

DR. BRIE TURNS, LAMFT

ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING



**The Simple Guide to Creating
Realistic and Achievable Goals**



Accomplish Anything

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Unless you have been living under a rock, you have probably been asked or have asked the question: “What is your New Year’s Resolution?” Chances are, you’ve created a New Year’s Resolution at some point in time; maybe you even achieved it, but the statistics indicate that you likely failed.

Approximately 92% of people who made a New Year’s Resolutions in 2017 didn’t accomplish it (The Statistic Brain, 2018). I don’t know about you but this statistic makes me not only shy away from making goals for the New Year but also other goals that creep up during the year! If I think that I only have an 8% shot of accomplishing them, I am not going to waste my time just to be disappointed.

The Disappointment

Think about the last time you carefully crafted and created a goal. Do you remember the excitement you felt when thinking about achieving that goal? Did you fantasize about how the goal would improve your life? Did thinking about embarking on this new adventure make you happy and excited? Most people who create goals start to fantasize about their life after the goal has been achieved.

Unfortunately, because many people don’t complete their goals, they also miss out on experiencing this excitement. We have all felt the satisfaction after a job well done. You know,

when you finally get the house cleaned up after the kids go to bed or you finished responding to that mountain of emails in your inbox. Even these minor goals leave you feeling accomplished and motivated to take on the next task. But when you lay in bed thinking about everything you didn't get done that day, you're often left feeling frustrated and discouraged.

In addition, many people who don't meet their goals start to lose hope, which turns into disappointment towards themselves. Personally, I remember the excitement I had during the first day of my internship while completing my master's degree. I had excitement towards working in the court system, learning how to be a family therapist, and knowing that earning 250 client hours was one of the last goals I needed to achieve before graduating. My excitement came to a screeching halt one month later when I was *fired* from my first internship site. I won't bore you with the details but I was mortified. Numerous thoughts ran through my head: Why was I being fired? What would my professors think of me? Am I not meant to be a therapist? This abrupt delay in my goal immediately made me turn inward and feel like *I* was the failure, *I* wasn't able to measure up, and that *I* should quit while I was ahead and find a new career.

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Failing to achieve goals does not only increase your frustration and disappointment because you were not able to complete them, but it can also cause you to develop negative thoughts about yourself and your abilities. These thoughts and perceptions can grow each time you fail to achieve a goal. This negative cycle explains why so many people stop creating goals after they have previously missed the mark.

Professionals

If you have ever sought out professional therapy or counseling, you've probably encountered the question: "What is your goal for therapy?" or "How will you know when you are ready to be finished with counseling?" (Side note: if you haven't created goals or a treatment plan with your therapist, it may be time to find a new one!)

One of the most common interventions used by family therapists is *goal formation*. When planning this book, I thought about the numerous clients who I have treated that achieved their goals for therapy. Whether their goal was to spend more time with their children, enjoy their work life more, or increase their coping mechanisms, many were able to successfully achieve

their goal and terminate their therapy services. Luckily, therapists are not the only professionals whose job is to help people achieve goals.

If you think about it, most professionals, regardless of their business or expertise, help their clients or customers achieve their dreams and aspirations: Financial advisors help their clients achieve various monetary investments; home remodelers help customers design and transform their residences; and school teachers educate students on specific academic subjects. So how is it that experts and specialists can help customers reach their goals but individuals struggle to meet their own goals?

Well, there are two main reasons: 1) Professionals help you identify the *perfect* goal. We are great at helping clients identify and create a specific, measurable goal, rather than having a vague, ambiguous idea. Next, 2) Professionals help hold clients *accountable*. It is easy to skip the gym or cheat on your diet when you don't have anyone but yourself to answer to. The rest of this book will break down how you can begin crafting and solidifying the perfect goal and how you can start holding yourself accountable.

The Perfect Goal

Since becoming a therapist, I heavily use one specific model of therapy called Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (De Jong & Berg, 2013; de Shazer, 1985). Because I promise my readers research-based information, I found it crucial to first explain where these ideas came from. I don't want to go into a great deal of detail regarding this model but it is important for you to know that these characteristics of a perfect goal are *research-based*; meaning that this model of therapy has been proven to be effective for a variety of clients (i.e. those with substance abuse, high school students, parents raising a child with autism).

The Root Goal

The first step in establishing the perfect goal is actually identifying the *root* goal you want to achieve. I know that may sound strange but the initial "goal" you want to achieve is probably not the thing you really want. Let me give you an example: I frequently hear from individuals in my personal and professional life that they would like to lose weight. Now, with a very small percentage of individuals, losing 5 to 10 pounds is their ideal goal, but for most, their root goal is deeper.

So how do you know if your current goal is actually the goal you want to achieve? Easy! You answer, as honestly as possible, the question: What difference would achieving your goal make? How would you view yourself if you completed it?

When I ask this question to individuals who would like to lose weight, common responses I hear are: I would feel more confident; I would be happier with my appearance; I would feel more attractive; I would be able to sleep better; I would feel less stressed; and I would be more outgoing. I love asking this question because it helps clients actually identify what it is that they truly desire! So let's practice identifying yours:

1. What is the current goal you would like to achieve?

2. Looking at your answer above, if you were to achieve that goal, what difference would it make in your life?

3. Now, it may take another round of that question to find your root goal. So, again, if you were to achieve the answer in question 2, what difference or change would that make in your life?

4. Once you truly believe that you are at your root goal, you can stop asking yourself this question. But keep in mind that I typically ask the same question 4 to 5 times before clients believe they are at their root goal. So if you need to, ask yourself the question 1 or 2 more times. You know when to stop when you feel like you are going in circles. List your final, root goal here:

Characteristics of the Perfect Goal

Since using solution-focused brief therapy, about **90%** of my clients accomplish the goals they set out for themselves in therapy. How is it that I'm able to help clients achieve their goals in comparison to the measly 8% of the general population? I'm not a genie or own a magic wand (although, I wish I did). The trick is 5 crucial characteristics of creating the perfect goal. So what are these magical characteristics that I use?

The Presence of a Solution

The number one characteristic of a perfect goal is the *presence* of a solution rather than the absence (De Jong & Berg, 2013). One of the biggest mistakes an individual will make when setting up a goal is making a goal that is the absence of a problem, for example: I want to stop being anxious or lonely or I want to quit yelling. Instead of stopping a behavior, quitting a habit, or not feel an emotion, I ask clients, “What would you do/feel/experience instead?”

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My favorite motto in therapy is: For everything you take away, you have to put something in its place. If you would like to stop feeling anxious, what would you rather feel instead? It may sound basic and like common sense but this is why many who try to quit smoking have a difficult time; the habit needs to be replaced by something!

Neurologically speaking, your brain has been wired to do something, and each time you do it, that brain connection gets strong and stronger. It’s easier for your brain to create and strengthen a new connection rather than completely evaporating an existing connection (Carter, 2009), which is why I recommend replacing the behavior or attitude you want to change.

5. If needed, write your root goal (number 4) in terms of the presence of the solution rather than absence of the problem.

Behavioral Terms

The second characteristic of a perfect goal is that it needs to be based in *behavioral* terms. For example, when individuals state, I want to be “happier,” “calmer,” or “more peaceful” my typical response is, “What would that look like? How would you, I, or your friends know you are happier or calmer?”

There are a few reasons why this is important. First, identifying behavioral changes allows you to recognize when you are engaging in that goal. For example, if you stated that you would recognize that you are happier by starting more conversations while out in public, smiling more, and using a calmer voice, you can track and monitor each time you do these behaviors.

Secondly, everyone's definitions of potential goals are going to be different. If you and your closest friend stated that you each wanted to work towards "being happier" your definition and your friend's definition may be really different. By asking for the specific behaviors, you can start to identify your unique needs and wants from your goal!

And the last main reason for having a behavioral goal is because you will be able to identify when you achieve it! If you stay vague and state that you just want to be happier, you never know when you have completed that goal.

6. Considering your goal from number 5, clearly define it in behavioral terms. How would you and others know when you are doing ____? What would a fly on the wall see you doing?

Measurable

The third most important characteristic is to have your goal be *measurable*. If your goal is not measurable, you are unable to know when you are making progress. Using the example from above, if you state that you would like to start more conversations in public, my next question is, "How many more conversations would you like to start; two each day or each week? 10 each month?" Because everyone is starting at different places, measuring out your goal will help you consider your unique personality and characteristics. If it is really easy for you to start conversations, maybe two a day is more of a challenge rather than four conversations a week.

Similarly to wording your goal in behavioral terms, placing them in measurable terms allows you to know when you are making progress on those goals (De Jong & Berg, 2013). Tracking your goals each day and week allows you to recognize how far you have come from your starting point. When you start noticing that you are making progress on that goal, it fuels your fire to continue.

7. Looking at your goal from number 6, write out how many times a day, week, or month you will be engaging in that goal. This will be different for everyone so make sure you make it realistic for yourself but also challenging!

Small Steps

So now you have a goal that is the presence of a solution, behavioral, and measureable. The next key step is to have a goal that is broken down into small steps rather than a final result (De Jong & Berg, 2013). Of course it is great to think about the final result you want to achieve but you need to break that big goal into small steps. It goes back to the old phrase: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

8. Take your goal from step 7 and make sure that you can break it down into small steps. I like to help clients think about their small steps in terms of weeks. Over the next 4 weeks, what are small steps that you can work on?

Week 1- _____

Week 2- _____

Week 3- _____

Week 4- _____

After you have finished these, you can write out the remaining weeks in a journal. I often ask clients to bring in a journal that documents their goal for the week and the progress that they have made.

Your Role

Oftentimes, individuals feel discouraged about the possibility of their goal being achieved because they believe that their problems are occurring because of someone else (De Jong & Berg, 2013). For example, parents often tell me that they would like to see their child earn higher grades, be more respectful, or decrease their screen-time. Spouses often state that they would like their partner to stop nagging them or help more around the house.

If your goal is already focused on you, feel free to skip to the next section. However, if your goal is focused on someone else doing something, we need to make it more focused on you and your role. Thinking about your goal from number 8, ask yourself the question, “If {spouse/child/other} were to do {your identified goal of number 8}, how would that be helpful for you? How would you respond if that goal happened?”

You may have to use the following sections to re-write your ideal goal, but that’s okay! Make it focused on you and your role in the situation!

9. _____

One of the worst feelings you can have is to feel like your ideal goal can only be achieved if someone else acts differently or changes something. There is a lot of strength that comes from knowing you can control your life and your desired outcomes!

The Perfect Goal

You’ve done it! Which, creating the perfect goal, is a goal in and of itself. You have created a measurable, behavioral goal that is broken down into small steps AND focuses on your role in the situation. Write out your complete goal below so you can refer back to it in the near future. I also recommend that you print this page and hang it somewhere that you see everyday, like a bathroom mirror.

Now it’s time to think about how you can stay motivated. People often start off strong but then lose momentum when they are unable to recognize their progress. This next section will focus on how you can stay motivated on your journey!

Staying Motivated

Scale It

One of my favorite activities is to scale people's progress. Many solution-focused brief therapists use the scaling question (De Jong & Berg, 2013). My favorite way to use it is to track client's progress.

10. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is if the complete absence of your goal and 10 is your final goal, where are you at today? _____
11. Taking that number you just provided, answer the question: What would you need to do in order to move one point higher? For example, if you want to get from a score of 4 to 5, what would you need to do next week?

At the end of each week, ask yourself these questions. Some weeks you may go up or down on the scale but your overall projection should be moving forward.

Why?

Another question I have individuals answer when things get hard is: Why did you start this goal in the first place? What made you want to achieve it? Once you remind yourself of why you started, you'll usually find a bit more motivation to keep going. The reasons why you started your goal the first time may change over time but if you keep reminding yourself of the benefits of completing the goal, you will likely not stop working towards it.

Good Luck

Now that you have a perfect goal and have a few ideas for how to stay motivated, it's time to start making small changes! You may even want to consider building a tribe to support you along the way. I will offer one last word of caution. If your life revolves around this goal, you will likely become burnt out and irritated with it. Take your time, enjoy the journey, and HAVE FUN! You've got this!

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