

Introduction to The PIG

The Problem with Instant Gratification, AKA The PIG, is something that's discussed in a number of different programs that are designed to support people with changing unwanted, or what I prefer to call ineffective behaviour patterns. When we really stop to take a look at it, the Problem with Instant Gratification is actually a societal issue that generally shows up all over the place. For example, many people experience the PIG as what I call the "Next Shiny Thing" syndrome. Constantly looking for the external reward that's going to fill the internal void that a lot of people aren't even aware they have. If you find yourself constantly upgrading your electronic devices, things like your phone or TV, despite the fact the ones you have are totally fine. Or, if you're always looking to move to a bigger and better house, chasing the faster more expensive car, or even never feeling satisfied with the relationship you're in, it might just be that you have a Problem with Instant Gratification that's actually masking an underlying issue.

In the world of Behaviour Change, The Problem with Instant Gratification is something we have to be extremely aware of, because it plays a significant role in pretty much everything we do. Changing addictive, obsessive, or compulsive coping mechanisms is an incredibly difficult thing to do. One of the main reasons for this is because our brains have been wired, often for a really long time, to seek the instant reward of escaping from the uncomfortable emotional experience we're currently having. This is the exact reason we turn to the specific behavioural response that we've created over time. This response has become a very effective short-term solution to all of our problems, instantly. The issue with this is that it doesn't actually solve the problem in any way, it just shuts down the feelings we have for a short period of time.

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~Steven Morris RP.

The Problem with Instant Gratification can also show up when we're actually making the behavioral changes that we want to make. In the beginning of my own journey, when I started exploring my own internal world, I was bombarded with "aha moment" every single day. This too was instantly rewarding, and it created more and more motivation to keep doing this work, pushing me to learn about why I do what I do. The issue with this was that there is only a certain amount of "Aha Moments" a person can have. Sooner or later, the instant reward I was getting from all these amazing realizations and revelations began to slow down, and as a result, so did my motivation to keep doing the work.

This euphoric phenomenon often gets labeled as the “Pink Cloud” and it’s a period of time when we can’t understand why we didn’t do this before, and the world seems like a better place because of all the wonderful things we are experiencing right now. As I said before, the issue is that once this wears off, we can often fall back into our previous behaviours pretty quickly, because of the instant reward we’re seeking from the experience of solving our problems in this old familiar way. So, how do we work with the PIG, and how do we build the internal motivation that’s required to keep Living the Life we Want to Live?

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The secret lies in the Dialectical Behaviour Therapy skill called Noticing Positive Events. To build internal motivation we have to create our ability to acknowledge the things we do well, without externally seeking reward for these particular actions. Internal acknowledgment involves noticing the parts of our personality that have completed effective behaviours. Bringing authentic gratitude and appreciation to these parts activates dopamine in our system, which in turn builds motivation for these parts to keep doing the things they’re currently doing.

When we mindfully acknowledge our behaviours this way, taking the time to authentically recognize the achievements connected to them, the parts of our personality that often feel a general lack of appreciation for whatever it is that they do, usually because we are focussed on stopping the ineffective behaviours that other people will judge, are motivated to do more. On the following pages of this PDF, there is a worksheet that’s designed to create the narrative we need to build our appreciation for the parts that are participating in the effective behaviour patterns we want to acknowledge. Take some time to go through the work and build this narrative into your daily mindfulness work.

Today I was challenged by... (Acknowledge a situation you found difficult today).

What I could do differently is... (Build awareness for the behaviour that could help you in the future).

Today I had success with... (Notice all the situations you had success with today).

The parts of me I am grateful for are... (Acknowledge the parts that were involved in achieving these things)
