



# EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

July 2024



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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3,4</sup>

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.<sup>5,6</sup> 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.

♡  
**HAPPINESS**  
♡

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.<sup>7,8</sup>

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!

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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.

# PURPOSE

Source: Veretis. (Revised 2024 [Ed.]). *Finding purpose and meaningful pursuits* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).



## CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is an important part of overall health for children as well as adults. For many adults who have mental disorders, symptoms were present—but often not recognized or addressed—in childhood and adolescence. For a young person with symptoms of a mental disorder, the earlier treatment is started, the more effective it can be. Early treatment can help prevent more severe, lasting problems as a child grows up.

### Warning Signs

It can be tough to tell if troubling behavior in a child is just part of growing up or a problem that should be discussed with a health professional. If there are behavioral signs and symptoms that last weeks or months, and if these issues interfere with the child's daily life at home and at school, or with friends, you should contact a health professional.

Young children may benefit from an evaluation and treatment if they:

- Have frequent tantrums or are intensely irritable much of the time
- Often talk about fears or worries
- Complain about frequent stomachaches or headaches with no known medical cause
- Are in constant motion and cannot sit quietly (except when they are watching videos or playing video games)
- Sleep too much or too little, have frequent nightmares, or seem sleepy during the day
- Are not interested in playing with other children or have difficulty making friends
- Struggle academically or have experienced a recent decline in grades
- Repeat actions or check things many times out of fear that something bad may happen

Older children and adolescents may benefit from an evaluation if they:

- Have lost interest in things that they used to enjoy
- Have low energy
- Sleep too much or too little, or seem sleepy throughout the day
- Are spending more and more time alone, and avoid social activities with friends or family
- Diet or exercise excessively, or fear gaining weight
- Engage in self-harm behaviors (such as cutting or burning their skin)
- Smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs
- Engage in risky or destructive behavior alone or with friends
- Have thoughts of suicide
- Have periods of highly elevated energy and activity, and require much less sleep than usual
- Say that they think someone is trying to control their mind or that they hear things that other people cannot hear



Mental illnesses can be treated. If you are a child or teenager, talk to your parents, school counselor, or health care provider.

It may be helpful for children and teenagers to save several emergency numbers to their cell phones. The ability to get immediate help for themselves or for a friend can make a difference:

- The phone number for a trusted friend or relative
- The nonemergency number for the local police department
- The Crisis Text Line: 741741
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, call 911 or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. (The former number at 800-273-TALK [800-273-8255] will still work and reroutes you to 988 also.)

# MENTAL HEALTH AND GEN Z

There is extensive research suggesting that members from Generation Z (Gen Z) are growing up in an age of increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Members of Gen Z are individuals who are born between 1995 and 2010. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a mere 45 percent of Gen Z report that their mental health is very good or excellent.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly concerning, especially when all other generations (e.g. Millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers) fare significantly better.<sup>2</sup> So, what is the main cause of this and what are some practical strategies to be done about it?

## Impact of Social Media and The "Tech Age"

Many would argue that the impact of social media and the influence of the "tech age" is the main detriment for poor mental health. Gen Z has grown up in an age of phones, high-speed internet, and the creation of various social media platforms. Consuming too much social media has been shown to exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety. However, it could be argued the real pressure comes from unrealistic expectations and creating the ideal "persona" online. Some members of Gen Z are constantly striving to construct an idealistic version of themselves online. Celebrities and influencers constantly reinforce the "perfect" life without any shortcomings. Comparing themselves to these unrealistic expectations creates issues with self-identity, which perpetuates poor mental health.

## Impact of COVID-19

Another factor impacting mental health is the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 had a profound impact on all generations; however, some would argue that Gen Z was hit the heaviest. Tasked with finishing schooling during a pandemic as well as changes in learning environments (e.g. studying online) placed an enormous amount of pressure on them to achieve. Furthermore, some students found it difficult to retain information when learning online and would have preferred a more interactive and face-to-face environment. As a result, some students didn't achieve the grades they needed to get into the college or higher education of their choice. In addition to this, those who finished studying may have been tasked with finding a job during the pandemic. Limited job opportunities and entering a volatile job market after the pandemic added additional

challenges to new graduates searching employment during that time. This uncertainty increased the risk of developing mental health problems, as those affected may have felt frustrated, angry, or that they weren't given a fair opportunity.

## What can be done to improve mental health for Gen Z?

So, what can be done about it? Well, there are a few things...

- First, it is important to open up to someone close to you when you are struggling. This may be a teacher, parent, or good friend who can support you to seek out the help and support you need.
- Secondly, it is important to identify simple self-care strategies. Often, when you feel low or anxious, you avoid activities that you once found pleasure in. Forcing yourself to go for that walk, meditate, or journal is very important. Think about these things as an obligation for your own mental health and wellbeing.
- Thirdly, consult with a mental health specialist. It is important that if you are feeling anxious or depressed that you seek support as soon as possible. Having someone explore your situation from an objective point of view as well as guide you through evidence-based strategies is very important.

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