

UNITED WISDOM

Commitment after enthusiasm has faded

Freedom and Action

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Epigraph

> *put more sustained effort*

Kennon Sheldon and Andrew Elliot, “Goal Striving, Need Satisfaction, and Longitudinal Well-Being” (1999), author abstract. The fragment concerns people pursuing goals consistent with their developing interests and core values.

What this article is about

We often make a promise when the future looks particularly appealing. We want to host a discussion, learn a skill, help a friend, or bring a shared project to completion. Later, what remains is a calendar, work to do, and people relying on an agreement. The feeling that accompanied our decision may fade before the agreed period ends. It is easy to treat that loss of excitement as a final answer: there is no longer a reason to continue. Another quick answer demands completion at any cost, as though changed circumstances had no significance.

Between these responses lies the work of making distinctions. What exactly was promised? Do we still endorse the goal? Has the task become boring, or have its conditions actually changed? Who is relying on the promise, and what would revision mean for them? Motivation research can clarify some of these questions, but it cannot decide what we owe other people. This article considers one accepted commitment after enthusiasm has faded: how to continue in a workable form or discuss a change in time, while remaining precise and considerate toward everyone involved.

I. Feelings change faster than agreements

Consider a hypothetical situation. Nadezhda agrees to lead six meetings of a small book club. The first discussion is lively: people bring examples from their lives, disagree, and choose the next book. She enjoys preparing questions. A month later, preparation no longer feels rewarding. After a day at work, she would rather do something else, and the next book takes concentration. Meanwhile, the other members have read it, set aside an evening, and are expecting another meeting. In this scene, a particular feeling has disappeared. The agreement and the actions other people have taken on its basis still exist.

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The scene does not establish that Nadezhda must hold every meeting under all circumstances. We do not know her current workload, condition, or the details of her promise. Nor does the absence of excitement establish that the agreement has lost all significance. Unless that condition was discussed beforehand, the members did not agree to depend on a daily assessment of her inspiration. A practical question follows: what role did the initial enjoyment play in her consent? Did it help her recognise something worthwhile, provide the main condition for participating, or simply accompany the decision? These possibilities give different grounds for the conversation that follows.

A commitment connects moments in which a person feels differently. That connection makes it useful: we can agree on something beforehand and act even when our mood no longer resembles the earlier one. The connection also needs limits. Our future selves have finite resources and need to consider new information. A well-formed promise therefore depends on a clear account of its content and a way to discuss substantial changes. A constant feeling is an unreliable sole criterion. It is more useful to ask whether the reason for agreeing still holds and whether a way of carrying out the commitment remains available.

II. What exactly was promised?

Before judging our capacity to persevere, we can reconstruct the agreement. Sometimes a person promised a result by a certain date. Sometimes they agreed to several meetings, a defined amount of help, or participation until an initial review. Consent can also be less clear: an invitation to try something together may have meant a short experiment to one person and continuing support to another. Disappointment then concerns more than a loss of enthusiasm. Expectations differed from the start. Until that difference is named, each side may regard its own understanding as obvious and interpret the other's behaviour as a breach of a clear rule.

In Nadezhda's club, ordinary details matter. Were precisely six meetings discussed? Did she take on the preparation of questions, or only the role of facilitating the conversation? Could the work be shared among members? What was said about absences or a change of format? Answers confine responsibility to a particular undertaking. A sweeping declaration that she is unreliable extends it to her whole personality while doing little to organise the next meeting. An accurate record of the promise does not ensure easy fulfilment, but it reveals what was accepted, what is assumed, and where clarification is needed.

A personal intention differs substantially from a promise someone else relies on. A person who decides to read in the evenings can change that routine without consulting a book club. If other people have arranged their time and preparation around that person, revision affects a shared undertaking. This distinction does not make every expectation obligatory: an expectation may be unfounded, and consent may be absent. It invites us to examine where expectations came

from. Who agreed to what, which conditions did they understand, and where was something added that nobody explicitly accepted?

III. A goal we can still endorse

A loss of enjoyment sometimes reveals that the original goal was chosen according to someone else's model. Sometimes it reflects an ordinary encounter with the difficult part of a worthwhile undertaking. It helps to distinguish these cases by examining our present relationship to the goal, rather than demanding the return of its original vividness. Nadezhda may still value discussing books with other people even though preparing particular meetings has become tiring. Alternatively, she may realise that she wanted one conversation but agreed to lead an entire series without noticing the difference. These accounts call for different decisions. They can also overlap: the value remains, while the chosen format proves excessive.

Sheldon and Elliot examine goal self-concordance: consistency with a person's developing interests and core values. In the available author abstract, they report that pursuing such goals is associated with more sustained effort and a greater likelihood of attainment; attaining self-concordant goals brings greater benefits for well-being through psychological need satisfaction. Their model fitted three longitudinal datasets satisfactorily. This is the authors' account of empirical relationships. The abstract is the scope used here: this article does not reconstruct unread methods, sample composition, or results tables.

The source supports asking whether we endorse a goal; it does not determine which promise we may fairly cancel. One person's well-being and other people's interests are related without automatically coinciding. We may discover that an undertaking no longer fits our interests and still have reason to complete a limited part or help arrange a replacement. We may retain the goal's value while being unable to perform the original amount of work. The empirical language of motivation names one aspect of the situation. A decision about a commitment also requires attention to its recipient, conditions, consequences, and available alternatives.

IV. Enjoyment and endorsement play different roles

Endorsing an action need not mean enjoying each moment of it. In their account of self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci distinguish intrinsic motivation from forms of regulation of actions performed for a separate outcome. Someone may regard an undertaking as important and integrate it with their values even when the operation itself is unexciting. Preparing questions, checking the participants' list, or clearing up after a meeting may remain ordinary work. The absence of enjoyment in that work does not by itself establish that the entire goal was imposed or that the original consent was insincere.

The same approach distinguishes an endorsed reason for action from internal pressure involving guilt, anxiety, or the protection of self-esteem. Yet we cannot reliably assign these categories to a person on the basis of one remark about laziness or one difficult evening. We can clarify our own account: what we want to preserve, what we fear, which outcome we value, and which judgement we are trying to avoid. Nadezhda might find both an interest in the discussions and a fear of appearing unreliable. The second motive does not erase the first. Understanding their relationship is more useful than immediately declaring the commitment wholly free or wholly forced.

The practical effect of this distinction is to identify what might need to change. If the conversation remains valuable but preparation is excessive, a simpler meeting format may be worth exploring. If recognition turns out to have been the only valued outcome, we can honestly examine the limits of the original agreement. If the main difficulty comes from having to appear inspired all the time, perhaps the display of excitement can be dropped while the concrete work continues. None of these conclusions follows automatically. Autonomy involves being able to endorse the grounds for our action; it does not require solitude, freedom from responsibilities, or continuous pleasure.

V. New circumstances change what needs assessing

A commitment is accepted on the basis of a limited picture of the future. Available time, necessary skills, conditions of participation, or information about consequences may subsequently change. Discovering a difficulty also differs from encountering a fundamentally new obstacle. Reading takes longer than expected: that is one situation. A continuing additional workload arises that cannot be combined with the original schedule: that is another. The undertaking involves danger or coercion: that is a third. To assess continuation, we need an account of what changed and how it affects the specific promise. A general reference to lost motivation may conceal an important difference.

In the hypothetical club, Nadezhda can identify what has become unavailable: two hours of preparation, a late meeting time, the chosen frequency, or participation itself. Different proposals follow. Reducing preparation, moving the discussion, sharing facilitation, or ending the series have different costs for members. Our estimate of our resources is often approximate, so setting a trial period and revisiting the question can be reasonable. A trial still requires the agreement of those affected. A private decision about convenience does not automatically make a new arrangement suitable for the shared undertaking.

The boundaries of a promise matter especially here. This article concerns voluntary participation and everyday agreements; it does not establish rules for treatment, professional safety, or legal obligations. Dangerous or coercive relationships should not be maintained through an appeal to preserve enthusiasm or prove perseverance. Safety and support

appropriate to the circumstances take priority in such cases. That boundary changes the question itself. Before choosing how to continue, we need to establish whether participation is acceptable and possible. Perseverance that ignores conditions may preserve the form of a promise while undermining its reasonable basis.

VI. A plan can make fulfilment easier

When the goal is still endorsed and the necessary amount of work remains possible, the difficulty sometimes lies in organising action. Each time, a person chooses the moment again, searches for materials, remembers the agreement, or competes with more noticeable demands. In the author abstract of their 2006 review, Gollwitzer and Sheeran describe implementation intentions: a previously specified connection between a situation and a response. They report a positive average effect on goal attainment across 94 independent tests. This describes the overall result of a review; it does not promise success for every club member or for the particular trial proposed here.

Nadezhda could select an available moment for preparation and define a limited result: after a particular household task, open the selected chapter and write down two questions for discussion. The example shows how a beginning can become recognisable and less uncertain. It does not establish that two questions suit every club, that the necessary resources will appear, or that interest will return. The prepared action still needs to serve the agreed format. If members need different work, a convenient small plan cannot replace it without discussion. The organisation of fulfilment remains subordinate to the purpose and conditions of the commitment.

A repeated component may gradually require fewer separate decisions, but this too has limits. Wood and Rünger distinguish habitual context responses from action guided by current goals. In the preliminary version of their review used here, they describe the interaction of these processes and explain why a stable cue is not the same as continuing conscious endorsement. A preparation routine can support the undertaking while the format is suitable. If circumstances change substantially, its ease does not establish that continuation is necessary. A plan helps us act; determining an acceptable goal remains a separate task.

VII. Steadiness involves choice

Book II of the Nicomachean Ethics connects the development of character with repeated action. Aristotle also distinguishes an outwardly appropriate act from the action of someone who knows what they are doing, chooses it, and acts from a steady disposition. This is a philosophical question about character, rather than a contemporary experimental model of habit. For our topic, it is useful because it prevents us from assessing continuation solely by its visible sequence. Holding every meeting may preserve a worthwhile undertaking; it may also maintain a form that no longer fits considered choice and damages relationships.

Aristotle's attention to circumstances provides no ready arithmetic. Proportion cannot be obtained by assigning half of every original workload or choosing a midpoint between complete continuation and immediate cancellation. Sometimes the original amount is appropriate; sometimes a much smaller amount is; sometimes participation needs to end. The grounds lie in the specific undertaking, available capacities, and consequences. The reader is not invited to declare a decision virtuous simply because it appears moderate. The invitation is to examine whether it preserves a reasonable relationship between the goal, the action, and the people affected.

Steadiness, understood this way, includes both the ability to tolerate ordinary difficulty and the ability to recognise substantial change. Those capacities may call for different actions even though both begin with pausing and clarifying. Nadezhda need not prove the club's value anew every day if her reasons for agreeing are clear and its conditions remain possible. Periodic review can nevertheless reveal when the familiar format no longer fits those reasons. A freely chosen commitment gains support from intelligible grounds and finite boundaries. Clearer boundaries reduce the need to hold the entire undertaking together through a feeling of exhilaration alone.

VIII. Revision takes place among participants

A change in personal assessment does not yet change the agreement. If Nadezhda decides that she can no longer prepare meetings in the same way, the members still have their earlier understanding. A conversation is needed between that decision and a new format. It can begin with facts and a specific limitation: which amount of work has become unavailable, what remains possible, and which options are workable. It matters not to make a new promise merely to relieve the discomfort of the conversation. An offer that feels generous at the time but again exceeds available resources transfers the same problem to the next date.

Sharing preparation, reducing frequency, or ending after a particular meeting can be presented as proposals. Other people may agree, suggest something else, or decline. We cannot assume that a member wants to lead the club simply because they enjoy discussing

books. Nor does disappointment establish that every change is unfair. Someone can acknowledge another person's difficult reaction while having a serious reason to revise their participation. An honest conversation preserves both sides: one's own limitation and the other's actual freedom to respond. It does not replace that response with a convenient guess.

Some changes require time for people to rearrange their plans. Others may be so urgent that the earlier arrangement cannot continue. This article does not prescribe a universal notice period. It proposes considering what has already been done in reliance on the promise and what available actions might reduce the consequences: handing over materials, clarifying the remaining work, naming a feasible part, or helping identify an alternative with participants' agreement. These are ways to make responsibility concrete; they do not guarantee the restoration of trust. Their value depends on circumstances and actual fulfilment. A promise to fix everything immediately can increase uncertainty again.

IX. Consequences survive a new explanation

Even an agreed revision does not erase costs already incurred. Someone bought the book, declined another invitation, or spent time preparing. A new decision may be necessary while its consequences remain unpleasant. Acknowledging them does not require judging ourselves to be bad people. It requires maintaining the connection between the accepted agreement and the other person's actual situation. An explanation of motivation may make the change understandable, but cannot itself return time or cancel disappointment. Research language is particularly easy to overextend here: a finding about self-concordant goals is not a ready justification for every cancellation.

Repair also has limits. Handing over materials may be helpful without being equivalent to the promised conversation. An extra meeting may help some members and inconvenience others. It is therefore reasonable to ask what help people actually need and to offer what is available. Every revision need not become an indefinite debt payable only through further excessive effort. Acknowledging a consequence and choosing a workable action are connected steps. Uncertainty remains between them: another member may assess the situation differently and reject the proposed compensation.

Future promises matter too. After this assessment, Nadezhda might offer another series in a clearer form: a limited number of meetings, shared preparation, and a review date. That does not turn the earlier difficulty into a mistake she should never have allowed. It provided information about the actual workload and the format's compatibility with her interests. The information is useful when it influences new agreements. If someone repeatedly relies on the brightest moment and ignores a known cost, the promise again becomes dependent on a change of mood, while others expect a steadier basis.

X. After enthusiasm, a workable decision remains

Return to the hypothetical club. Nadezhda finds that her interest in the discussions remains, while preparation took too much time. She asks members which elements they actually value and proposes changes to the remaining meetings. This ending is possible, but not compulsory. In different circumstances, a reasonable outcome might be completing the accepted series without beginning another, transferring facilitation to a willing member, or ending participation with an explanation of a serious limitation. The article does not choose the happy outcome for everyone. It identifies the information needed to avoid treating reduced excitement as the sole ground for a decision.

The criterion for continuation becomes clearer when it includes three relationships. The person still endorses the goal. A workable way of acting is available. Other participants' conditions are accounted for in the current agreement. These relationships can diverge, and each needs its own work. Organisation does not create endorsement; endorsement does not produce extra hours; another person's consent does not make every workload bearable. We can therefore describe the specific difficulty and change the corresponding part. Sometimes a new plan for fulfilment is enough. Sometimes the format needs revision or participation needs to end. A general judgement of perseverance does little to distinguish these possibilities.

A commitment after enthusiasm has faded can become calmer and more precise. This does not promise that work will cease to be difficult or that every conversation will preserve a relationship. It offers a way to act with attention to what is now known and what was already accepted. The initial feeling remains part of the decision's history. It helped us begin, but need not sustain the entire journey. Continuation gains support from clear reasons, a workable form, and consideration for others' expectations. Revision gains support from named circumstances, concrete proposals, and acknowledged consequences. Both require more attention than an immediate attempt to recover inspiration.

What this means in practice

For one voluntary commitment, you can make a limited assessment. Choose an undertaking that can be described concretely: the promise's content, recipient, amount, and duration. If there was no actual consent, begin by clarifying expectations rather than accepting an unlimited obligation. Do not use this trial for dangerous or coercive participation; treatment, safety, and legal obligations call for decisions appropriate to their own domains.

First, record what was accepted and the conditions you expected. Separately name your present relationship to the goal: its value remains, has become uncertain, or requires new information. Then describe the limitation without a general judgement of personality. Preparation may take more time than is available; the earlier moment may no longer fit; a

necessary skill may still be missing. A loss of enjoyment can accompany any of these possibilities, so it does not replace assessing them.

If the goal and feasibility remain, choose one observable next step and a suitable situation for it. Bound preparation by a real result that meets the agreement. If the shared undertaking needs to change, formulate a workable proposal and discuss it with those affected. Ask what they have already done in reliance on the promise and what feasible help they would find useful. Do not decide their participation for them.

Set a point for reassessment: after the next meeting or another limited stage. Check whether fulfilment has become workable, whether you still endorse the goal, and whether members understand the new format. The result may be continuation, another clarification, or completion of your participation. This sequence is an editorial trial for clarifying a situation, rather than a universally validated research method. Its nearest outcome is a more precise next decision; the return of excitement is not a required measure of success.

Key quotation

> *reap greater well-being benefits*

Kennon Sheldon and Andrew Elliot, the same work (1999), author abstract. The authors refer to the attainment of self-concordant goals, not to the benefits of fulfilling every promise.

Connections between traditions

• Goal self-concordance in Sheldon and Elliot ↔ autonomous endorsement in Ryan and Deci. These approaches clarify one's relationship to a goal; they do not determine ethical obligations toward another person.

• Intrinsic motivation ↔ integrated regulation in self-determination theory. Enjoyment of an action and endorsement of its separate outcome can have different grounds.

• Implementation planning in Gollwitzer and Sheeran ↔ context-dependent habit in Wood and Rünger. Both attend to situations, but a prepared response serving a chosen goal is not identical to an established habit.

• Character development in Aristotle ↔ psychological accounts of repeated action. The philosophical question includes knowledge and choice; frequency and ease alone do not answer it.

• Proportionate action in ancient ethics ↔ reviewing the feasibility of a shared format. The comparison helps frame a question about circumstances; the present-day agreement remains a separate matter for discussion.

Sources

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5. Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, Book II, English translation by W.D. Ross, Internet Classics Archive. Chapters1,2,4,6 used; role: character, choice, and attention to circumstances, without equating them with experimental psychology.

Tags

commitment, promise, enthusiasm, motivation, self-concordance, autonomy, self-determination, values, interest, enjoyment, regulation, responsibility, agreement, expectations, relationships, feasibility, resources, circumstances, revision, continuation, completion, intention, planning, habit, character, choice, proportion, consequences, preparation, trust

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