

### **ERP 069: Have You Lost Motivation In Your Relationship?**

Welcome to The Empowered Relationship Podcast, helping you turn relationship challenges into opportunities and setting you up for relationship success. Your host, Dr. Jessica Higgins, is a licensed psychologist and relationship coach who shares valuable tips, tools and resources for you to dramatically improve your relationship.

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Hello, hello. Thank you for joining me today. Today's episode is episode 69 - Have You Lost Motivation In Your Relationship?

This episode is largely inspired by a video that I watched last week, a TEDx Virginia Tech talk from Scott Geller, and the title of this video is The Psychology Of Self-Motivation.

Most of the time I will post on my social media channels interesting videos and articles and quotes and graphics, infographics on things that are psychology-related, relationship-related, growth-related, and most of the time I think most of what I post is good reminders or interesting, or there's a little tidbit, and I find it good and fine to be having those input; it's just good mind food, it's good to remember, it's good to be inspired. Some of the videos are touching, some are funny... Those types of things. It's slightly entertaining.

Most videos or most articles - I think about it and I like it, but it doesn't always stick with me for a long time. And this particular video stuck with me, and I was pondering it and thinking about. It wasn't even like I was actively thinking about it, it was just something that kept circulating in my thought process, so I started to pay attention and I was like, "Okay, there's something about this video..." I thought it did a great job, but it wasn't the most awe-inspiring video I've ever seen. He as a professor has got great points and good stories, but I think some of the principles he's talking about really apply to relationship, and really strike, most particularly for me right now in what I'm trying to offer you on this podcast, and I think it's largely to motivate you.

So let me just say that, and then say in this video he's largely talking about motivating people, and we think about as teachers, as parents, as bosses in management teams, executives - we want to help people feel self-motivated, we want to inspire people. Some parents and teachers and some bosses hold people accountable. We need that kind of guidance sometimes. So he's talking about it from this vantage point. But he talked about empowerment - that's the title of this podcast, Empowered Relationship - and he said empowerment is feeling self-motivated; you're feeling empowered when you're self-motivated, and I think this is really true in relationship. I find this with the couples that I work with, and in the field of couples' therapy and couples coaching, how motivated people are, how empowered do people feel. Because

honestly - I'll tell my clients and I'll tell you guys - you can have the most brilliant therapist or brilliant coach, and they can say all the right things, do all the right things and really offer the best feedback and guidance and support possible. If you think about it, it's two hours at most in a week, usually, and all the interactions that partners have in a day or in a week - it's a lot in comparison. A therapist can't do it for the couple, right? It needs each partner to be motivated to do the work. That's the biggest determinant of success, people's willingness and motivation to do the work, because they need to incorporate it, they need to integrate it, and they need to live it.

This question of motivation in relationship seems essential, especially as we look at some of what Scott Geller talked about in his video. I will be posting the video link on my show notes page, and I believe you can access the show notes from your smartphone or whatever device, if you have an iPad - just touch the graphic of Empowered Relationship and it will access from your smartphone or your iPad the show notes. So you can click and find that link to this video that I'm referring to. Again, this is with Scott Geller.

Scott's suggesting in his video to know if you feel empowered you wanna be able to answer yes to these three questions. I'm gonna lay out these three questions and offer you a little bit of points here. Then he's got a couple other added points.

The three questions - as I lay these out, I would love to you as you're listening to really just think about where are you, where do you stand in the points that he's talking about.

First question: Can you do it? Do you believe you can do it?

In psychology we call this self-efficacy - believing in yourself, knowing you're capable. This is also having the time, the knowledge, the skill to do what you wanna do. As parents, when we parent our children, we wanna help foster and build self-efficacy, and part of that means being willing to watch them struggle, to learn.

Many years ago when I was in my master's program I nannied, and I loved working with these two kids. There was this family that I worked with, and I remember this little girl, I think she was about three, and we were at the playground. She was wanting to climb... I don't know if you guys have seen this, it's almost like a very big arch and it's got ladder rungs all the way across. So if you think of a three-year-old that's pretty little, it's a pretty tall -- maybe six or seven feet high at its apex, at the very top of the arch. So she was scared, she hadn't ever made it to the top. So I'm watching her, I'm obviously right there with her, supporting her, willing to catch her, able to catch her if she stumbles or falls... And I remember watching her this one day, I could tell she really wanted to go to the top, and she was climbing, climbing, climbing, and I could see her little legs, she was scared and she started to shake, but she wanted to keep going...

So I was there with her, I was helping her, encouraging her, and I didn't do it for her - it's easy to wanna help and assist, especially when we see someone we love struggling, we wanna take that pain away. This is a very small example, but I stayed with her, and she was able to build the courage to continue to take the next rung and the next rung, and she made it to the top, and getting the chance to see her be elated and say "I did it! I did it! I did it!" and just be thrilled with herself... She did it, and to help her have the experience where she gets to feel it in her body and her belief system that she knows she can climb those rungs and get to the top, and that's gonna help her anytime she's on the playground, but it's also gonna help her deal with any other things that might be scary and she's trying to muster the courage. So this is the belief that we can do it.

This first question, "Can you do it?" also relates to do you have the time? Do you have the knowledge and the skill to do it what you want to do? Some people really want to have an authentic, alive, conscious relationship and they don't know how. I know I didn't know how, and I have a whole personal story about that, and that's really the biggest reason that prompted my dissertation topic - looking at growth-oriented relationship. I was looking for studying people who subscribe to this type of relationship; I didn't even know they existed. But once I learned they existed, I wanted to learn more about what that looks like, because I wanted to have the model here.

So my dissertation also had some limitations. Part of the limitations is all of the studies that I'd found that looked at couples who subscribed to more of a growth-orientated relationship or a conscious relationship were pretty well-educated and middle-class or higher. So when we look about do we have the time and the resources, the skill and the knowledge, part of this is okay, we have the ability, we have our basic needs met, then we have the ability to focus on our relationship.

It's often the case if we're feeling financially stressed, we're not making ends meet and we are really struggling, it's hard to allocate and focus on relationship improvement. It kind of makes sense, Maslow's hierarchy of needs; that sense of belonging comes after your safety, your basic food and water, shelter - all of that is met. So there is some really logistics around this. If you're in a really crisis point in your life right now, it would make sense that you're feeling really stressed and that you don't have the ability to really focus on improving your relationship. So that's real. Part of that is just really getting yourself the support and the ground that you need, and I do think you can still practice these relationship principles, but it is a factor. I just want to acknowledge that and validate that.

The other important point here in this question - can you do it? Do you believe you can do it? - is again the knowledge and the skill. This is one of the biggest reasons why I'm offering this podcast, because in my field more often than not people seem pretty ill-equipped, meaning they come into relationship with a lot of expectations that are partly from mass media, all the focusing and emphasizing the romance period; I think that's really beautiful, but we also get

this notion of happily ever after, so we don't actually know what the developmental process of relationship is. If you're interested in learning about that, you can find a link to an article that I wrote, "What does the development of intimacy look like in a relationship?" You can find that on my show notes as well.

So when people are ill-equipped, they're expecting their relationship to just happen beautifully, happily ever after. They don't even think about what does it take to foster a healthy, strong, life-giving relationship. What do I need to do? What skills, what knowledge do I need to gain to set myself up for success? So most people don't have any exposure to any of these relationship principles, and there's a lot of things that get in the way.

This is all addressed in my relationship couples course. If you're interested, you can reach out to me and get more information about that course.

Let's bring us back to motivation. If we're not inspired by a relationship model, or we don't feel like we can do it, we don't know how to do it, it's gonna not contribute to motivation. I know for me, I was really perplexed and I was confused, I was lost, and I was searching to find something that I could model after, something that I could envision. Because I felt like if I could imagine/envision, or if I had the belief that other people created this, then I thought I could do it. And that was true for me - the more that I began to learn and recognize that there are people that are doing these practices, that it does exist, it is possible, that increased exponentially my motivation to learn these things. I didn't feel so alone, I didn't feel so confused and perplexed. I felt motivated and inspired. Because again, if other people can do it, I felt like I could do it.

So let me ask you if you can take a moment to reflect - do you believe you can create a relationship that you really dream of, however you articulate that. I often say 'healthy relationship', 'strong relationship', 'life-giving, fulfilling, satisfying, conscious, authentic'. Those are my words, but you have your own words. So I'll just say really healthy, strong relationship - can you do it? Do you believe you can have a strong, healthy relationship? So ask yourself and just reflect on that for a moment.

The second question - this is, again, from Scott Geller and his TEDx talk at Virginia Tech, and this is The Psychology of Self-Motivation. He is describing these three questions you can ask yourself to determine how self-motivated you feel. Second question: Will it work? Do you believe the process will work?

Again, Scott is a professor and he is coming from a teaching standpoint, educating and coaching individuals, and he is talking about you want to show them data, you want to show them research; you want to show them theory, how it makes sense, you want to demonstrate, and you also want to teach them why it might work. Teaching and training often include feedback and guidance - real, customized, individual feedback. People want to know what they're doing well, people want to know what they can do to improve. When we're trying to

self-teach ourselves, it's difficult to see our blind spots, so to speak. It's unfortunate to me - and again, I think that's why I'm doing this podcast - that many people still, even though it's changing, a lot more people are much more receptive to the idea of investing in their relationship proactively. There's still a large portion of people that are scared of coaching and therapy, they think that it's really only for people who have problems, or they see it as a last resort. This is unfortunate.

I think I've said in previous podcasts that many times, statistically, couples will come in to get support when they've been in pain for seven years or longer. So there's so much buildup, and there are so many layers, so many hurt feelings, it's so volatile, and it's a lot to tease out to really get to the core and really help people feel safe. That emotional safety is key, and that's one of the reasons why it's really nice to have someone to hold that therapeutic space, to go there.

If we're talking ideally, my preference would be that everyone in relationship had a solid foundation to work from. Again, what that foundation looks like - that's part of the reason why I developed my couples course. It's for people to have all the skills that they need to establish a solid foundation, and to work out some of the kinks, for sure.

Ideally, I would love for people to have a solid foundation for the framework of the relationship, and then periodically get support to develop their relationship, or tune up certain times. Because we're gonna have stressors, we're gonna have things that emerge, and in psychology we often reference his analogy of peeling the layers of an onion. So you might get to a certain place that feels really intimate and really close, and then life happens and certain things get triggered and then you'll have another opportunity to deepen. In my mind, it's all for the growth and the deepening of the intimacy. The result of that work is really worth it, it's positive. The outcomes of that are amazingly beneficial.

Just to tell you transparently, I try to share with you guys, to let you know that I believe in this work so much, and I practice everything that I describe, or at least I try to. I'm not perfect, and I even tell you when I'm doing these podcasts I'm reminding myself also, these principles to be in it. There's more I can say about this, but I'm gonna hold it because it's related to some of the points that Scott makes coming up.

To share with you transparently, over the last several months my husband and I have been getting bi-weekly support. We've had a lot of stress in the last couple years, to be honest. In the last several we've recognized a pattern in our dynamic that we weren't enjoying. We really try to be pretty aware and conscious. It wasn't anything super problematic, but it was something that we were noticing, so we decided to get some support. I can tell you, having someone really hold that safe space for us to reveal, get vulnerable, really open up and explore, is priceless. And having somebody that's trained and skilled to be able to offer feedback, be able to help guide us, to shift and help us grow and evolve in our dynamic - I'm so grateful that we've invested in that time together. The things we're learning are very subtle

because we've had a strong foundation and this is like a tune-up and shifting, and really reworking some patterns in a way that really will help us and have been helping us. Because again, the goal is for greater health, greater intimacy and closeness.

There's a lot more I could say about that, but I'm just letting you know that I believe in the process, so my answer to this number two is "Will it work?" and "Do you believe the process will work?" I've devoted my life's work and my career to this, so yes, I'm very much a believer that this process works.

Again, if you wanna take a moment of pause and ask yourself - do you believe in the process of relationship growth? Do you believe there's a process that will help you grow in your relationship, and do you believe that it will work?

Question number three - Is it worth it? Do you believe in the result? Basically, is it gonna pay off? Is the result gonna be worth it to you? Is it what you really want? Is it gonna be worth the effort, the time and the energy? Again, you wanna be able to say yes to this. If you're putting your own language on this - a healthy, strong, alive, fulfilling, satisfying relationship, for most people it is worth it. That payoff would be worth the effort.

Scott Geller in this video is talking about consequences. In the field of psychology, consequences comes from behavioral psychology and it's looking at when people seek a positive consequence, which is usually food when we're talking about animals; for humans it could be a paycheck, it could be some time of positive social feedback (a hug, smiles, positive affirmation). Those are examples of positive consequences. These are things that we typically seek. There are also aversive, or negative consequences, things that we typically want to avoid: pain, rejection, anger, or whatever it is that we would term as aversive.

Scott in his video talked about "I enjoy working toward a positive consequence. I feel good." If you're seeking to earn a paycheck and you earn that paycheck, that feels good; that process of earning something that's positive feels good, whereas if you're working to avoid something aversive or negative, he's saying "I feel controlled." This is true all the time, we could probably think of several examples, but here's just a couple for you.

He mentioned in his video students who go to class because they don't wanna fail - that's avoiding the negative consequence - rather than going to class to learn. That would be the positive consequence. Or following the speed limit when you're driving, to not get a ticket. That would be the adverse consequence, to get a ticket for speeding versus to contribute to safety on the road; so that everyone has the privilege to drive safely. When we really think about it, that's a big deal. I don't know that I drive thinking about "I have an opportunity to contribute to safety on the road." Sometimes I do, but I can tell you, a lot of the times I don't.

Another example would be eating a salad instead of a burger and fries to not get fat - that would be the adverse consequence - rather than to feel nourished and healthy, and have



energy. That would be more of the positive. He is posing here - this is a classic question, and we all can probably think of examples - most people are motivated by pain.

When we think about marketing as an industry, most people will try to market to people's pain points, meaning the places that hurt the most, because what is typical is that people won't take action until they're in pain. People are highly motivated to get out of pain when it's bad enough. Most people don't take action just to seek something pleasurable; the intensity of the pain hurts more, versus the inspiration to -- that's what this talk is about, if we can get aware, if we can increase our motivation, then we're likely to be more engaged in feeling empowered, and accomplishing, and taking action, and being self-motivated to accomplish the things we want.

It's unfortunate, a lot of us as adults have let go of the idea of visioning or dreaming. We think, "Oh, that's not realistic, that's not accessible, or reality" and we wanna settle, and we don't allow ourselves to get excited, because maybe we don't feel self-motivated; we don't believe it's possible, we don't think we can do it. I think we would think it would be worth it, but most of the time we don't think it's possible, so we cut off even getting excited about anything that would be meaningful. We lose these higher goals that we would wanna strive for.

Unfortunately, what brings couples into therapy or coaching is when they're really distressed, they're hurting, they're thinking about getting up, some major thing has happened, like an affair or something that has brought things so much to a head, or there's just this apathy. They've been together for 20+ years, and it's like "Okay, I'm mid-life here, and I'm looking at my life - do I wanna spend the rest of my life in this type of zone, being apathetic, lifeless, no energy, bored, in a routine?" That doesn't feel good. Some people will say, "I've tried and I've tried, and I'm giving up, I can't do it. I'm overwhelmed" and there's like a breakdown. Largely, again, I think people are ill-equipped and I think people feel really alone, and I'm gonna talk about that in a moment.

But as far as this point of really seeking positive consequences, in the whole sense of the examples that I gave, "Oh, I get to drive the speed limit so that I can contribute to safety on the road", we normally don't talk like that. We don't communicate to others... We don't think that way, first of all. We normally don't talk to other people that way, or talk to ourselves that way. So he's really encouraging people to be aware of your thinking, and that you actually have a choice in how you talk about it; to be a success seeker, I think that's what he calls it, rather than a failure-avoider.

I have my best friend, she's so good about a lot of these principles, and I hear her actively change her language in mid-sentence. She will say, "I have to...", maybe she was gonna say "I have to get up early", and then she changes it to "I get to..." It's a subtle play on words, and yes, it can feel a little forced or fake, and it's very much in alignment with this principle of looking at what's the opportunity here? What do you get to be engaged in?

Just recapping here, and then I have a couple more points that he's offering, that I do think are really important. So the three questions again are:

1. Can you do it? Do you believe you can do it?
2. Will it work? Do you believe the process will work?
3. Is it worth it? Do you believe in the result? Do you think you'll get the payoff?

He's saying if you can answer yes to these three questions, you will feel competent and more self-motivated. When we think about a relationship, I think these things are key.

Scott Geller in this talk is highlighting a choice, which I think I just talked about, and he's using these C-words. The last point here is Community. He says, "People who perceive a sense of relatedness, a sense of connection with others, feel more motivated and are happier", and how social support is just critical to our well-being. He's saying we need each other, we need to have each other's back, we need to have community, to help lift each other up, to offer each other feedback, to help each other grow.

So when we think about relationship, we live in a pretty independent culture here in the United States, and when we think about relationship, I think people feel so isolated in their relationship, in their nuclear family. I even think there's a flavor of competition at times, if I'm really being honest. So if we think about talking about our relationship and some of the places where we feel challenged, how are people gonna see us? Will I be viewed more poorly? Will I be seen as not together or successful?

People feel really alone in their struggles; they think that they should have this figured out, they feel like they should know how, without any knowledge, without any skill, and they just feel like they should be born with this, and be without community; essentially trying to navigate all alone, without a map, without a compass, with no other people around. It just seems mind-blowing that this is the expectation that we have of ourselves in our relationship.

I was thinking about this episode and what I might say as kind of points to illustrate - it made me think about most wedding ceremonies, there's some section where the minister or the officiant, whoever's leading the ceremony, will invite family and friends to agree that they're gonna uphold this union, they're gonna remind the couple when they go through dark times, they're gonna remind them of the things that they're aspiring to be, their commitments and their love for one another. Yet in practice I don't think this happens all that often. I think most people, family and friends, think the dynamics of the relationship are off limits - it's too personal, it's too private. And again, most of the time we're not even sharing with one another. So it really kind of breaks my heart that this is what we're up against, when I know what is possible.



That's part of why I wanted to share this with you, and I wanna ask you, just in your own feeling, how do we build a sense of community around this topic? How do we support each other and lift each other up? I would love to hear from you any ideas you have, any things that you're yearning for or longing for.

Scott Geller says, "We can always learn from each other. We need to have the humility to accept feedback, and the courage to speak up. We need to help each other feel - I'm gonna add competent, and - self-motivated."

So when it comes to your relationship - in summary - the three questions he asks, which are based on research, and you can find the link to this video on the show notes, and you can find the show notes on my website, [DrJessicaHiggins.com](http://DrJessicaHiggins.com), click on Podcast and you can find all of the episodes there, and the most recent ones are up at the top. This is episode 69 - Have You Lost Motivation In Your Relationship?

In summary, the three questions he asks are:

1. Can you do it? Do you believe you can do it?
2. Will it work? Do you believe the process will work?
3. Is it worth it? Will it pay off? Do you believe in the result?

He is highlighting the choice we have, the way that we think, the way we communicate about our choice. Do we seek pleasure? Do we seek the positive? Are we success-seekers or failure-avoiders? And Community - just how we need each other. We're social beings, we learn through feedback; we learn and we feel a sense of belonging and connectedness; we are more motivate and we're happier.

Again, I would like to hear from you - I would like to hear your comments, questions, ideas about how we can build a sense of community, how we can support each other, how we can lift each other up when we're on this path together, of improving and strengthening our relationships.

You can find me and reach me on my website, which is [DrJessicaHiggins.com](http://DrJessicaHiggins.com), click on Contact. You can also comment on the show notes page. You have to scroll all the way down and find the space to comment below. I would love to hear from you.

Until our next episode together, I hope you take great care.

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