



041 – Make the most of your motivation - a conversation with Dr. BJ Fogg part 1 (of 2)

Introduction

Hi English learners! Lori here, your teacher from Betteratenglish.com. You are in for a treat with this episode of Real English Conversations. It's a really special episode, and I'm so happy to be sharing it with you.

A while back I had the huge honor of having a conversation with one of my own personal heroes, Dr. BJ Fogg. BJ is the director of the Persuasive Tech Lab at Stanford University. Put simply, he's a scientist who spends a lot of time studying how to help people create desirable habits and getting those habits to stick. The concept of motivation plays an important role in BJ's work. I think most people would agree that motivation is incredibly important for successful language learning, maybe even the most important thing. When you're highly motivated, it's easy. But when your motivation is low, it's not so easy.

BJ has lots of practical advice about how you can make most of your motivation, no matter if it's high or low. His way of thinking about motivation as a wave blew my mind when I first came across it. The motivation wave can easily be applied to language learning, so I am super excited to share it with you.

As always, you can find the full transcript of this conversation, including a bonus vocabulary lesson at Betteratenglish.com/transcripts.

OK, you're about to hear part one of the conversation. I'll pop in again at the end to give you four things you can do to get the most benefit from this episode.

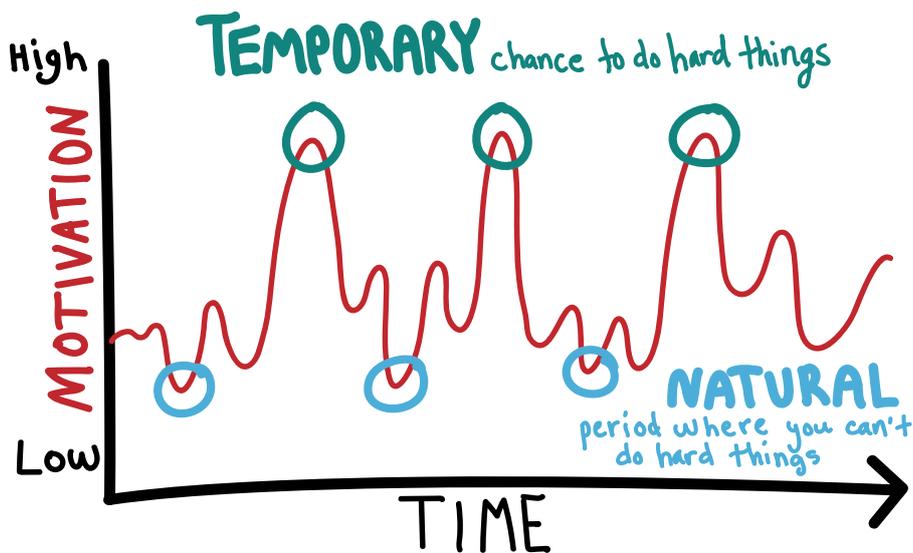
Are you ready? Let's go!

Conversation transcript

- Lori: Can– can people **depend on** motivation when they’re trying to learn things and do things that are difficult?
- BJ: Well, in order to do anything difficult, you have to have motivation or you won’t do them. So either, if it’s...if the behavior or task is difficult, you’ve got to find some way to **summon up** some motivation; or if you make the task simpler, you won’t need so much motivation. So you basically have two options: **boost** your motivation or make the task easier to do.
- Lori: Okay yeah, that– that makes a lot of sense. And I— I noticed in your video, you said that...people often, like teachers or people trying to initiate behavior change or help people change their behavior, that, you don’t like to hear them talking about, “**motivating** behavior change,” you prefer the term “**facilitating**” behavior change. **I wonder if you could** talk a little bit about that.
- BJ: Yeah. In English, there’s a common phrase that people use when they talk about behavior change, “We need to motivate behavior change.” And yes, you could motivate behavior change but there’s other ways to get behavior to happen. And if you’re looking at long-term behaviors or getting people to create habits, focusing on motivation is the wrong focus. You really need to look at, how do we make the behavior easy to do? And also, it’s related to the habits — how do we make the behavior **rewarding** or emotionally satisfying? And so, the thing that I’m worried about is by using that phrase, “motivate behavior change,” people are really limiting themselves in how they think about the different ways to design for behavior change.
- Lori: It’s interesting to me, coming from, you know, having a background as a teacher. I can remember from my **initial** teacher training, we were often...it was either **implied** or— or sometimes even **overtly** stated that the idea was, “You have to motivate your students. You have to do things to keep their motivation up.” And— and of course, you know, [as a teacher] you want to be motivating and inspiring to people. But when I saw your video, your presentation about the motivation wave, it’s kind of

like, **a little bell went off** that— you know, that it makes so much sense. Could you just explain just the basic, basic idea about the motivation wave — talking about the peaks and valleys, and difficult and hard?

BJ: Everyone, I think, has experienced this phenomenon in their life where they get excited about doing some behavior or some set of behaviors like, getting healthier or reducing stress. Now that excitement, as it goes up, I decided to call that, a “motivation wave” because it will go up but it will also come back down. So, it’s not a constant thing. And what the motivation wave allows you to do, when the motivation wave is high — you can do hard things, you can spend lots of time, you can put in a lot of effort, you can persist through **hardship** if your motivation is high. And as your motivation comes down, you can’t do the hard things any-



Motivation naturally goes up and down, like a wave

more, you only can do simple things.

And so **the key** to understand...there's **a few keys**: Number one, that motivation won't always be high. That goes up and down. And then two, when motivation is high, that's the right time to get yourself or other people to do hard things. And when motivation is low, you can't do hard things; what you *can* do are simple things. And so designing — if you're trying to get yourself to study more or exercise more or **what have**

you and your motivation's really low, then you should take, let's say, the study task, and **break it down** to just three minutes and say, "Okay, I'm only going to study for three minutes. And within three minutes, I'm done." Instead of forcing yourself or saying, "Oh, I have to study for an hour," and then your brain finds excuses not to do it at all. Like, zero.

Lori: Oh yeah.

BJ: And so what happens in a lot of people that say "Great! I'm just going to do three minutes," once they get started, they're like, "Oh! I'll do another three minutes...oh! I'll do another three minutes." So there's a **momentum** they build up by doing the small steps. And the motivation actually goes up and they may end up studying an entire hour or longer because that's how their motivation and their interests changed as they were doing it.

Lori: Yeah, I know. I have noticed that myself, many, many times when I have some kind of task that I'm **putting off** because it seems like it's too difficult or I'm just not motivated. But if you can just force yourself to, to sit down and say, "Okay, I'm just going to at least get started; do one tiny little thing," it's so true, that often does happen, that once you get going, you sort of build a momentum and you end up doing a lot more than you planned in the beginning.

BJ: Yeah, so that's what you do when motivation's low. When motivation's high, when you're in high motivation, that's the time to change your **environment**, get the materials you need, get the...let me give you an example.

Lori: Sure.

Study for
a whole hour?
Seriously?
Oo.



**When motivation
is low**

Has it
already been
a whole hour?
No way!
Oo.



**When motivation is
high**

BJ: One of the habits I'm doing right now is, I'm practicing whiteboarding. I'm practicing with **markers** writing on a whiteboard. You know, like teachers do.

Lori: Right.

BJ: And I want my handwriting to get much, much better and so, I'm practicing every day. And **in fact**, I'm doing it right now.

Lori: Yeah?

BJ: Just— yeah, because this is how I practice. But anyway, what I did was...



markers

Final words

That's the end of part one of this conversation with Dr. BJ Fogg. Did you notice how nervous I sounded? That's because BJ is one of my heroes, and I kind of felt like a little fangirl talking to one of my favorite rockstars!

Until next time, here are four ideas for things you can do to get the most benefit from this conversation.

1. If listening to this episode was challenging for you, you can prepare for part two by studying the transcript and listening repeatedly to the conversation. If any words are really causing trouble for your understanding, make sure to look them up. If you do this over the next few days, the second part of the conversation should be easier because more of the language will be familiar.
2. Make a prediction! Based on what you heard in this conversation so far, what do you think BJ did to make it easier to practice his whiteboarding every day? There is a big clue toward the end of the conversation. Then next week, listen to see if you were right.
3. If you need to talk about charts and graphs to pass an exam, here's a great chance to practice. Think about your own motivation to learn English, and how it changes over time. Is it steady, or does it fluctuate? If it fluctuates, how dramatic are the changes? How often? Draw a simple graph of your English learning motivation and practice explaining it to a friend. Or post it on my Facebook page and explain it there!

4. In the transcript and on the website I've put a link to a Youtube video where [BJ explains the motivation wave](#). BJ is a great speaker, and if your listening is intermediate or above, I encourage you to watch the video so you can learn more about how to make the most of your motivation. This will also help you prepare for part two of our conversation.

That brings us to the end of this episode of Real English Conversations. Make sure to download the transcript for this episode so you can read along to check your understanding. The transcript also has notes about the language we use in the conversation, and explains a lot of the vocabulary.

You can find the transcript at betteratenglish.com/transcripts.

Until next time, have fun practicing your English! If you have questions or suggestions about what you would like to hear in these podcasts, I'd love to hear them. You can find all the ways to get in touch with me Betteratenglish.com/contact.
Bye for now!

Vocabulary and usage notes

depend on

to rely on, to trust that someone or something will do something for you

Example:

You can't *depend on* motivation for learning English, because motivation goes up and down. It's better to create good language learning habits.

summon up

to make something appear or happen, usually within yourself.

Examples:

1. It's hard to *summon up* the courage to ask your boss for a raise.
2. If you can *summon up* the courage to start speaking English, you will see that it gets easier with practice.



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to boost

to help something to improve or to increase

Example:

The article has 5 tips to *boost* your motivation to exercise.

to motivate

to make someone want to do something, or to feel excited about doing it. Grammar point: -ed and -ing adjectives are different, You *feel motivated* by things that *are motivating*.

Example:

All the listeners felt *motivated* to learn English after listening to BJ's *motivating* presentation.

to facilitate

to make something easier to do or happen

Example:

Effective teachers are always looking for ways to *facilitate* their students' learning.

I wonder if you could...

Beginning a request with "I wonder if you could..." makes it sound less direct (and more polite). Note: this is not a direct question, so there is no question mark (?) at the end.

Example:

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what you mean by "facilitating behavior change."

reward

A *reward* is something that gives you a feeling of satisfaction, pleasure or accomplishment.

It is very *rewarding* to notice your progress when you're learning a language.

initial (adj.)

at the start or beginning of something

Example:

It only takes a few seconds for us to form an *initial* (first) impression of someone we meet.

implied (to imply)

to express something without saying it directly

Example:

The confused faces of the students *implied* that they didn't understand the teacher's question.

overtly (adv.)

expressed in a direct or open way

Example:

Overtly political example sentences are not a good idea in a dictionary. It is safer to be neutral.

a little bell went off

A phrase that describes the feeling of suddenly noticing or understanding something important. Similar to having a *light bulb moment*.

Example:

When I first met her it was like *a little bell went off* in my head. I knew right then that I had found my business partner.

hardship

A difficult or unpleasant situation situation or condition

Example:

She faced many *hardships* while growing up. Her family was poor, and both of her parents were mentally ill.

key - a few keys

A key (n.) is something that is very important (or the most important). You can also use *key* (adj.) to describe something as important.

Example:

1. *The key to success* is to never give up. Keep trying!
2. The speaker made three *key* points in her presentation.

and/or what have you

A fixed phrase, similar to *et cetera* or *etc.* Often used at the end of a list to mean “other similar things.”

Example:

You can make a healthy vegetable soup with carrots, broccoli, spinach *or what have you*. Use any vegetables that you like.

to break sth. down

To divide something big or complex into smaller parts so that it is easier to understand or do.

Example:

Writing a paper or report is much easier if you *break it down* into small parts. Do one small part every day.

momentum

A force that keeps something moving or developing once it has started

Example:

Having a series of small successes gives you the *momentum* to keep studying. Once you see that you get results, it is hard to stop!

to put (sth) off

To delay, to postpone, to do or move something to a later time

Example:

Many people do their best work in the morning. If they *put it off* until the afternoon, they don't work as well.

environment

The conditions and circumstances that you live or work in and how they affect you

Example:

Your working *environment* can have a big effect on your productivity.

marker

a kind of colored pen

Example:

Teachers often use different colored *markers* to explain grammar on the whiteboard. It makes it easier to understand.

in fact

An expression to show that something you say is surprising or not what your listener would expect.

Example:

I like to write email while I am walking at my treadmill desk. *In fact*, I'm walking on it as I write this!