



EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER

June 2024



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DEER OAKS PRESENTS

June On-Demand Seminar

*Living Well 365 - Igniting Motivation
for a Fulfilling Life*

*Available OnDemand starting June 18th
Access via deeroakseap.com*

MENTAL HEALTH: REFOCUS YOUR THINKING

There are many ways to take care of your mental health, all of which can contribute to your emotional wellbeing. Healthy eating, exercise, and sleep habits play a role, as do supportive social connections and efforts to deal with stress. Another important strategy is to refocus your thinking. Using approaches such as positive reframing, gratitude, self-acceptance, self-forgiveness, and intentional distraction, you can shift the balance from negative thoughts and emotions toward more positive ones.

Look for more optimistic perspectives: Use positive reframing.

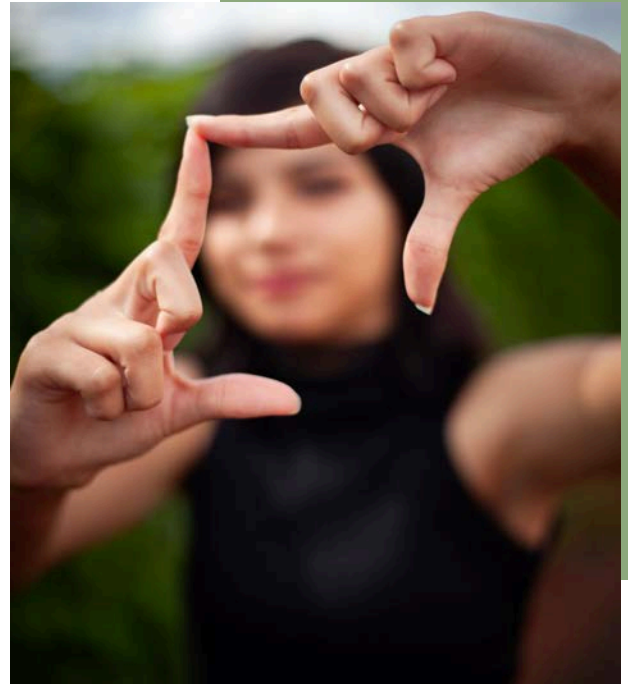
Positive reframing is the practice of looking at problems and worries from different and more optimistic angles:

- It's natural for a first reaction to an unexpected change to be negative, for example. With positive reframing, you intentionally look for the upsides of a new situation and the opportunities to be found in a change.
- In a similar way, when another person's words or actions bother you, it's easy to assume bad motives. With positive reframing, you consider other interpretations of those words or actions and explore more generous reasons for them.
- Positive reframing can also help you avoid being too hard on yourself. When something goes wrong, instead of finding fault with yourself for what has happened, look at the broader circumstances of what happened, not just your own role.
- Once you've used positive reframing to get a more thoughtful and open-minded view of a situation, take a step-by-step approach to making things better.

Consider the good: Practice gratitude.

Practicing gratitude is the simple act of reflecting on what you're grateful for. It's easy, doesn't take much time, and can work wonders in lifting your mood:

- Try it by taking a few minutes of quiet, undistracted time to think of a few things you're grateful for. Those might include a person you can depend on, the affection of a pet, an act of kindness you've experienced, something beautiful that makes you feel good, the food you eat, or even finding a convenient parking space.



- Turn that one-time experiment with gratitude into a habit by taking two minutes every day to think of three new things you're grateful for. Over time, you'll start to pay more attention to the good that happens throughout your day.

Accept and appreciate yourself for who you are.

Every person is unique, with their own special mix of strengths and quirks. No one is perfect:

- When you find yourself being overly self-critical, make a conscious effort to pull back from that negativity and think about what makes you special in good ways. What is it about you that your friends love and value?
- If negative self-talk thoughts run through your head (thoughts like "I'm not good enough" or "I keep making mistakes"), imagine what a good friend would tell you if you said those words aloud. Work on replacing negative self-talk thoughts with positive ones.

- Think about the good that you've done. Give yourself credit for your strengths and accomplishments and the ways in which you help and support others.
- Forgive yourself for your mistakes and missteps, and think about what you've learned from them.
- Treat yourself with the same kindness and forgiveness you'd show to a friend.

Break the rumination cycle.

When you're feeling down or frustrated, it's easy to fall into the trap of digging deeper into that unhappiness with rumination. The next time you find yourself dwelling on and repeating negative thoughts, work on breaking the cycle. Instead of delving into the causes of your unhappiness or the sources of your frustration, take steps to free yourself from the negativity:

- Think about what you can do to improve the situation that's bothering you. Focus on the steps, even very small ones, that you might take to move toward a solution.
- Challenge your thinking. Is the problem as important as you're making it out to be?
- Distract yourself with an activity you enjoy that takes your full concentration. Spending time with friends is a great distraction as long as you steer clear of this issue that's driving your rumination.

Get the help you need.

Some emotional problems are just too difficult to handle on your own. If negative thoughts and emotions persist, and these ideas for adopting more positive ways of thinking aren't enough, reach out for professional help. A mental health professional can diagnose and treat conditions such as depression and anxiety disorder and can help you learn ways to manage your thoughts and emotions. Your employee support program, your school's health or mental health service, or your primary care doctor can help you find a counselor who can help.

Source: *Morgan, H. (2023, November 9). Mental health strategies: Refocus your thinking (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).*



JUNE IS POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) AWARENESS MONTH

Negative Coping & PTSD

When you have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), you may try to deal with symptoms in ways that cause more harm than good. This is called negative coping. Learn how quick fixes may make your PTSD symptoms worse in the long run or create new problems.

What are examples of negative coping to avoid?

Substance Abuse

Taking a lot of drugs or alcohol to feel better is called substance abuse. You may try to use drugs or alcohol to escape your problems, help you sleep, or make your symptoms go away.

Substance abuse can cause serious problems. Drinking or using drugs can put your relationships, your job, and your health at risk. You may become more likely to be mean or violent. When under the influence of alcohol or drugs, people often make bad decisions.

Avoiding Others

Certain social situations may cause you stress, make you angry, or remind you of bad memories. Because of this, you may try to avoid doing things with other people. You may even avoid your friends and family.

Avoiding others can make you feel isolated. Isolation is when you tend to be alone a lot, rather than spending time around other people. Yet social support is critical to healthy coping.

When you distance yourself from others, your problems may seem to build up. You may have more negative thoughts and feelings, like sadness and fear. You may feel like you're facing life all alone.

Reach out to those in your support circle, even if you don't feel like it. You're not alone.

Staying Always on Guard

After going through a trauma, it may seem reasonable to try to stay extra alert. You may be on the lookout for danger at all times. However, this way of coping doesn't work. You end up feeling stressed, fearful, and worn out.

Avoiding Reminders of the Trauma

Trying to avoid bad memories or trying to shut out feelings may seem reasonable. However, they don't work, because trauma controls your life if you run from it. If you avoid thinking about the trauma or if you avoid seeking help, you may keep distress at bay for a time, but at a cost. This behavior also prevents you from making progress in how you cope with trauma and its consequences.



Anger and Violent Behavior

You may feel a lot of anger at times. Your anger may cause you to lose your temper and do reckless things. You may distance yourself from people who want to help.

This is understandable. It's natural to feel angry after going through something traumatic. However, anger and violent behavior can cause problems in your life and make it harder for you to recover.

Dangerous Behavior

You also may cope by doing things that are risky or dangerous. For example, you may drive too fast or be quick to start a fight when someone upsets you. You may end up hurting yourself or someone else.

Certain ways of dealing with stress can be dangerous. If you start smoking or smoke more, you put your health in danger. Eating to relieve stress also can be dangerous if you gain too much weight.

Working Too Much

Work is a good thing. You learn new things, interact with others, and gain confidence. However, working too much can be a form of avoidance. You may be working to avoid memories or to help yourself forget about the trauma. This is negative because of these reasons:

- You may not seek help for your PTSD.
- You're not spending time with your family and friends. Being with them and getting their support may help you recover and deal better with PTSD.
- You may work so much that you get little sleep and don't eat right. This can hurt your health, so you're more likely to get sick.

What are more positive ways to cope?

Learning how to cope with PTSD is part of your recovery. Positive ways to cope with traumatic stress include talking with others, relaxation methods, counseling, or other positive lifestyle changes.

Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD. (Updated 2022, March 23). Negative coping and PTSD. Retrieved May 13, 2022, from <https://www.ptsd.va.gov>

WHAT DOES MOTIVATION REALLY MEAN?

A lot of people engage performance-psychology services looking for keys to steely motivation. This is the type of drive and discipline that sees people leap out of bed at 4:30 a.m. rain, hail, or shine, then charge off on a 10-mile run and be the first into the office and last to leave. The problem is that these "keys" are a myth. They simply do not exist.

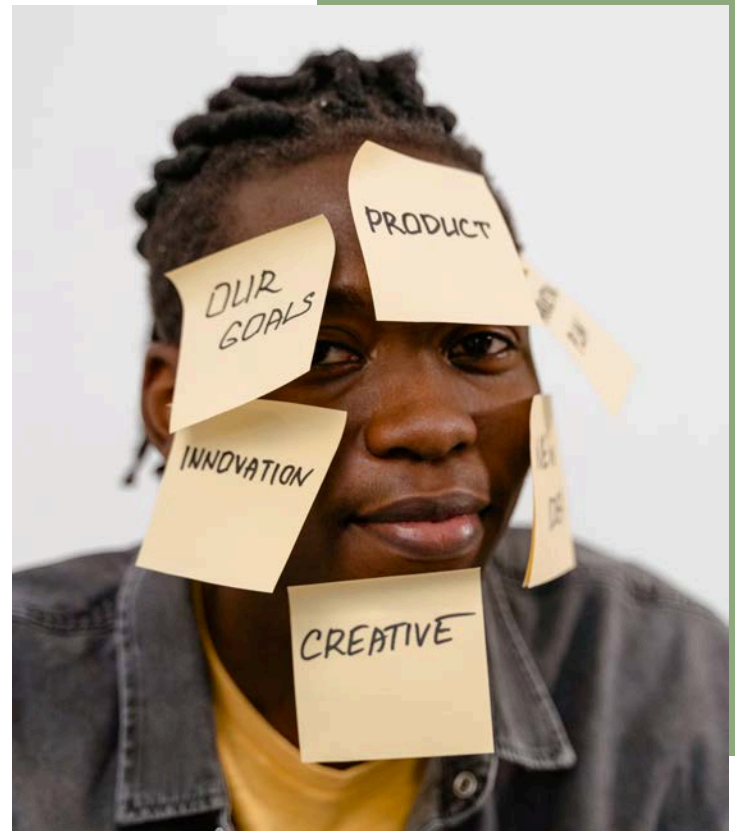
The platform of online video streaming makes it easy for people to access motivational videos screaming at you to be tougher, better, faster, and stronger. This leads you to believe in the myth of motivation and extreme overnight behavior change. A person's inevitable failure to replicate and sustain this level of extreme motivation often leads them to feeling disheartened and disappointed. Sometimes, you need to accept that your dreams or desires are simply beyond the capabilities you have and are meant for others.

Why does this happen?

Motivation is a myth, because it is not a standalone concept. Motivation is the combination of both importance and belief. It is when you feel something is important and you believe you're capable of achieving success. Then, you see the follow-up discipline, prioritizing, and action, which is associated with motivation. So "motivated" people are those with a clear understanding of what is important to them and why, and the belief that they are capable of achieving success in these areas.

Why does this matter?

Understanding motivation in this context helps you recognize that there is far more to it than simply "getting to work" and prior planning. This is necessary if you want to see long-term behavior change and increase your likelihood of success. Planning should revolve around understanding importance and setting achievable goals to build belief.



So how do you stay motivated?

To understand importance, ask yourself five "why" questions to uncover the deep-seated meaning of why you want to begin this journey. For example, say you wanted to lose 20 pounds. At the first level of "why," this may be because you used to be able to run 10 miles nonstop and now you can't.

Asking yourself why running 10 miles is important (the second "why") may produce the answer: "Well, I felt fit and healthy when I could run." This uncovers that health is important to you. Through asking yourself (the third "why") "Why is health important?", you might recognize that "Being healthy means I can physically do the things I want." It is important to contemplate exactly what you want to do (e.g. "Why is being physically capable important?"—the fourth "why"). You recognize that you want to be able to keep up with the kids while they are playing.

Again, reflect on why this is important (the fifth and final "why"). You discovered it's because you want to be an engaged and present parent who sets a good example for your kids around an active lifestyle. In this example, investigating the five "whys" led from "I want to lose 20 pounds" to "I want to be an engaged and present parent." This is a far more meaningful and important goal than just weight loss. You have moved the goal from losing weight for losing-weight's sake to being a good parent.

The five "whys" take time. In some cases, you may already know the fifth "why" before getting to that level. However, taking the time to be disciplined in thinking through and investigating each level will help align the desired behavior change you are looking for with truly burning inspiration.

What else can I do?

In regard to the second aspect of motivation (belief), make sure you take the time to recognize the small steps on the journey to your overall destination. In the example above, losing 20 pounds is a long process that could seem overwhelming. But focusing on the first five pounds can be a good way to build momentum and set a more achievable initial goal.



Before setting off into action, make sure you spend time breaking your overall desired outcome into smaller "journey goals." Ensure they are relevant and in line with your overall goals. This makes them a true indicator of progress to build confidence and highlight any changes you need to make.

So where to now?

Motivation is not simple. The video-streaming generation may make it look as easy as yelling a bunch of motivational words at yourself on repeat, but if it were truly that simple, then most likely you would have already started and succeeded.

Behavior change is far more complex than this, and therefore your understanding of what motivates you needs to match this. A firm understanding of why you want to change (importance) and what this would mean for your life is the key first step to motivation. This needs to be supported by a clear strategy on what progress looks like and the markers along the way that indicate progress. By breaking down these goals, the overall task will seem that little bit more achievable.

Source: Veretis. (Revised 2024 [Ed.]). *What does motivation really mean?* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).

