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Your EAP news

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Setting SMART goals for success

In life and in work, setting a goal can be the first step toward achievement. With a goal in place, a standard has been set, and you understand where you want to go. To set goals in a way that helps you reach them, make them SMART goals:

Specific: Instead of making a goal to “eat healthier,” “stress less,” or “save more money,” aim for more specific goals, such as eating five fruits and vegetables daily, meditating for 20 minutes a day, or putting \$20 a week in savings.

Measurable: Make a goal you can measure, such as “work my way up to running three miles by three months,” “sleep at least eight hours a day,” or “cut my social media time to a half hour a day.”

Attainable: Avoid aiming too high or too low. While it is good to push yourself, it is also smart to make sure a goal is one you can reach.

Realistic: Losing 10 pounds a week sounds great, but if a goal is one that is not possible for anyone to reach, you may give up too soon.

Trackable: Set goals that let you track progress. For example, if your goal is to lose 25 pounds in six months, record your progress once a month to make sure you are on track.

The goal-setting process

Goal setting is not a “once-and-done” event. It’s a process that should encourage action and change when needed.

Step 1: Define your dream. These are your outcome goals.

Step 2: Know where you are right now.

Step 3: Decide what you need to develop. These are your priorities.

Step 4: Make a plan for steady improvement. Include actions and affirmations.

Step 5: Set and pursue short-term goals that will lead to long-term goals.

Step 6: Commit to reaching those goals!

Step 7: Adjust as necessary.



Lecturas recomendadas para esta temporada

Tu programa Employee Assistance Program (EAP) también ofrece información útil en español. Para leer los artículos que enviamos este trimestre, visita anthemEAP.com y selecciona español. Encontrarás la lista de temas tratados en esta edición en la sección “Noticias para Usted.”

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Reaching goals

You have determined where you want to go — but how will you reach those goals? The key is to work backward from your goals to build habits.

While goals are about the big picture, habits are the daily actions taken to help reach your goals. For example, imagine your goal is to lose 30 pounds in six months. Your habits could be to walk for 30 minutes a day, eat five fruits and vegetables daily, and cut out fast food, among other steps. Be sure to ask your doctor for advice on health goals.

Remember, goal-reaching is a process, not a perfect line. If unexpected events derail you, reset and keep moving forward.

Sources:
Mayo Clinic. *3 Ways to Get Closer to Achieving Your Goals* (accessed January 2021): mayoclinic.org.
Forbes. *Four Ways to Take Your Goal Setting to the Next Level*, Forbes Communications Council (August 3, 2020): forbes.com.
Goal setting for personal and professional excellence, U.S. Army, Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Introduction (pp. 3-6). (accessed October 2020): lewis-mchord.army.mil.



Creativity can be good for you

According to experts, experiencing creativity has a positive physical effect on brain function.

Daniel K. Hall-Flavin, M.D., M.S., Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Mayo Clinic, says, “Experiencing the arts has the added benefit of stimulating your brain centers and impacting your cognitive functioning. Each experience in appreciating or participating in a wide range of the arts can improve your attention and concentration.” Hall-Flavin says listening to or watching a performance, dancing, or being moved by a piece of art can all affect the brain in positive ways.

Taking part in creative activities also has positive effects. Being creative can:

- **Increase happiness**, since being absorbed in a project can reduce anxiety and boost mood.
- **Reduce dementia**, as it helps people tap back into their personalities and sharpen their senses.
- **Boost the immune system**, especially when writing or listening to music.
- **Make you smarter** in certain cases: For example, it has been shown that musicians have stronger connections between their right and left brains.

To turn creative thinking into a habit, try to:

- **Let your mind wander.** Challenge yourself to think of a number of ideas around a topic or problem at the same time. Write down as much as you can, as small thoughts can lead to bigger ideas.
- **Reduce distraction.** Take a break from the computer or cellphone to tidy up your workspace. That way, you won't become distracted by visual cues when you're trying to focus.
- **Practice mindfulness.** A simple, daily breath meditation is a great way to stimulate creative thought.
- **Read a novel or watch an online performance.** Cultural activities such as watching a play or concert or even just reading a book can strengthen the connections between the two halves of the brain, which helps with creative thought.

Sources:
Mayo Clinic Connect. *Creativity: The More You Use, The More You Have* (June 1, 2019): connect.mayoclinic.org.
Forbes. *Here's How Creativity Actually Improves Your Health* (July 25, 2018): forbes.com.
Fast Company. *This is how to train your brain to be more creative* (May 30, 2019): fastcompany.com.

Practicing your listening skills

Listening is an art, a skill, and a discipline. Becoming a good listener means understanding what is involved and developing the skills to be silent and pay attention. Hearing becomes listening only when you follow what is said very closely. By becoming a better listener, you can also become a better family member, friend, and worker.

To become a more active listener, try working on these key skills during your next conversation:

Avoid distractions.

Focus on what the other person is saying. Don't allow other thoughts or sounds to take over the conversation.

Listen to the details.

Focus on the specific words being used. Each phrase and word choice is something interesting to take in. Take notes, if it feels like the right thing to do.

Think about who is talking.

Do they have a certain situation that makes them see things differently? Recognize that diversity of thought is important.

Listen to the tone of their voice.

Tone of voice can help show what a person might be feeling. Think about what their tone implies.

Ask them to share their feelings.

The more that you follow someone's emotions, the more likely they are to feel understood.



Pay attention to body language and make appropriate eye contact.

Show them you are sharing in their experience.

Don't fight silence.

Say small things like, "yes" and "that makes sense," and let natural silences happen without filling them.

Ask questions.

There's no substitute for a good question. Try for responses that help you understand the big picture, as well as the details.

Sources:
Inc.com. *10 Ways to Immediately Improve Your Listening (and Networking) Skills* (January 10, 2018): inc.com.
Practicing listening skills. U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, Alternative Dispute Resolution. (Accessed January 2021): va.gov.

Your emotional wellness toolkit

How you feel can affect your job, relationships, and overall mental health. That makes emotional wellness an important part of overall health. Emotional wellness is the ability to handle life's stresses and adapt to change and difficult times. The following six strategies can help improve your emotional health.

1: Brighten your outlook.

Experts say that people who are emotionally well have fewer negative emotions and are able to bounce back from problems faster. To develop a more positive mindset:

- Give yourself credit for the good things you do each day.
- Forgive yourself. Everyone makes mistakes.
- Spend more time with friends. Surround yourself with positive, healthy people.
- Develop healthy physical habits. Healthy eating, physical activity, and regular sleep can improve physical and mental health.

2: Reduce stress.

Learning healthy ways to cope with stress can boost resilience and help improve overall health. To help manage stress, make sleep a priority and exercise regularly — just 30 minutes a day of walking can boost mood and reduce stress.

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You can also:

- Set priorities. Decide what must be done and what can wait. Say no to new tasks if they put you into overload.
- Think positive. Note what you accomplished at the end of the day, not what you didn't do.
- Try relaxation methods. Mindfulness, meditation, yoga, or tai chi may help.

If stress becomes too much for you, seek help. Talk to a mental health professional if you feel unable to cope, have suicidal thoughts, or use drugs or alcohol to deal with stress.

3: Focus on quality sleep.

Sleep helps you think more clearly, have faster reflexes, and focus better. Here are tips to sleep better:

- Go to bed at the same time each night, and wake up at the same time each morning.
- Sleep in a dark, quiet, comfortable environment.
- Exercise daily, but not right before bedtime.
- Relax before bedtime, and limit the use of electronics. Try a warm bath or a good book.
- Avoid nicotine, alcohol, and stimulants such as caffeine late in the day.

If you have ongoing sleep problems, consult a healthcare professional.

4: Be mindful.

Mindfulness is about being completely aware of what is happening in the present — of what is going on inside and happening around you. Becoming a more mindful person requires commitment and practice. Here are tips to help you start:

- Take deep breaths. Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4, hold for 1 second, and then exhale through the mouth to a count of 5. Repeat often.

- Enjoy a stroll. As you walk, notice your breath and the sights and sounds around you.
- Practice mindful eating. Be aware of taste, textures, and flavors in each bite, and listen to your body when you are hungry and full.
- Find mindfulness resources in your local and virtual community, including online yoga and meditation classes; mindfulness-based, stress-reduction programs; and books.

5: Cope with loss.

There is no right or wrong way to mourn, but while you are grieving:

- Try to eat right, exercise, and sleep well. Avoid smoking or drinking too much alcohol, which can put your health at risk.
- Talk to caring friends if you can, and consider reaching out to a grief support group. It might help to talk with others who are also grieving.
- Don't make major changes right away. Wait a while before making big decisions like moving or changing jobs.

If you're having trouble with everyday activities, talk to your doctor. Mourning takes time, so be patient with yourself. It's common to have a roller coaster of emotions for a while.

6: Strengthen social connections.

Scientists are finding that people's links to others can have powerful effects on health, emotionally and physically. To build a healthy support system:

- Work on creating strong relationships with your family and friends.
- Join an online group focused on a common interest, such as reading, hiking, or painting.
- Take a virtual class to learn something new.

Source: National Institutes of Health. Emotional wellness toolkit. U.S. National Institutes of Health (Reviewed December 10, 2018): nih.gov.



Schedule a checkup with your doctor to talk about any signs of depression.

Important: This document is intended for general information only. It does not provide the reader with specific direction, advice, or recommendations. You may wish to contact an appropriate professional for questions concerning your particular situation.

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