

GOAL VISUALIZATION

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **10 MINS**

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

When we face a daunting task, sometimes the hardest part is getting started. To help you overcome that big initial hurdle, this exercise asks you to describe a short-term goal and to visualize the steps you will take to achieve it. In the process, it helps build your confidence that you will be able to reach that goal.

Having confidence in your ability to achieve your goals is a key component of optimism, which research links to greater health and happiness, including lower rates of depression, a better ability to cope with stress, and more relationship satisfaction.

TIME REQUIRED

10 minutes daily for 3 weeks

HOW TO DO IT

1. **Identify one goal that you would like to achieve in the next day or two and briefly describe it in writing.** Make sure that this goal is realistic and doesn't take up too much time (e.g., "tidy up the hall closet" rather than "clean the entire apartment top to bottom") and something that is important to you (e.g., "spend more time with the kids" rather than "learn about the life cycle of the common fly").
2. **To help you visualize how you will go about accomplishing this goal, write down the steps that you will take to get there.** These steps might include preparing your space to help you stay motivated and focused, scheduling time for the task, and breaking down the task into small steps.
3. **Remind yourself that it's OK if you don't do everything perfectly, or complete the entire task**

For example, if your goal is to tidy up the hall closet, these are the steps that you might take to achieve it:

- schedule one hour tonight that you will devote to cleaning
- turn off your cell phone or reduce other distractions
- put on some comfortable clothes
- turn on some upbeat music, if that helps you
- subtasks:
 - take everything out of the closet
 - sweep the floor
 - dust the shelves
 - get rid of stuff that you don't need anymore
 - sort the things that you want to keep into boxes
 - put the boxes back in the closet

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sergeant, S., & Mongrain, M. (2014). [An online optimism intervention reduces depression in pessimistic individuals](#). *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 82(2), 263-274.

Adults from Asia, Canada, and the United States completed this Goal Visualization exercise (along with the [Silver Linings](#) practice) daily for three weeks and reported greater engagement in life and less dysfunctional thinking (e.g., believing that small failures make you a failure as a person) at the end of the study than they had at the start of it. Participants who had a tendency to be pessimistic especially benefited from the exercises and showed fewer depressive symptoms afterward. However, these effects seemed to wear off two months later, suggesting the need to repeat this practice periodically.

Who has tried the practice?

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

WHY TO TRY IT

This exercise makes goals feel attainable and manageable. When you believe that you will be successful at something, it encourages you to work harder toward achieving that goal—and this greater effort increases the chance that you will actually succeed. Plus, the more you succeed, the more confident you will be about future goals.

Remember, though, not to get down on yourself if you don't succeed right away or perform perfectly. With repeated practice, you may feel greater confidence in your ability to achieve important goals in your life, and this can have a significant impact on your general mood, as regularly completing the goal visualization exercise helps you develop a more optimistic mindset.

SOURCES

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FOR MORE

Check out the [Silver Linings practice](#), which was developed and studied in tandem with this Goal Visualization practice.

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

