

Ep #20: Setting Goals the Right Way



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With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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Motivation is a feeling, just like all the others. And so if you are depending your life's ambitions on a temporary feeling, such as motivation, it isn't going to get you there. I wish it was enough, but it's not, okay. However, perseverance will.

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

We are talking about setting goals and how to achieve them. So, I think, when it comes to goal setting, one of the things is that people just don't know right off the bat what is a tangible goal and how to create the steps to get there. So I'm hoping, in this episode, we can kind of clear some of the mind chatter that happens around that because one of the things that I love most about talking with people is about their goals.

I love it. It lights me up. It lights you up. It is so exciting when you have a goal in mind. But it can be so disheartening when you are confused on the road to get there. And let me tell you, my friends, right off the bat, achieving your goals, the road getting there is going to take all kinds of twists and turns, it just is. And that's why I do so much talking about how to reframe your mindset so you can persevere through the failures, learn from them, and grow, okay, because that is the key to your success.

But for this episode, I'm going to stay really, really focused on the very beginning stages of when you have a big goal in mind, how to break that down into tangible steps, and how to get momentum going in the right direction. Because the thing that makes me the saddest for people is they set goals, but then they don't know how to achieve them, and then they just give up.

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And it's not that the goal was bad. It's that we didn't have an action plan that really laid out the steps for how you can get there, okay, because if you're a visionary, like me, if you're a dreamer, we come up with the most amazing ideas, if I do say so myself, but where we can get lost sometimes is in the steps to get there. And then you have your more logistical humans that really get caught up in the step by step, and they lose sight of the big vision. And so, what we need is we need to come together and create some balance there because the truth is, you need both.

You need the big dream and you need the logistics. You need the tangible steps to get there so you don't fall in a puddle of despair, feeling like you're never going to get there. You're going to get there. You just have to take some real strategic steps to go there.

So, here's the thing, as I said, I love hearing people talk about their goals and aspirations for their life. Like, I live for this shit. Business coaching is one of my favorite things to do for that reason. But what I don't love is when these goals become so big and people put their whole heart and soul into an idea with no real plan.

It worries me, to be honest, because without a plan, without tangible steps, I don't know how you're going to get there. Because, knowing how the human brain works, how humans process, and how much of our relationship with ourselves impacts every goal we set, like, we need a plan, friends. We need a plan, okay?

You need a plan to get to the main goal, otherwise you're likely to have a hard time because there's a lot of different paths and a lot of different ways to get there, you know. And how much time you spend running around the track depends on how long it's going to take you to get there. So that is why there needs to be this beautiful blend of this dream, vision, huge goal, and there needs to be tangible action steps to get there that are very doable for you.

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As we've talked about in previous episodes, we need to take tangible doable steps that work towards our goals so we actually reach them, okay, because if you have an idea of what you want to do and your plan is just to stay motivated, like, "I just need to stay focused on my goal and I just need to stay motivated," I can't tell you how many fucking times I hear that.

I love the heart and soul behind that. I hate it as a plan. So, I love it, I love it from a passion standpoint, I hate it from a tangible doable standpoint, okay, because I know this is how people crash and burn. Okay, so, motivation is a feeling, just like all the others. And if you've been listening to any of my other podcast episodes, you have learned that feelings are energy in the body, and then your brain interprets it.

And so, if you are depending your life's ambitions on a temporary feeling such as motivation, it isn't going to get you there. I wish it was enough, but it's not, okay. However, perseverance will. Perseverance will, an action plan will, commitment to yourself and your dreams will. You have to stay committed to the path of your goals, even when it gets messy emotionally, and it always does.

I wish I could tell you that it didn't, but especially if your goals are in business, it gets messy. If your goals are in losing weight, it gets messy. If your goal is to be a better parent, it gets messy. Anytime we are working with the human condition, we get a little messy, okay. And that's alright. It's alright. It's part of the human experience to have emotions.

I just don't want you to bet your life on them, okay. Because energy in the body, it's designed to pass through. It's supposed to. In fact, when energy in the body gets stuck, that's usually when we start having a host of problems. And so, this is why people really enjoy exercising or journaling or art, like, things that process and allow energy to flow out of you is what ends up making you feel more energized.

And I know this sounds like some woo-woo shit, because I'm not talking about all this woo-woo energy out in the world. I'm talking about you as a

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human being have emotions and experiences and there can be energy to that, okay.

And so, if you set all your hopes and dreams on an idea and you believe that all you need to do is to feel motivated or stay motivated, you are cutting yourself short, okay. I don't want you to depend on a feeling that is designed to come and go. I want you to depend on yourself. I want you to learn how to work with your strengths and your weaknesses, okay.

So, don't hear me wrong here. Motivation and staying positive, honoring that energy in your body, is incredibly important, okay. You need those emotions. We need motivation, usually to set the goal. It serves a purpose. I want you to embrace it. I want you to use it properly. I don't want you to depend on it, okay.

Motivation is meant to get you started. It's not meant to carry you through. That's where you hand the baton off to perseverance, okay? So, I hope you hear me clearly on that.

And this is actually true for negative feelings, you know. Feelings are supposed to come and go, if you think about it. Like the weather. Like, if you're the sky and all of the different seasons come and go, the rain, the hail, the sunny days, you are designed to change. It's designed to transition.

And that's why, you know, when we're having bad emotions too, we have to remind ourselves that it's energy passing through. It's an emotion. And it's valid and we need to honor it in that moment and give it the support that it needs, but also knowing it's not designed to stay there forever, okay. So, this is a universal concept between good and bad emotions.

And that's why, in therapy, probably the most annoying thing you hear therapists say is, "Well there really are no bad emotions and there really are no good emotions, there's just emotions." And you can kind of see why. It's all just information for you, where do I need support, and how do I get it, and how do I honor myself in this moment?"

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Because the human experience is filled with highs and lows. We are wired to have emotional responses to them, okay. There is nothing wrong with that. But you need to make smart and supportive choices for yourself so you succeed.

So, let's talk about how do we do this. So, since this episode is specific to how do you achieve your goals, I'm going to break this down for you in a few steps, okay.

So, number one is you need to have a clear vision, okay. What is the goal? What are you trying to achieve? So, let's say, the answer is you want to be a better parent, okay? And so, I'm using this one not because I have hidden messages in it, I really, really don't, but because it's super fucking broad. And I think you guys do this a lot.

You're like, I just want to be a better parent, that's my goal. It's a beautiful goal. I like the goal. I'm just curious how you're going to do that. Okay, so I'm going to use that as an example and we're going to kind of work through it.

So, keep in mind, even if you're not a parent, the logic I'm using works for your goal of what you might be trying to achieve, okay. Because sometimes, we're like, "Well I just want to be a better person," or, "I just want to get my emotions under control," or, "I want to be a better friend," or, "I want to have more friends," or, "I want to make more money next year," or whatever. Do you guys kind of get what I mean?

Usually humans start with a very broad noble idea, but then there's not tangible action steps to get there, and so it's kind of like, "Well I tried being a better parent," or, "I tried being a better person," or, "I tried getting better at art, but it just didn't work out." And I'm like, well what have you tried? And that's when I usually get the blank stares. It's just more ambiguous on top of ambiguous. And guess what, it doesn't work out, okay.

So, let's not do that. Let's stop that shit right there. What is your vision? So, because I know who I'm talking to, let's say you've picked a broad idea,

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and again, noble one. I'm not saying it's a bad goal. It's a good goal. Embrace it. I like it. I just want to help you get there because an idea without tangible steps is not going to give the brain anything to take action on.

And since the brain is already managing so many things about you that do require action steps, like keeping you alive and functioning and breathing and digesting, it's going to forget about this new idea and just go back to the way things were because it knows how to do that. And if you haven't given it the support it needs to do anything different, don't be surprised by the results.

And no, it has nothing to do with motivation. You're not lazy. I hear that more than I'd like to. I hear so many people berating themselves for being lazy. Maybe there's a laziness factor, but most of the time, it's just a dependence on motivation, okay. And I want you to utilize motivation to its fullest extent to get your ass pointed in the right direction, and then after that, you need a plan and you're going to have to commit to it with perseverance because it's going to get hard, it's going to get uncomfortable, and it's not always going to be easy. And you need to be able to follow the plan regardless of how you feel, okay.

So, let's go back to this example that we're going to work through together. And because I love you guys so much, I have actually created a worksheet for you because I want you guys to really kick off your new year with a great start. And so, I know that this parenting example is not going to work for many of you, but the logic will.

And so, if you go to my website at nicolesymcox.com, you can go ahead and download the worksheet for this episode and work through it on your own with your own goal that you want to put in mind. You can also grab it on Instagram, [@mentalhealthremix](https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthremix). We're going to have a link also on Instagram, okay. So, two places you can get that worksheet, one is on Instagram and then one is on my website. So, let's get back into this.

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Okay, so going back to this example, we have set a goal, we want to be a better parent. That's the big idea and it's a nice idea. I love it. But we need to break this down since it's way too broad and the brain can't do anything with it, okay. So, this is your next step.

You pick your broad goal. Your next step is to pick three things that you can easily put into place that will make you a better parent. So, for example, let's say that those three things are you want to be emotionally available, you want to make time for your kids, and you want to set healthy boundaries.

So, let's say that after an in-depth session, that's what you have come up with, just I'm making this shit up as I go. Number one, in order to be emotionally available, you are likely going to need the support of therapy or coaching to help you figure out where your blocks are, okay, because when we're not emotionally available, a lot of times, there is unprocessed pain that we need to deal with so that we can open up our availability again, okay.

So, maybe since your goal to be a better parent includes being emotionally available, you might have to include going to therapy as part of your plan. So, you can work on, "Why do I not feel emotionally available? Why is it hard for me to emotionally connect to my kids? Where am I getting triggered? And where am I getting stuck?" Okay, so now therapy just became part of that goal list.

Two, the second thing was making time for kids. So, making time for your kids is usually a scheduling and a focusing issue, okay. So, for a lot of parents, they can be with their kids, but they're on their phones, they're on their computers. That's what I mean by a focusing issue.

So, I you want to make more time for your kids, in order to make that statement true, let's say you create 45 minutes a day at bedtime, or whenever – again, this is just a general example. So, 45 minutes a day at bedtime to really spend uninterrupted time with your kids. The rest of the

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day is busy and shuffling, and maybe you have multiple children and so it's difficult to give undivided attention.

So maybe you spend those 45 minutes figuring out, how do we all do this as a family? And you treat it as important as you would any adult meeting in your life. Okay, that's where the focus comes in; we're focused on nothing but the activities. Maybe it's reading books, you know. Maybe you're doing a craft project together or doing a puzzle. I don't really know what it is.

But you're treating this as sacred time with your children because this goes into your big goal of being a better parent. Kids need time with you. And I think every parent knows that. And so maybe that's something that you create and that goes into action seven days a week, or it goes into action five days a week, you know, give or take whatever your schedule is like.

Then number three is setting healthy boundaries. Alright, this is actually a big one – I love to double dip – so what will be great about that is if your goal is setting healthy boundaries, you can actually learn about that when you're in therapy. And you're already doing that because that goes with being emotionally available.

So, we're double dipping here a little bit, but healthy boundaries is usually a learned skill for most of us, okay. And it's especially true when it comes to kids. Boundaries are something, unless they were modelled to us as children, unless they were modelled to us by someone, we don't always intuitively know how to set and enforce boundaries, okay.

And even for adults who had healthy relationships with their parents, they still have to learn how to set healthy boundaries with children, okay. I don't know how much parents realize, but your children bring up all of your emotional shit. Like, they bring up all your stuff, especially young children, okay.

Young children, like, when I say young, I mean five and under particularly that age group. And then it usually resurfaces again when they're

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teenagers. Those are probably the two hotspots when it comes to learning how to set boundaries as a parent, okay. And you're going to need different skillsets for each age group.

Like, the younger ones require a whole different skillset than what a teenager can simply because of their brain development. Teens have a lot more access to thought process, and there's just a lot of other things that are going on for them emotionally versus a five, four, three, two, one-year-old, right? Like, they're going through their own phase.

And so, taking classes or talking to your therapist or really doing some reading – there's a lot of good books out there on how to set boundaries with kids and parenting with boundaries that maybe goes into your game plan of being a better parent. And so, there's a ton of books on the subject, and that's how you take ownership of these things.

Let me tell you, my friends, breaking down those three things, here is my hope for you. You saw how tangible and specific all of these were. And so if you have this written down and you're literally checking this off, like this starts to become part of your schedule, part of your everyday rituals, like learning how to be emotionally available, learning how to set boundaries, and learning how to make time for your kids, like putting that in process, the result is probably you're going to become your version – remember, I'm pretending that you came up with these – your version of a better parent.

It's going to make you feel so accomplished because you're not working towards this ambiguous abstract idea of being a better parent. Like, that could go 100 different ways. That's defined differently by every single person, you now. And so, the way we defined it in this episode makes it specific, it makes it tangible, and it makes it doable and you're going to feel successful in the process because you're going to know, "I am actively participating in achieving this goal."

And if you notice, within at least two out of those three, you're having external support, so you're having objective support by a therapist or a

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coach or whoever, you know, maybe they're holding you accountable or maybe they're just providing the support and the resources you need. Because it's an important part of understanding.

Like, no one really arrives on their own. We all need each other. We all need support. There's no weakness in that. There's weakness usually in doing it alone, okay.

Anyways, I hope that part was helpful. And again, if you're using the worksheet, which you can get on my website or you can get it on Instagram, @mentalhealthremix, use your own goal and work through that. So maybe your goal is to get in better shape over the next six months. So, work through that goal. List three things that you're going to need to do in order to make that happen, and really list some details, okay. So just follow the logic, alright?

Number two, perseverance. I said that with a little oomph to it. Okay, you're going to run out of motivation at some point, my loves. I'm sorry, it's true, and it's going to get hard. Do it anyway, okay. That's how I summarize perseverance. Work the plan anyway. We just took a lot of time creating a plan for you to reach your big goal. We've broken it down into three very tangible steps.

So, guess what's going to follow. Your motivation on it's going to run out and then you're going to have to put perseverance in because you're like, "Well shit, I definitely don't feel like doing this anymore. I would rather watch TV," or I would rather whatever, you know, whatever thing that we want to do. And you need to work the plans anyway.

That's how you achieve your goals. You stick to the plan, even when it sucks, even when it hurts, even when it's an emotional mess, even when you don't feel like it. You created the plan because it supports your goals, and that's where you might need to create some kind of affirmation for yourself or mantra. This is where those kinds of things can be really, really helpful to help you continue to persevere when it sucks.

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So, having faith in yourself, I created this plan, the plan is good, I'm sticking to the plan, okay, and then whatever affirmation or mantra you need to keep yourself committed. Because, once again, it takes motivation to set this up. It takes perseverance to see it through, alright. And then stop arguing with yourself, alright. Commit to the plan, do the plan, stop arguing with yourself. It's a waste of fucking energy. There's plenty of other people you can argue with. Don't argue with yourself. Actually, I really don't want you to argue with other people, but you get my meaning on that.

So, number three, surround yourself with support. So I already said this. You usually need support from a group, a class, another person, a friend, a family member, community, whoever. It is so much easier to persevere through the hard times when you are doing it alongside other people who are doing the same thing, okay.

There's all this bonding that happens. Like, when we get together as a community, as a group, and we persevere together through something hard, it not only creates connection between us, it also creates empowerment. And it helps us to keep going, even when it's hard.

So, don't keep your plan to yourself. Share your goal with someone who is safe. I mean, don't share your plan with someone you know is going to shit all over it. That's not helpful.

Share it with people that you think are really going to support your emotions, that are really going to support your choices as you create that goal, because it's a lot easier to do it with other people than to do it by yourself. And I want you to keep in mind, every small step leads to a bigger one. Let yourself fail, let yourself learn, and keep walking. Every little step moves you in the direction that you are choosing to go. So don't discount this.

I don't want you to just full-on jump to these big goals without taking the small tangible steps that you need to get there. Taking those small steps builds a firm foundation for you to build your dream on. And when you have

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a firm foundation where your dream is built, that is where shit can grow. This is where life can build on itself, okay. But if you are building your heart and soul and dreams on sand, that will have a time limit, and I don't want that for you. So, let's not jump to the quick fixes. Let's not jump too far ahead. Let's do the work, let's be successful, and let's feel good along the way.

Alright, my friends, I hope this was helpful for you, and again, if you want to grab that worksheet, it's at nicolesymcox.com. I think we're putting it in the show notes, or you can grab it off Instagram @mentlhealthremix. Alright, and if you loved today's episode, please feel free to leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. It helps other people find the podcast.

And as always, if strong emotions came up for you while listening to this podcast, please take it as information, okay, that something in your internal world needs support. There is no shame or blame in getting mental health support by a mental health professional in your local state of residence. Alright, my friends, I am rooting for you and I can't wait to hear about all your success.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.

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