



Caregiver Support Line Audio Recording - Transcript

Series: Care for the Caregiver

Topic: Making My Goals Matter: Looking Forward to the Year Ahead

Hello. I am so pleased that you were able to set aside this time to listen to this presentation. We all know how difficult it can be to take the time to focus on you and your own needs, so we hope this presentation will be a worthy use of your valuable time.

The topic for this presentation is, "Making My Goals Matter: Looking Forward to the Year Ahead."

I want to start by giving you a bit of an overview that describes how we will focus our time. We will first review why goals matter; why it is helpful to make or set goals. We will discuss the obstacles or barriers that may get in the way from actually setting or staying with our goals. Finally, we will talk about some of the strategies or tools you may find helpful so that you can successfully achieve your goals.

Okay, let's get started! Is goal setting a sore subject for you? Have you been disappointed by goals that lost momentum or were never reached? Is it hard to imagine with all that you are trying to take care of that there is time to focus on your goals? Is thinking about goals only a painful reminder of dreams that went unfulfilled?

If this is a sore subject for you, you are not alone. We all, at one time or another set goals that got left behind, ran out of steam or fell flat. As a result of failed attempts to pursue a goal, you may have come to think that setting goals doesn't help. But research and experience supports that setting goals does help.

Why is it that some people accomplish more in one week than others do in one year? People that accomplish more are likely to have set clear goals and their actions are focused towards achieving their goals. The fact is that goal setting works! Earl Nightingale put it this way, "People with goals succeed because they know where they are going." It's as simple as that. As the old saying goes, "If you aim at nothing, you're going to hit nothing."

So if you don't set goals, you are missing the first critical step towards realizing your dreams. When goals fail often it isn't the goal setting that failed, it is how we work with those goals after they are set that is often where we run into trouble.



Not only do goals give you a target to aim for, they define what is deeply important to you. Human beings have a natural inborn instinct to grow, to meet challenges, to evolve into our best. As Mohammed Ali's says, "What keeps me going is goals." So, if you are not engaged in pursuing what matters to you, you are losing out on the zest and desire for living that is deep within you.

As a Caregiver, you have so many responsibilities that are important to you. You are committed to your critical goal of caring for your loved one. It is important though to make room in there for goals that are just about you.

These goals don't have to be something life changing or monumental either. In making any goal, small or large, you are making a commitment to accomplish what matters to you. When you listen to that urge inside you to reach towards a goal, you are connecting with your vitality, your investment in living and this is what gets you up and out of bed in the morning. The rewards for this investment will be yours, you will feel it, and it will feel good.

So is there something that you have had a nagging urge to accomplish? Is there something that you have wanted to do or get done that you keep putting on the back burner? Maybe there is a book you have always wanted to read, a new recipe to try, a lunch with a friend that you have put off too long, a class you wanted to take or something you have always wanted to learn. Listen to what your inner voice has been asking you to pay attention to.

Another reason setting goals matter is because they can help you concentrate your time and effort. One important reason goal setters achieve such outstanding results is that they have learned how to focus and concentrate their time, energy, and resources on a single objective. Even if it is just for a small amount of time each day, concentrated attention and commitment can produce results that are much greater than if you are just getting by, floating from one day to the next.

Goal setting requires that you focus in on how to work towards achieving the end result you desire. An important aspect of goal planning and success requires attention, focus, and consideration to all the aspects of how to make a plan that will work. Now if you don't set the goal in the first place, you won't do the footwork that successful goal setting requires. Goal setters do have great results because they focus and take into consideration the time, energy and resources required to reach their goal.



Another reason setting goals helps is that it can provide motivation, persistence and desire. Our most significant accomplishments are riddled with obstacles, struggles, and failures. It is estimated that Thomas Edison failed over one thousand times before he finally discovered a way to make the light bulb work.

It is very rare for something important to be accomplished successfully on the very first try. But if we are focused on achieving a goal, focused on getting an end result, we are more likely to persist, to hang in there, and continue to try, than if we never set the goal to begin with. If we really commit to a goal we can push towards it when the going gets tough or when we begin to waiver, just because we have really made the commitment in the first place.

Setting goals helps establish priorities, and highlights what really matters. Instead of just going with the flow and letting the "current" or other people's interests determine where you end up, your goal makes you the priority. When you are setting a goal, you are making a conscious decision to identify where you are headed and what really matters to you. Goals can provide a roadmap to take you from where you are to where you want to be.

Oftentimes Caregivers put themselves on the back burner, which is easy to do when you are tending to others' needs. You may be in the habit of not really paying attention to what your needs and priorities are. Goals can help you remember that you are a priority too.

Accomplishing a goal requires multiple steps and setting the goal will require recognizing all the potential steps along the way towards reaching your goal. One of the best ways to deal with a large or seemingly "impossible" goal is to break it up into a series of intermediate achievable steps and get to work on each piece. This roadmap can help you stay focused on the steps that will get you where you want to be.

Sometimes people give up on what they think is an impossible goal because they forget that the way to get there is each little step along the way. Remember, the greatest accomplishments really only occur one persistent step at a time.

In almost any endeavor, you will need to make adjustments to your plans and overall strategy as you learn from your mistakes, face and overcome obstacles, and experience unexpected setbacks. The most important thing is to continue to keep your vision, both on the goal and also on the many steps you will need to take along the way to get there.



Finally, goals matter because they increase your self-confidence. As you complete each action step towards your goal, your self-confidence grows because you can see the concrete results of your efforts. You are mapping your success and increasing your self-esteem each step along the way. Setting goals and investing in each step is a reminder that you matter, that you are engaged in your own growth, and that you are engaged in living.

What are your goals? Maybe it's calling an old friend once a week or learning a new hobby. Maybe you are isolated and you want to find some new ways to connect to people. Maybe planting a garden or training for a 5K run is something you want to do. Maybe you want to change your eating habits to something healthier. Maybe you have always wanted to learn something. What matters to you? What change do you desire and imagine for yourself?

The fact that you listened today tells us that you want to make yourself and your goals a priority. You have something that you want to change or something that you are longing to achieve.

Sometimes we don't even allow ourselves to hope for a change because we are afraid we will be let down, that we won't achieve it. If we don't even try, if we don't risk naming that goal, we are letting ourselves down and turning our back on what matters. Let yourself dream for that goal that you want, and begin to plan the steps needed to achieve it.

It is important to consider first, what is the goal you want to pursue this year? How do you want to make a commitment to yourself? Name the goal that you would like to commit to.

One of the things we will do is ask that you put your goal in writing. Why is it important to put this in writing? Your brain sees a written goal as more real. It is a confirmation of what you want and the start to a commitment. It seems like a step that isn't that important but it really does help to write it down and see the goal, in black and white.

If you really wish to commit your intention to pursue a goal, you also might consider telling someone. Sharing your commitment to another really can help to make you accountable to that goal. Sometimes knowing that someone else is aware of what you are trying to accomplish can be the little push or the support that you might need when your focus waivers. So put your goal in writing and consider sharing it with someone or ask someone for their support.



Setting goals marks the first step towards successfully achieving what you want for yourself. By setting the goal you are clearly stating what you desire for yourself, not what anyone else is expecting, but what matters to you. The more the goal matters to you, the more you will be motivated to work towards it.

Write down on paper what it is that you are hoping to change or achieve in the year ahead. Go ahead take the risk! Small or large, your goals matter!

Now to begin, start with the end goal in mind. You just wrote down the end goal. Next, you will need to identify the plan or the steps that it will take to realistically attain what you want. This process of goal setting requires that you both pay attention and visualize the end result and also keep your attention on the here and now steps each day that will bring you closer to your goal.

It is important to focus on and affirm the daily steps you are taking to track your progress. Each step taken is a daily reminder you are making progress, which can help when you get discouraged.

When we develop steps in our plan, we want to identify steps that are realistic and attainable. We will want to make a plan defining steps that will take your current responsibilities into consideration.

The steps should be measurable and clearly defined. Making a plan that breaks down the steps into realistic and manageable pieces will help you from becoming overwhelmed or discouraged and will also help you work with any obstacles that get in your way.

Let's use a weight loss goal as an example to illustrate this idea. So to start, if you focus on the end goal of weight loss for example, what plan or steps could you consider in achieving this goal?

There is research to support that the greater the range or variety of solutions or alternatives that one may generate to make a change, the greater the likelihood we can be successful. As the saying goes, there's more than one way to skin a cat. It is important to think outside the box for as many potential strategies or courses of action that you might take to try to move yourself toward your end goal.

Let's use the goal losing 10 pounds in 6 months. There are many steps one might brainstorm in order to reach that goal. For example, maybe you realize your weight gain started when you got in the habit of eating ice cream every night so your plan will



be to stop eating ice cream every night and instead limit it to only once a week. Maybe you haven't been exercising as you used to, so you decide to add a walk 15 minutes each day. You could drink 8 oz. water before meals, or decrease eating fried food to once a week. You might decide to track your calories to see where you are getting into trouble or decide to eat at the table instead of in front of the TV. The list could go on and on.

Brainstorm as many ideas as you can when developing steps along the path to your goal. Be realistic and remain aware of the many roles and responsibilities you face each day.

There are some very helpful tips to follow when you are making a plan that works. First, be specific when defining your steps. The more specific you are the better. For example, I will walk 15 minutes each day, or I will eat 1 cup of ice cream only one day per week. Make it measurable. You can measure the time of a walk or the amount of ice cream. Make it action oriented. You will be taking the action step of taking a 15 minute walk. Make it practical – I know that it is reasonable, that it is doable to get a 15 minute walk in per day. Identify the time frame that you will be accomplishing it for example- each day. And finally, commit the steps to writing. Committing the steps to writing helps the plan materialize.

Committing to another person also reinforces your intention. It's important not to skip the step of taking the time to write down the specific, measurable, practical actions, that you will be taking, as this is your map. When one of your steps isn't working out as you envisioned, you don't have to ditch the whole plan. You just move back to adding a step that will work better.

Sometimes plans to pursue a goal get ditched altogether just because you run in to an obstacle or a step that doesn't work. But hitting roadblocks is expected in any plan. Don't ditch the goal altogether, just rework your plan again. Be creative, brainstorm other alternatives. So if you are having trouble getting a 15 minute walk in, is there another alternative that will work?

Usually goals involve obstacles to overcome or conflicts to resolve. For example, an obstacle to your walking each day may be you are unable to leave your loved one. An example of a conflict might be, "I know I will feel better if I take a walk but I'm tired and don't feel like getting out of bed."



The first step in removing barriers or working with a conflict is to identify what is in the way so that you can work with it or around it.

Obstacles are blocks in your path to a goal. Obstacles can come in the form of internal or personal hurdles such as fear, anxiety about change, procrastination, feeling overwhelmed, low self-esteem, feeling that you and your goals don't matter, or low confidence that you can actually accomplish the goal. Maybe you feel guilty for taking time for yourself.

So if we go back to the weight loss goal as an example, maybe the internal hurdle would be feeling discouraged that you never seem to make progress when you tried in the past.

We need to be able to work with the negative feelings. For instance, by first noting the feeling, and then trying self-talk to put things in perspective. So you may try a more encouraging positive response like "I know you have tried this change before but this is a new beginning, and I can do this one step at a time," or "because you didn't make it before doesn't mean you can't do it now." Also, with negative emotional barriers try calming techniques such as taking a deep breath, then take another, until the urge to go off course passes.

With negative emotions you may use your logical steps and day by day concrete plan to get off the emotional roller coaster. Be firm, but kind, and logical with yourself. Tell yourself "one step at a time. You're just having some emotions right now so focus on your steps towards your goal."

Obstacles can also come in the form of external constraints or challenges such as limited time or income, lack of support or anything that might interfere externally such as the weather, your living environment, physical disability or financial limitations.

The important thing is to find a way around the external hurdle. What can you come up with as a creative, or many, creative solutions to work around the obstacle? For example if you can't get out walking maybe you can follow an exercise regimen at home. The trick is to not see this obstacle as a failed plan. The trick is to hang in there and work with it. Keep at it. Find a way around it.

Barriers can also come in the form of conflicting goals. Conflicting goals can be problematic when there is a conflict between two opposing goals. So for example, if weight loss is the goal desired, it may be in conflict with a desire to overeat. The part of



you that wants to lose weight is in conflict with the part of you that finds comfort in overeating. With conflicting goals, you would need to find alternatives that address one side of the conflict.

So, for example if you want to lose weight, you might need to find alternatives to self-comfort or maybe a bunch of alternatives. "Instead of overeating, I will take a bath or take a stroll or listen to soothing music."

There is a cost that we pay for any goal we are going to work towards. It is normal to experience resistance between the part of us that wants to change and the part of us that wants to remain the same. The voice of resistance says, "Oh this is too hard or it's easier to give up."

Realizing that there will be obstacles along the path to your goal, planning on having these obstacles can make it easier to overcome or avoid them all together. It can help you from being taken off guard or discouraged when they get in your way. They are simply part of the process. In the words of Michael Jordan, "Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."

Visualizing your goals and believing in them, believing they are possible, believing you deserve them, can keep you inspired and focused. Taking a deep breath and bringing your vision of achieving your goal not only may calm you but also help you see the light at the end of the tunnel whenever you begin to feel pessimistic about your chances of reaching your goals. As author Henry David Thoreau writes, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined."

Today you have taken a great first step in reaching your goals. You committed your attention to yourself and to the idea that if you set goals and work towards them, you can in fact succeed. Remember; don't allow negative feelings or doubt to interfere with you following the path you have set. Please, be patient and loving with yourself along the way. Review your goals daily, both your struggles and your progress. Pay close attention to what and who uplifts you and supports you through your journey.

Remember, you deserve to experience the joy, freedom, and confidence that can come from reaching your goals. You deserve to make your dreams happen. Don't give up. We are rooting for you!



I hope you found this presentation a worthy use of your time. Thank you for listening. If you are a Caregiver of a Veteran and would like to discuss any of the ideas offered during this presentation, I invite you to contact your local Caregiver Support Coordinator. You may also contact a social worker at the Caregiver Support Line at 855-260-3274.

Thank you for all you do.