Dopamine and Motivation

Dopamine does a variety of different things. (Like keep me from shaking – Parkinson's)
In the news it is usually referred to as a "pleasure chemical".
But dopamine does not produce the actual physical feeling of pleasure.
It is related to pleasure - released after experiencing something productive or pleasurable.
Dopamine is involved in motivation/pursuit. It says: "do more of that."

In this context, dopamine's normal/natural function is to motivate activities that help you survive and thrive like searching for food, learning, achieving goals, connecting socially.

2 Ways to Release Dopamine: Effort/Slow/Earned vs. Easy/Fast/Cheap

Easy dopamine – things that give instant gratification: drugs, alcohol, gambling, scrolling, porn, emotional shopping, video games, highly processed sugary junk food and drinks.

3 results of easy dopamine causing big dopamine spikes and crashes: (Desensitization)
1. Reducing the amount of active dopamine receptors results in cells being less sensitive; thus more of the stimulus is needed to get the previous result. (tolerance)

2. Reducing the amount of dopamine results in a lower baseline (lowers motivation).
So you need to have the stimulus just to feel normal.
Can result in an inability to find pleasure in normal experiences. (anhedonia)

3. The brain learns to expect large easy amounts of dopamine reducing interest in sources of dopamine that take time and effort. (narrows motivation)

Classic example of lower and narrower motivation is the college student who flunks out because he stops going to class and just stays in his room and plays video games.

Typically, the negative results of habitually releasing too much easy dopamine can be reversed. Abstain from the source and the dopamine system reset in about a month.

Effortful dopamine does not produce the negative results associated with easy dopamine.
Effortful dopamine - exercising, cooking, learning, work projects, hobbies, acts of service, solving a problem, anything concluded by dusting your hands off in satisfaction.

1 Cor. 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

The way to be mastered by your dopamine: choose activities that release easy dopamine.
The way to be master of your dopamine: choose activities that release effortful dopamine.