



The Importance of Setting Goals

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WE HEAR so much about goal setting these days, it can get quite wearing. I mean you don't need to set goals when you're going to do the shopping do you? Or when you're washing the car? Or painting a room?

Or do you?

Let's take a closer look ...

- **Shopping** – you make a list before you go – whether on paper or in your head. And you feel satisfied when you get everything on that list (maybe not overwhelming levels of satisfaction, but a certain glow!). The task is achieved, the job done. You are rewarded with a sense of clarity, of a weight off your shoulders, of a job well done.
- **Washing the car** – you know how you want the wheels to look, whether you care about it being spotless, or just looking less awful. Whatever your goal is, you still set one, be it unspoken and unwritten. And the satisfaction comes from achieving that goal.
- When you begin **painting that room**, you have a goal in mind, You want the room to look more welcoming, less gloomy, better co-ordinated, more modern, less scruffy – whatever! And when you complete it you feel good – because you did what you said you were going to do.

Not so profound huh? No of course not, until you look at what happens *when people stop setting goals*. When depression takes over.

Setting goals to fight depression

Typically, when depressed, people let things mount up. They allow a multitude of small problems to amass until they feel overwhelming. And there are usually one or two larger problems in there as well.

And for various reasons to do with the way depression makes you feel and think, you stop setting goals when you have depression. You stop saying “I wish that car didn't look so awful. It will only take me an hour to fix it”. You stop thinking “I'd like to make that new dish for dinner, I'll get all these ingredients today.”

And what happens? No satisfaction. No sense of completion. Just feelings of more confusion, the pressure of more tasks unachieved, less and less hormonal reward from your brain, and deepening depression.

Small goals - major results

I once heard a seriously depressed man say that the most enjoyable thing he had done all year was to clear the drain of a sink at his work. My colleague Mark Tyrrell was told by a depressed man that he couldn't believe how much he had enjoyed changing the wheel on his motorbike.

One of the most therapeutic things you can do for yourself when depressed is take something small, plan it, and do it- regardless how 'meaningless' it is in the grand scheme of things. And remember – don't just go and do it; plan it first. Even if that is a 10 second thought of "Now I am going to clean the house windows so the place is lighter". That's a plan!

And if you're tempted to think "Oh what's the point", the point is – it will make you feel better. Surely that's point enough?

Planning or setting goals creates a pattern to match your experience to. And satisfaction comes when that pattern is matched.

Further Relationship Skills

Like a popular bank account, people will like you if you pay good interest. Listening properly to people can meet their need for connection, status and intimacy and is a key relationship skill.

Let people know you are listening by:

1. Actually listening to them, nodding, smiling and looking in their general direction.
2. Feeding back what they say; showing them you know they actually said it. And then adding anything of your own. If you don't agree at least acknowledge they've spoken: 'I understand what you mean, however as far as I see it.....', or: 'That's a good idea... and it might be even better if...'

Ask opinions, advice or help

People feel important if you ask them what they think. This meets their need for status.

Talk to them about their concerns and interests

People will feel that you are interesting if you show interest in them. Don't compromise your own personality but be aware of this basic rapport building rule.

Offer help and do favors

People like people who are helpful. Helping people practically meets all kinds of emotional needs (you should, by now, be able to work out which ones ;-)

And smile, smile, smile

Research shows that when you smile at someone 😊 pleasure centers in their brain are stimulated. 😊 People like warmth and will come to associate you with feeling good. 😊 Smiling relaxes people and make them feel they can trust you.

Basic rules on smiling: 😊

- Don't over do it! 😊 Whoops!
- Don't smile when you are anxious, angry or giving negative feedback - it's confusing!
- Don't smile when someone else has stubbed their toe. You smiling when someone else is having a bad time gives the message that you are glad it's not you rather than you wish it wasn't them!

In summary

- Remember that everyone has similar emotional needs (including you!)
- Take these needs into account in social, work and romantic situations
- Keep complaints specific and avoid overgeneralising negatives
- Make compliments specific; give examples to make them 'real'
- Listen and talk about what is important to people. And smile and look interested.

The more you meet others' emotional needs, the more they will like you. The less you step on their emotional needs, the less offence you will cause. And if someone else offends you, check out your basic emotional needs to find out why.

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