



STATE OF NEW JERSEY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

July
2024

EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance.



UPCOMING WEBINAR

CULTIVATING MINDSETS FOR SUCCESS

About the Webinar:

How we think significantly influences our success. This crucial session is designed to help individuals develop the belief systems and thought patterns that foster attitudes and behaviors leading to success. The course includes practical exercises that participants can use long-term to reinforce positive mental habits.



REGISTER NOW

Date: July 25, 2024

Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

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TO BE HAPPY, SET GOALS FOR YOURSELF

A popular idea in business startup books is that goal setting is crucial for financial success, and it may well be true. More importantly, positive psychology has found that goals affect your daily happiness. If you understand this interesting link, the greater your wellbeing is likely to be. How so? When you discuss your hopes and dreams for the future, you're actually describing your goals. These help you to determine where and on what commitments to focus your energy. Dr. Edward Hoffman's research on peak experiences shows that people often experience joy when they attain a personal goal—whether it involves education, work or social relations.¹ If you are someone who has not thought of what your goals are, or you do not have a clear idea of what they are, it is likely that you are missing out on a potential source of immense happiness.

Psychologists have discovered that certain types of goals are more effective than others in producing happiness: specifically, those that are personally valued, realistic, and freely chosen. It seems clear enough that pursuing goals that are meaningful to you is more fulfilling than chasing after those that have been imposed by others or those that you don't really value.

An influential study led by Dr. Ryan Niemiec at the University of Cincinnati found that the attainment of intrinsic—or personally meaningful—goals led to greater wellbeing, but achieving extrinsic goals actually resulted in the opposite.² Other studies show that when there is a good fit between a person's values and goals, they are likely to be more motivated, have higher commitment, and experience a greater sense of wellbeing.^{3,4}

A second important issue concerns approach versus avoidance goals. Approach goals motivate you to move towards something, like, "I want to get a degree in counseling." On the other hand, avoidance goals motivate you to avoid difficulties, dangers, or fears. One example would be, "I try to avoid public speaking, because it makes me very nervous." Research conducted on many different cultures reveals that approach goals are more likely to be associated with happiness than avoidance goals.^{5,6} That is, people tend to be happier when they see themselves as moving towards something they value, rather than trying to avoid something difficult or painful. However, motivations are complex in nature, and both approach and avoidance goals can make you feel content depending on the situation.



Third, the rate at which people approach their valued goals is important as well. Making adequate—or better than expected—progress toward significant goals evokes a sense of happiness. The rate of progress that a person has made—or expects to make—towards goals may even be more important than the actual attainment of it; self-acceptable rates of progress are associated with more positive emotions.

Fourth, the impact that goals may have on your sense of happiness appears to be dependent on their specificity. Highly abstract goals may be detrimental to boosting happiness because it becomes hard to know when they have been achieved. For instance, if your goal is "to be a kind, caring person," it's hard to know when you've treated people with enough compassion to have reached your goal. With concrete goals, however, you know almost immediately if you've been successful. An example of one such goal is "to treat at least one person every day with deliberate kindness and compassion." By the end of the day, you know for sure if you've attained this particular goal.

GOALS!

Finally, an important aspect that concerns the relationships among your goals is, specifically, their degree of "fit" versus conflict. Having more congruence among different goals and less conflict among competing goals is associated with a greater feeling of happiness.^{7,8}

For instance, people who have eight or ten major goals in life which are all deemed "very important" may inadvertently create conflict among these goals, due to insufficient time to fully accomplish them all. In short, the popular wish to "have it all" in terms of career, money, family, community involvement, and leisure may actually aggravate internal conflict between different goals, lowering your day-to-day happiness.

Based on these scientific findings, you might find it useful to ask yourself: What are my goals for the next six months? How about the following year and the next three years? It's helpful to compose a written list, and remember that it's best to create goals that are realistic, attainable, and measurable. Now, it's time to begin!

References

1. Hoffman, E. (Updated 2024, March 29). Maslow, peak experiences, and the body. *Positive Psychology*. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-peak-experience/202403/maslow-peak-experiences-and-the-body>
2. Niemiec, C.P., Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2009, June). The path taken: Consequences of attaining intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations in post-college life. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 73(3), 291–306. doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2008.09.001
3. Cherry, K. (Updated 2022, November 8). What is self-determination theory? How self-determination influences motivation. *Verywell Mind*. Retrieved April 8, 2024, from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-determination-theory-2795387>
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About the Author

Dr. Edward Hoffman is an adjunct associate psychology professor at Yeshiva University in New York City. A licensed clinical psychologist in private practice, he is the author/editor of more than 25 books in psychology and related fields. Dr. Hoffman is the recent coauthor with Dr. William Compton of *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Flourishing*, and he serves on the editorial boards of the *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology* and the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*.

About White Swan Foundation

White Swan Foundation for Mental Health is a nonprofit organization that offers knowledge services in the area of mental health. Based in Bangalore, India, they offer information relevant to India specifically but also cover issues that apply to mental health issues globally. For more information, visit their website at <https://www.whiteswanfoundation.org>.

FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANINGFUL PURSUITS

Step back to understand your motivations and purpose.

The need for purpose and meaning behind your actions is one of the defining characteristics of human beings. People are in a healthier state of psychological wellbeing when they are pursuing tasks that are meaningful to them. You can also suffer quite serious psychological difficulties when you don't.

A lack of recognized and felt purpose or meaning in your life makes you vulnerable to boredom, anxiety, and depressive disorders. On the other hand, having a strong sense of purpose can have a positive effect. When you're focused on and engaged with working towards your purpose(s), life becomes easier, less complicated, and less stressful overall.



Why does purpose and meaning in what one does have such a positive effect?

Firstly, it makes you less vulnerable to becoming caught in habitual meaningless pursuits and losing focus and motivation. Also, this can stop you from getting into a "racing mind" syndrome. This is when you become swept away with negative, irrational, or upsetting self-talk. Aligning yourself to a purpose often helps you to be less self-centered and less focused on your own worries and anxieties. When you feel you're a part of something more important and bigger than yourself, your sense of wellbeing increases. This leads to you experiencing more positive emotions.

Purpose can also enhance your level of self-regard and self-esteem. Achieving meaningful goals in life helps build your self-efficacy. Through developing self-efficacy, you can build a sense of competence and achievement. This also enhances your ability to deal with difficulties and challenges when they occur in important areas of your life.

Having purpose is also closely related to health levels of optimism. As people immerse themselves in purposeful pursuits, it engenders hope and optimism. This tends to enhance your overall feelings of wellbeing and belief in yourself to achieve those things that are meaningful and important to you.



How do you know when you're truly involved in meaningful and purposeful pursuits?

1. Firstly, **you become intrinsically motivated**—you are driven internally by your need to do the best you can do for the greater good. These feelings and pursuits are rewarding enough for you to remain passionate about your pursuits without the need for reward and recognition from outside sources.

2. Secondly, **you find a lot of meaning and joy** in building close meaningful relationships with others. People who help you attain your goals and pursuits are the best ones to surround yourself with.

3. Thirdly, **you have a sense of leaving a meaningful legacy for others** in what you are pursuing and achieving. That is, the consequences of what you're doing will have positive effects for others and not just for yourself.

It is important to note that there can be derailers that lead you away from your meaningful pursuits. A major one is not prioritizing tasks and processes that allow you to stay on the journey towards your "true north"—your meaningful pursuit. It's easy to be sidetracked or take a detour into less important tasks and pursuits. These may be easier or take less time to accomplish, but when finally attained, they lack real meaning or a sense of accomplishment for you. Another common derailer is "jumping on the treadmill" and doing things repetitively on automatic pilot. Not taking time to reflect upon why your actions are meaningful for yourself and others can make you lose track of what's important.

It's important to really focus on these meaningful pursuits so that you continue valued behavior towards important goals. By honing in on purposeful and meaningful actions, you can drive happiness in your actions and improve wellbeing. This leads to improved performance and allows you to truly thrive in your everyday life.



FLOW: TIME TO REZONE

What is flow?

Have you ever been so absorbed by an activity that you lost all sense of time? Were you ever so focused on your task at hand that all your worries drifted away? If so, you may have been in a mental state psychologists refer to as flow.

According to psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, people enter a state of flow when they're completely immersed in an activity of interest. A guitarist playing over a piece of music, or a costume designer transferring their ideas from pen to paper, may reach this state of flow. In an interview for Wired magazine, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi stated, "The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost."¹

PURPOSE

Characteristics of Flow

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi proposed 10 factors that are characteristic of flow. He suggested that most of these factors would be present when an individual enters their state of flow. Such characteristics included the following:

- The activity is intrinsically rewarding.
- In completing the activity, the individual is working towards well-defined, challenging, and attainable goals.
- The individual is attentive solely to the activity of interest.
- The individual feels a strong sense of control over the activity of interest and the outcomes.
- The individual's concept of self falls away when engaged in the activity.
- In completing the activity, the individual is mindful of the quality of their input.
- The individual loses awareness of their physiological needs (e.g. sleep).
- There is a balance between the individual's skill level and the challenge of the task.
- The individual is hyper focused on the task at hand.
- The individual loses track of time.

Ultimately, the activity of interest must be sufficiently challenging but accomplishable in order for people to enter a state of flow. When you are lying in bed, scrolling through Facebook and Instagram, you are not in this state of flow. Such an activity requires no challenge and little skill to be undertaken.

Benefits of Flow

The benefits of flow are numerous and well documented. Research suggests that when engaged in a state of flow, your brain releases a chemical messenger called dopamine. When dopamine is released, you feel pleasure. Since the feeling of pleasure is inherently reinforcing, the state of flow is inherently reinforcing. Over time, you become motivated to seek out that state of flow; to do this, you return to your activities of interest. Returning to this state of flow allows you to master your activity. Think of a painter returning to their canvas every weekend and developing their artistic abilities.

What is the connection between flow and wellbeing?

There are also many health benefits of flow. When you are in a state of flow, there is no time to experience sadness and worry. As such, flow promotes emotional regulation. Flow teaches people that engagement in their activities of interest can help them cope. Practicing an instrument, editing a photograph, or writing a novel then becomes a powerful coping tool. Since flow promotes mastery through engagement, flow can also be used to build your confidence and self-esteem. When you reflect on how far you've come in your activities of interest, you acknowledge the value of your efforts and therefore yourself. Flow encourages people to take on new challenges as they feel they have the confidence to do so.

How do you increase your chances of achieving flow?

In reaching flow, it is helpful to use the principles of SMART goals. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-oriented. For example, if you want to learn how to play the drums, you assign yourself the goal of practising drums for half an hour, this upcoming Saturday, in your bedroom between 2:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. It is also helpful to eliminate distractions or objects that may compete for your attention. For example, when learning how to play the drums, leave your mobile phone and laptop in another room, and check the devices only when you have completed your SMART goal.

Finally, as your skill level increases, so should the challenging nature of your SMART goals. It's important, however, that you increase the level of challenge gradually. If you push yourself too much too soon, you risk misalignment between the activity and your skill level. This may result in frustration and disrupt your state of flow.

Reference

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Employee Advisory Service

UPCOMING WEBINARS EMPLOYEES

Supervisors / Managers

The Art of Effective Management

Date / Time

- July 25, 2024
- 11:00 – 12:00 PM

About this webinar:

This session offers a thorough overview of the management and leadership skills, along with strategies essential for a supervisor to effectively motivate and engage their team. It will cover key skills such as employee relationship development, teambuilding, coaching, performance management, conflict resolution, and effective management strategies.



REGISTER NOW

Employees

Cultivating Mindsets for Success

Date / Time

- July 25, 2024
- 2:00 – 3:00 PM

About this webinar:

How we think significantly influences our success. This crucial session is designed to help individuals develop the belief systems and thought patterns that foster attitudes and behaviors leading to success. The course includes practical exercises that participants can use long-term to reinforce positive mental habits.



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