January 2022

New Year’s Resolve the SMART Way

One third of New Year’s resolution makers don’t make it past the end of January! A resolution often fails for one of three reasons:

- It’s created based on what someone else (or society) is telling you to change.
- It’s too vague or too big.
- You don’t have a realistic plan for achieving your resolution.

A goal setting tool called SMART addresses these trouble spots. The SMART acronym has been around since 1981 and stands for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. It has been used successfully for developing goals in many settings, both professional and personal. You may find it works to help you create resolutions that stick.

- **Specific.** Your resolution needs to be absolutely clear. It needs to be yours and specific to you. Stating a concrete goal is going to be more effective than just saying for example, “I want to lose weight.” It is more likely to succeed if you establish a detailed goal. Continuing with the weight example, a detailed goal would identify how much weight you want to lose and at what time interval --- X number of pounds in the next two months.

- **Measurable.** How will you know you’re progressing if you don’t have a way to measure that progress? Logging progress into a journal, making notes on your phone, or using an app designed to help you track behaviors can reinforce the progress, no matter what your resolution may be.

- **Achievable.** This doesn’t mean that you can’t have big stretch, long-term goals. But trying to take too big a step too fast can leave you frustrated and less motivated to stay with your resolution. Say you resolve to save enough money to retire. A great goal, but the smaller step of saving an extra $25-100 a month creates a more realistic, achievable goal. In addition, it allows you to see the savings, which in turn encourages continued saving.

- **Relevant.** Is this a goal that really matters to you, and are you making it for the right reasons? Are you doing it because someone else thinks you should? Unless it matters to you the likelihood of your success diminishes greatly.

- **Time-bound.** The timeline toward reaching your goal should be realistic. And goes hand in hand with setting achievable goals. Give yourself enough time to do it with lots of smaller intermediate goals set up along the way.

If you would like to talk with someone to help you create realistic and sustainable goals, contact AAH EAP at 800.236.3231.

Adapted from the New York Times article by author Jen A. Miller
February 2022

Ways to Show “I Love You”

As we get closer to Valentine’s Day, we begin to see ads and sales promotions that encourage us to show our love for others through gifts of flowers, jewelry, chocolate etc. While these types of gifts can certainly be fun and flattering to receive, we would encourage you to remember that love is not tallied by the amount of money that you spend on someone. Rather, love can be shown and shared in lots of creative ways, most of which don’t cost a penny.

Below are just a few examples of ways that you can show your love through your words, your attitude, your behavior, and your unconditional acceptance.

1. Say those magic 3 words - often.
2. Try an alternate 3-word phrase: “Tell me more”. When you say these words, you’re committing yourself to be fully present in that moment.
3. Be a good listener. Maintain eye contact, stay focused, don’t interrupt, and truly listen to what they are saying.
4. Share, “What I love about you is….”. Recognize and acknowledge the good qualities.
5. Write a (love) letter. There’s something about writing things down with a pen that makes us remember all the things that you love about another. Plus, writing sometimes enables you to find the right words to get your point across.
6. Be that person’s cheerleader and top support person. Let them know that you’ve got their back and are rooting them on. Speak words of comfort, affirmation, and encouragement.
7. Give them love coupons. These could be for favors, a pass on chores, or promises toward future dates/events.
8. Ask them what their “perfect day” looks like, then try your best to make that day happen for them.
9. Prioritize spending time with them. Do something they like to do.
10. Give them a hug.
11. Be kind – both in your actions and in your attitude. Say kind words in a kind voice.

To access AAH EAP online resources for fostering love in your relationships, visit www.aah.org/eap or Click Here.

If you would like additional support for your relationship, please call us at 800.236.3231.

References:
https://buddingoptimist.com/simple-creative-ways-to-show-love/
https://www.6seconds.org/2020/02/27/kindness-and-loving-75-ways/
https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-love-2795343
Did you know that since 2013, March 20th (the day corresponding to the Vernal Equinox, first day of Spring) has been deemed as International Happiness Day?

**Why Happiness?**
Happiness creates success over our physical and mental health, it increases performance and productivity which in turn helps build and maintain relationships. We know that of course, happiness spreads.

**What is Happiness?**
- A combination of how satisfied you are with your life and how good you feel on a day-to-day basis
- A positive cycle of emotions, thoughts and actions that increase the more you experience them
- The joy we feel striving after our potential
- Key components including pleasure, engagement and meaning

  *What makes you happy?*
  *What brings you joy?*

**What determines happiness?**
- 50% Genetics- Studies of twins suggest that about ½ of our propensity for happiness is inherited.
- 40% Behavior- Much of our ability to be happy is governed by our own choices, such as exercising and socializing—emphasis on paying attention to the positives, what you look for you’ll find! We can’t feel positive and negative emotions at the same time.
- 10% Circumstances- Differences in external factors such as income have the smallest influence.

One study showed that the happiest people had an average heart rate of about 6 fewer beats per minute, over the lifespan showed a person’s risk of coronary heart disease dropped 22%!

**Healthy Habits for Happiness**
1. Sleep more- People who get adequate sleep have a better shot at achieving emotional well-being. The happiest of people get an average of 8 hours a night. 42% of US adults get less than the recommended minimum of 7 hours.
2. Exercise- Physical activity boosts the actions of endorphins, which are natural mood enhancers, and not only in the short term.
3. Getting outside- Studies have found that sunlight boosts synthesis of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that helps regulate mood.
4. Stand up Straight- One study showed that upright posture reported feeling more enthusiastic, excited, and strong. Their slumping counterparts were more fearful, passive, and sleepy.
5. SMILE- Smiling improves health, longevity, mood, heart rate, blood pressure... people find you more attractive and like you more!!!

Remember, Advocate Aurora EAP is here for you. Please call us at 800.236.3231 to speak with one of our counselors.

Cited references and for additional information, see the following websites:
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/series/the_science_of_happiness_videos
https://www.actionforhappiness.org/
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/happiness_at_work