

How to Motivate Yourself to Get to the Gym

My senior year of high school, I decided to try and knock out a few prerequisite classes at the local junior college before moving to Austin and officially becoming a Texas Longhorn. Along with Algebra (blech!) and Texas and U.S. History, I signed up for Intro to Sociology. It's safe to say that I, rather ironically, treated my senioritis with a nightly overdose of homework.

While I can't recall what a polynomial equation is, who led the Texian Army at the Battle of San Jacinto or where Paul Revere was headed to on his gallant midnight ride, I absolutely *can* recollect one fancy academic vocabulary word taught in my sociology class: *McDonaldization*. (Go figure.)

The term ***McDonaldization*** was invented by sociologist George Ritzer in 1993 to describe the sociological phenomenon that's transformed our culture into one giant fast-food restaurant—minus the cool playgrounds and creepy mascots. Simply put, our society possesses many of the same characteristics as your neighborhood McDonald's.

For example, at any typical fast-food joint, you will find the following four primary devices at work making your experience fast and ensuring the establishment remains a well-oiled (or should I say well-*greased!*) machine: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control.

You get your food fast (efficiency). The quantity of food provided literally outweighs the quality (calculability). Your food will cost, look and taste the same no matter which location you patronize, be it in Anchorage, Alaska, or Tyler, Texas (predictability). The process by which you get your food has been perfected to a Henry Ford-inspired science that is

simply overseen by employees but carried out by gadgets and appliances that beep, hum, sizzle and ding, drowning out the natural—and more agrarian, perhaps—noises of human conversation (control).

While a case could be made explaining how each of the four elements above promote and perpetuate the give-it-to-me-quick mentality that defines our modern, first-world existence, I'm choosing to focus only on *efficiency* because I think it lends itself to the McDonaldization, if you will, of 21st-century **fitness**.

For example, most gyms today are strategically built in densely populated areas to attract as many customers as possible. They typically offer incredible New Year's and summer specials to motivate people to join and get into "the best shape ever!" The majority of gyms today feature state-of-the-art equipment and maybe even a steam room, sauna or smoothie bar to boot. Some are even open 24 hours a day.

Getting a great deal on a gym membership in January or starting a **weight-loss program** that guarantees you'll be bikini-ready by June may be inexpensive and promise quick results. These may seem like wise investments and efficient expenditures of time—a no-brainer. Indeed, none of these markers of efficiency are inherently harmful, in my opinion; they make good business sense, and I think you'd agree.

But given that 67 percent of gym members don't go to their gym and 80 percent of the New Year's resolution crowd put down their dumbbells and jump off their treadmills by the second week of February, there's got to be something missing.

I believe the missing ingredient is what's left out of our morning trip to the ATM machine, our fast-food lunch break and our online class or Amazon purchase. It's what has been overshadowed and replaced by technology and defended by an argument for convenience.

It's human interaction.

When you walk into a gym, you may have a brief conversation with a receptionist, who will likely greet you and hand you a towel—although you could very well be welcomed only by a card or keytag reader. Then, if you're not taking a group fitness class or meeting with a trainer, you'll likely spend an hour or so relying solely on the music playing through your headphones to motivate you through your workout.

You might wave to a familiar face over by the free weights or engage in small talk in the locker room, but all in all, it's a "McFitness" experience: You leave the gym as one in a sea of customers whose fitness meal has been pre-prepared, effortlessly served and hastily eaten as you rush to move on with your day.

As it turns out, McDonaldization produces myriad unexpected outcomes that fly in the face of this very "rational" economic organism. In the fast-food world, over-rationalization presents itself in long lines at peak hours. In preservatives and additives that harm both humans and the environment. In the overuse of bags, boxes and straws that pollute our planet. In food that's been questionably or unethically cultivated and in final products that compromise the health of its consumers.

With fast-food fitness, I believe a type of over-rationality is tenuously contained beneath the conveniences of joining a health club and the efficient ways in which gyms operate. We've made the mistake of thinking we can be **motivated** to maintain our fitness and focus on our health when the price is right, when the time is right and when we can afford to go to the gym with the basketball court, swimming pool and cardio theater.

We've made the unfortunate mistake of thinking all we need are promotions and amenities when what we really need is each

other.

You may know that my husband and I own a **CrossFit** box in San Antonio, and before I continue I want you to know right away that this is *not* a plug for CrossFit. It's a plug for **relationships**. With that said, I want to tell you that I cannot count the number of people who have related to me, in one way or another, how badly they wish they would have joined CrossFit sooner.

Some say they used to go to the gym *maybe* once a week, others once a month. They didn't feel motivated because they had nothing to look forward to. Now they eagerly anticipate not only a great workout but seeing their fitness family, as corny as that sounds. One woman told me, with tears in her eyes, that she felt completely invisible at her old gym; she's touched whenever CrossFit friends text or Facebook her whenever she's missed class.

The **Bible** says, "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. ... A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken" (Eccl. 4:9-10, 12, NLT).

If you often feel lethargic, uninspired, foggy-headed and even irritable at the gym, could it be you've been consuming too much fast-food fitness? If so, I encourage you to join a group of people who will push and encourage you daily, help you fight when defeat seems near, and ask "Where were you?" when you miss a day. This missing ingredient could make all the difference.

This article was originally posted here.

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