



Diane E Dreher Ph.D.
Your Personal Renaissance

MOTIVATION

How to Build Hope in Troubled Times

3 powerful steps to a more hopeful life.

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Reviewed by Abigail Fagan



KEY POINTS

- Research shows that focusing on positive actions can counteract negativity and increase our well-being.
- Research has found that we can increase our positivity by building hope with goals, pathways, and agency.
- The positive emotions gained in this process can increase happiness, success, and well-being.

Today's avalanche of distressing news can make some of us feel helpless and hopeless. And research shows that we have an inherent "negativity bias" to focus on our problems, which can further drag us down (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Yet research has also found that focusing on positive events can counteract downward spirals of negativity and increase our well-being (Garland et al., 2010; Hurley & Kwon, 2013).

One powerful way to increase our positivity is to actively build hope. Pioneering research in Hope Theory by psycholo-



Source: Diane Dreher photo

hope involves three qualities: 1) Goals 2) Pathways 3) Agency.

Clinical psychologist David Feldman, Ph.D., and I conducted a study that showed how putting goals, pathways, and agency into active steps can significantly increase people's hope (Feldman & Dreher, 2012).

Here's how you can use these three steps to build

your own hope.

1. Goals

Choose a goal you'd like to achieve in the next six months. Make it an *approach goal* like "I want to be fit and healthy," "I want to enjoy life," or "I want to have more friends." Approach goals (striving for what you want) promote personal well-being while avoidance goals (striving to avoid negative situations) are associated with anxiety and distress (Emmons, 2003).

Choose your own approach goal, like improving your physical fitness, beginning a new hobby, making new friends, or something else you'd like to achieve. Focusing on this positive goal can not only help you progress in that one area, it can also evoke positive emotions to "broaden and build" your capacity for happiness, well-being, and success (Fredrickson, 2003).

2. Pathways

they could take toward their goal. You can do the same.

- For a fitness goal, you could sign up for an exercise class or begin a walking, jogging, or running practice. Research has shown that regular exercise can improve emotional well-being and even help relieve depression (Penedo & Dahn, 2005; Rethorst & Trivedi 2010). You may want to consult your health care professional before beginning an exercise program, and begin reasonably, walking or running a few blocks at first, then gradually increasing your distance.
- If your goal is adding more enjoyment to your life, you could begin a new hobby. Your steps might include signing up for a class at the local community center, taking that old guitar out of the closet, going to a music store and signing up for lessons, or something else.
- If your goal is to have more friends, your steps might include reconnecting with an old friend with a text, card, or phone call. Or you could begin making new friends by following your interest—taking a class, joining a group at your local church, synagogue, or community center, working for a cause you believe in, or something else.

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But choosing three steps is *not* enough. Life happens.

Unexpected events can throw you off course. We asked our

obstacle. You can do the same.

For example, years ago, I signed up for a Saturday morning yoga class. The obstacle was that it was tempting to sleep in on Saturday mornings. My positive alternate action was friendship. Because my friend Janette was also taking the yoga class, I made it to class because I didn't want to disappoint her. In another example, my friend Peggy committed to a walking practice around her neighborhood. Her obstacle was rain. So on rainy days, she walked inside the local shopping mall.

3. Agency

You'll need agency, or motivation, to keep moving forward. Some ways to build your agency are to:

- Use positive self-talk—tell yourself, “You can do it!”
- Post a motivational quote by your desk or on your bathroom mirror.
- Share your goal with a friend and encourage each other.
- Visualize yourself reaching your goal.

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Dave Feldman and I helped our participants build their agency with visualization. In a guided meditation, we asked them to close their eyes and visualize themselves taking

You, too, can visualize yourself taking your own steps, experiencing yourself confronting each obstacle, overcoming it with your alternative, and then feeling the joy of accomplishment when you visualize yourself reaching your goal.

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Hope advocate Kathryn Goetzke (2022), has called this three-step process “inspired action.” Through this process, you can plant seeds of hope that will grow like sunflowers, the international symbol of hope, because they turn toward the light. And this process can fill your life with the light of hope and greater possibilities.

References

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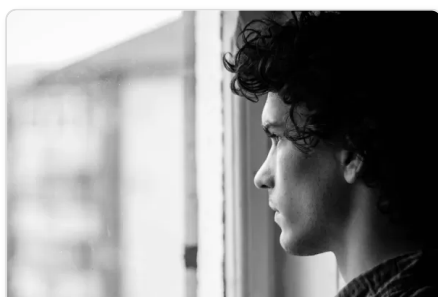
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Diane Dreher, Ph.D., is an author, researcher, and positive psychology coach.

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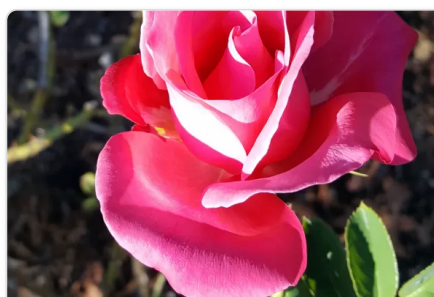


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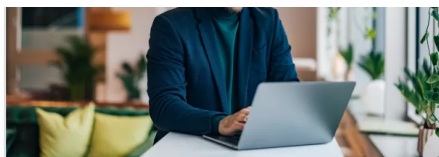


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