skilled* at a given task? Does *quality* matter? If it's a professional task: Does someone else need to complete it for education or succession planning, to grow, learn, or

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develop part of their job? How much will it cost your organization for you versus someone else to complete it? But the number one question to consider is, *What else could you be doing with your time if you weren't doing that task?* Most likely the answer would have something to do with pursuing Gain in some area of your life.

The result of a Gain task is achieving a sense of *leadership* in your life, your business, or your relationships—and finding time for leadership is difficult without delegation. Have you ever wondered where you might find the time to think outside the box, to work *on* the systems as opposed to working *in* the systems, to *improve* the business rather than to *do* daily business, to develop strategies rather than to spin wheels and waste time doing things the old way?

Delegation is where the time comes from for us to move things forward.

What should you delegate that would give you more time to improve your expertise in a certain area? If you had more time, what could you reach expert status doing? If you reached this expert status, what new solutions could you come up with for your employer or your clients? The more valuable those solutions are, the more valuable you become.

Delegation is a necessary tool because limited time is the number one obstacle to learning, growing, and pursuing goals. It is the key strategic skill that enables you to spend time moving your life forward versus staying where you are.

I learned this lesson several years ago when my business was taking off. The phone was ringing every day with presentation opportunities. It was a sign of a good economy, as well as the good reputation I had built with a few years of satisfied customers with word-of-mouth power. And it felt great! I had been pounding the pavement (so to speak), cold-calling clients for the first few years, and my efforts were finally paying off. In fact, I was getting so busy that I would respond to a voice mail asking about presentation dates with a quick e-mail to confirm, hoping everything went well. I had no time for in-depth contract discussions or long sales calls.

I was speaking or training four to five times per week, which meant customizing material, preparing handouts, and making travel arrangements at night or on the weekends. Although I was excited about the business, the hours were killing me—and I knew I needed help. The problem, of course, was carving out the time to find the right people to help me. I was scared to death that I'd hire the wrong people and have employee issues on top of everything else. Months went by with little sleep and lots of stress. Not only did I need to delegate some of my responsibilities to someone, but I also needed to delegate the task of finding the right person because I didn't have time to do it!

I finally reached my breaking point; then I came up with a simple plan and ran with it. It started with babysitters. My wife, who has an MBA in finance, was up to her eyeballs in daily work having to do with four small kids at home. So the first step was to make a quick call to my sister, who works at a local high school. She sent over several eager young students to our house every day after school to provide our children with supervision and fun from 3:00 to 5:00 PM (for no more than \$10 per hour). This gave my wife two hours every day to do what I had no time to do: find our first employee. She attacked career websites for several weeks and came up with 400 résumés. She then researched these people on social media, looking for someone with the right profile for our business, the right personality fit for us, and the right skills to help us out. She weaned the crop down to about 15 people and presented them to me.

I chose four résumés that looked like they were just what I needed. We interviewed each person—and I hired one! We got our new executive assistant quickly up to speed on what we do and needed *her* to do. Within a few days, she was making travel arrangements for me and took over invoicing and website management.

My wife then started using the babysitter time to work on our business every day. I went from being a one-man show to having an executive assistant and a part-time MBA consultant in the course of a few weeks. We contracted with several more professionals along the way, and I began to feel like a person again.

Just a few months earlier, my business had hit an unsustainable growth point. With the right delegation, we moved beyond it, made it sustainable, and thrived. With the management of Prevent Pain tasks such as travel arrangements, billing, and advertising taken off my plate, I was free to

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actually think about where I wanted to go next with my business and spend more time in the Gain category.

Managing my business was taking all of my time, but my business was ready for *leadership*. Delegating gave me the time to provide that leadership and move my business forward.

MANAGEMENT VERSUS LEADERSHIP

What's the difference between management and leadership—and what does it have to do with Gain and Prevent Pain and managing your decisions?

As we've seen, Prevent Pain tasks keep your life or business *the way they are today*. Paying your mortgage, doing your laundry, showing up for work on time, and handing in your reports on time are all about maintaining the status quo and keeping your life in the state it's currently in.

If you complete these and all other Prevent Pain tasks, you're doing a great job of *managing* your job and life without facing any consequences or falling behind on your responsibilities. Management is *maintenance*—keeping things the way they are today. If all you do is maintain for the next five years, what will your career and life look like half a decade from now? Pretty much the same as it does today. And perhaps that's not a bad thing for you. I'm not discounting the effectiveness of management. Having a well-managed life, business, or relationship is something to be proud of. Good management is vital to your success in business and in life, but *it is not leadership*. If you want things to be better than they are today, you need leadership.

If management is maintenance, then leadership is *improvement*—moving things forward from where they are today and making them better. What will be different and better in your life five years from now? The answer to that question lies in whatever Gain tasks you decide to take on.

Management is keeping things the way they are today.

Management = Maintenance

Leadership is moving things forward from where they are today.

Leadership = Improvement

Are you deliberately determining where your life is going? Or are you just managing it and making sure you keep up with the minimum requirements of what you have to do each day to Prevent Pain?

We should be asking that question in business much more often than we are. I have met many people in business over the years who were supposed to be in leadership roles but who actually made things worse! They ran divisions out of profitability, drove companies out of business, cost their organizations millions of dollars, and lost some of their largest customers. That's not leadership; it's *mismanagement*, which leads to decay and deterioration. True leadership does not depend on a title or a position. Having a position of authority in a group *gives you the opportunity* to make decisions that improve or change things. But if things *don't* get better as a result, then you are not a leader.

This turns leadership from a somewhat fuzzy concept into a *result* that you must produce. If you have made good decisions, identified Gain tasks, and are moving toward those goals, then you are truly *leading yourself* toward a better life. If you have grown and developed your business, then you have proved your *leadership*, regardless of your title or position. True leadership doesn't require a title. If you want to be a leader, all you have to do is *make things better*. And every member of a group can tell who is making things better, who is making things worse, and who is doing a great job of maintaining or managing things. Anyone who is improving things is a leader. Changes in economies, technologies, trends, cycles, and employee landscapes require changes in thinking and improving the way things are done. Leaders have the guts to put forth changes and new ideas for the future of the organization.

This definition of leadership means that *anyone* in an organization can be a leader as long as he or she is focused on the betterment of the organization. But it also raises the question:

Who in your life can be a leader except you?

Doing what we have to do each day to maintain our lives is *management*. This is not what defines us as individuals; rather, it is what makes us

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the same as everyone else. *Personal leadership* is doing what we don't have to do to lead ourselves forward and grow each day. This is where we get our self-identity, and what differentiates us from others. If we don't get our identity from Gain tasks, then we're left to determine it based on how we compare to other people. And this is a breeding ground for negativity, mistrust, jealousy, and depression, as well superiority or inferiority thinking. We must continuously adapt, grow, and improve to lead ourselves forward as things around us change—and to avoid getting stuck in a rut. The way to do that is through personal leadership, or Gain, which we will talk more about in the next chapter.

THE ONE AND ONLY EXERCISE I WILL ASK YOU TO DO IN THIS BOOK . . . BRAINSTORM!

Before we move on, I want you to think a little more about Gain for a few minutes. What are the Gain tasks or pursuits that would move your life forward? What would make your life better? Throughout this book, we will be exploring how your decisions about how you spend your time result in the quality of life that you experience—and how that experience could be better if you insert more Gain into your life. We will also explore how to better manage all your daily tasks while improving your life at the same time.

To prepare for that, take 5 or 10 minutes and brainstorm a list of Gain pursuits that, if accomplished, would make your life better than it is today, regardless of how long it would take to accomplish them—and *write them down*. Consider both long- and short-term professional and personal goals. Think about your career, family life, relationships, home, health, travels, hobbies, interests, finances, community, circle of friends, neighborhood, and on and on. You want these to be things that you would love to do or experience in life that you haven't already. The more you can imagine, the better.

Remember, thinking about all the ways that your life could improve doesn't mean you are dissatisfied with where you are now. It just means that you're considering ways to improve and move, what you want for your life, and what would make things better. Spend a few minutes thinking about what your life would be like if you accomplished one or two or *all* of those improvements.

Your goals, or Gain tasks, may be as diverse as going to law school, climbing a mountain, getting a promotion, planting a garden, opening your own business, learning a new language, adopting a child, and painting copies of famous Impressionist art. Whatever you put on it, *keep your list*. You may want to refer or add to it as you make your way through this book and envision what Gain can do for you.

