

Mindful Living: Your EAP Guide to Wellness

WINTER 2023

MAKING S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

The start of a new year often comes with celebration and traditions. One of those traditions is setting resolutions for the new year. Every year goals are set for self-improvement, wellness, physical health, financial stability, and a litany of other areas. Whether you believe in setting specific goals for yourself, the start of the new year is a good time to reflect on what has been working well in your life and what area(s) need some attention. One particular area of national concern currently is workplace burnout. The year 2022 seems to have been a year of unprecedented burnout in the workplace, adding to the overall stress and anxiety so many are already experiencing.

When we are feeling anxious or stressed about a situation, one of the ways in which we calm our mind is to find a potential solution. Knowing we have some control over our situation and making a plan not only eases our stress level but creates a sense of pleasure, knowing that some relief is on the way. Gaining a sense of mastery over difficult situations is a great way to boost self-confidence as well.

No matter the job title or work that you do, it is important you know your purpose. A sense of purpose leads to a greater sense of belonging, helps us overcome adversity, improves emotional well-being, and can even lead to improved physical health, including reduced risk of chronic diseases



and mortality (1). If you are struggling with burnout or compassion fatigue, having clear, concise career goals can help strengthen connection and purpose. Goals also provide motivational energy, even when motivation is low.

Sometimes, however, resolution goals are quickly forgotten. CNN (2022) reported that nearly 80% of people admit to abandoning their resolutions by February. As the saying goes "failing to plan is planning to fail." With this in mind, learning how to set goals is a vital part of working towards change. Using the S.M.A.R.T. method of goal setting is a systematic way to improve your chances of obtaining success with your New Year's resolutions or any other goals you set for yourself this year.

continued on page 2

Goals should create a framework by which the desired change or target behavior can be achieved. S.M.A.R.T. is a simple acronym to use when outlining your goal:

Specific: Can the goal be defined in a simple sentence and easily articulated? Sometimes we have a general idea of how we want to be better but clearly defining what that looks like and writing it down is a critical first step.

Measurable: Can the goal be incrementally defined and clearly accounted for in degrees of success? In other words, how will I know if I am making progress? Change happens in increments that build upon each other. It is important to know if one is achieving each step in order to know if re-assessment or troubleshooting is needed before moving onto the next step.

Attainable: Is it realistic and is there a clear and concise path by which it can be achieved? For instance, I would not want to set a goal of "better myself in the workplace," as this does not tell me what that looks like or how to get there. It is much better to set a goal of "I will complete two major projects by February 1st."

Relevant: Is the method and means by which the goal is set and measured applicable to the desired outcome? For instance, if my desire is to get promoted in the future, I would need to know if my method and means are likely to increase the desired outcome. For instance, a relevant goal might be something like "I will increase sales by 30% over the next year," or "I will attend a 3-day leadership conference in the spring."

Timely: Can it be accomplished within a relatively short and defined amount of time? Although it is important to have long-term goals, smaller, more achievable goals are likely needed to reach larger goals. Meeting goals also leads to a sense of mastery and personal growth.

By utilizing a more intentional goal setting plan, such as the S.M.A.R.T. method, one can increase their chances of success. This simple method can be used in many settings and with various types of goals.

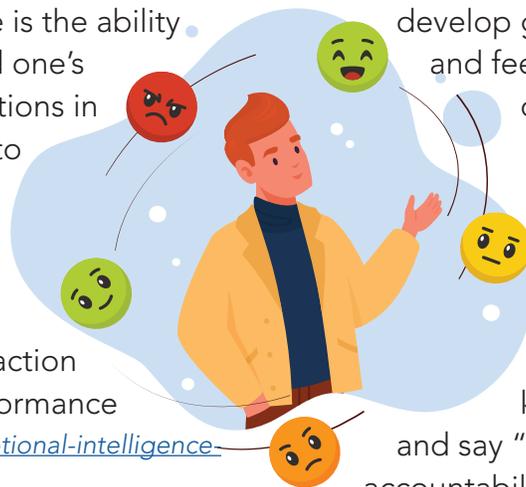
Citations: 1) Kim ES, Chen Y, Nakamura JS, Ryff CD, VanderWeele TJ. Sense of Purpose in Life and Subsequent Physical, Behavioral, and Psychosocial Health: An Outcome-Wide Approach. *Am J Health Promot.* 2022 Jan;36(1):137-147. doi: 10.1177/08901171211038545. Epub 2021 Aug 18. PMID: 34405718; PMCID: PMC8669210

INCREASING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

While emotional intelligence (EI) has been a relatively new area of focus within the commercial world the concept is one that has always been of importance. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to be in touch with and understand one's own emotions, responding to emotions in a way that is healthy and adaptive to difficult circumstances. Research suggests people with higher emotional intelligence have improved mental health, better relationships, and higher job satisfaction as well as increased academic performance (<https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-is-emotional-intelligence-eq>).

Part of optimizing emotional intelligence involves increasing self-awareness. Asking yourself questions

such as "What am I feeling right now?", "How am I being affected by this stressor?", and/or "What am I noticing in my body right now?" can help you develop greater acceptance of your thoughts and feelings while increasing self-compassion. Being able to interpret the messages your body tells you through your emotions is vital in being able to get your needs met and communicate your needs to others. This can include knowing when to ask for help, knowing when to set boundaries and say "no," and knowing when to take accountability for your actions. When you are better aware of your emotions, often as a result, you are also more aware/understanding of others and



continued on page 3

more cognitively flexible.

Cognitive flexibility is the ability to be flexible within your thinking, to adapt to different environments, see other viewpoints, and change your mind when the circumstances call for it. Those who practice cognitive flexibility are aware of their emotional responses as well as ways to self-soothe and reframe thoughts. For example, if plans with a friend suddenly get cancelled, those with flexible thinking may feel disappointed initially, but they will reschedule and/or find enjoyable ways to spend their time.

Those with rigid thinking styles may assume their whole day is ruined and they have no control over making it better.

Here are some ways to begin working on increasing emotional intelligence:

- Take time to check in with your emotions. Be curious about your emotions on a regular basis, see where physically you notice emotions in your body, such as where you hold tension when you're feeling stress or anger. Notice what situations cause certain emotions to arise in your body and label what emotions you are feeling.
- Be aware of how your emotions impact your decision making and behaviors. If you are unhappy with choices you are making, in order to change you have to understand your motivations, experiences, and emotions driving your decisions.
- Listen to understand. Often during conversations with others we are listening to respond or to get our feelings across rather than focusing on hearing what others are saying. By understanding how others are feeling and taking their feelings into consideration, we can further develop our empathy and increase connection.
- Practice using "I" statements rather than "you" statements. When we take accountability for our emotions we start recognizing that we can control our reactions. When we say "you" made me feel a certain way we are taking away accountability from ourselves.

- Acknowledge aspects of your life that are in your control vs. out of your control. Put your energy and focus into those aspects of your life that you can change.
- Notice your biases. There is a powerful quote by Anaïs Nin, "We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are." We are all biased due to having different life experiences and perspectives, and often we label our perspectives as right and that of others as wrong when realistically both perspectives/viewpoints can be valid.
- Use constructive criticism with yourself and others. Constructive criticism is clear, specific, and beneficial to the recipient. When we are being critical of ourselves and others in unhelpful ways it can often result in lowered self-esteem and experiencing an increase in difficult emotions.

Self-Care Tips for Seasonal Depression

- Take a walk, go to a movie, clean the garage or do another activity that you enjoy.
- Spend time with friends or relatives. Be around other people.
- Go outdoors in the sunlight or other brightly lit areas.
- Eat nutritious foods and get plenty of exercise.
- Volunteer your time or help someone.

If you have thoughts of suicide, get help right away.

There is hope.

If you or someone you know needs support now, call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact **419-475-5338** to schedule an appointment.

Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.

