

Psychology Space by Li Faustino, PhD



The New Year has begun, and many of us have made resolutions or set goals for 2015. Many people feel like starting something new, turning over a new leaf, or trying to improve ourselves in some way as we mark the passage into a new year.

While this can be a rejuvenating concept for many, it can be daunting and discouraging for others. It can be helpful to set a goal and accomplish part or all of it. Yet it is also possible to set ourselves up for failure by setting goals that are unrealistic and too big. So which way is right?

The answer is, it depends. It depends not just on who you are but the way you handle

challenges. Many people with mood disorders (and those without) do much better getting motivated from accomplishments rather than failures.

One of the interesting findings of research into depression is that people who suffer from depression are often able to be more accurate in estimating what they can accomplish than people without it. This is called "depressive realism." How is that useful? Well, if you're not currently in an episode (and thus likely to be feeling hopeless and apathetic), you may have an above-average ability to set realistic goals. That means you may be more likely to accomplish your goals and feel good. That creates a positive feedback system or "positive reinforcement."

However, setting too big a goal increases the chance you won't reach it, and then you'll feel worse than when you started. On top of that, you may get so discouraged you won't try again. This is called "negative punishment." So it is important to think about how you react when you partially meet a goal -- or don't meet it at all.

Crafting goals that are attainable, such as those made

with depressive realism, is a good way to improve the odds of success.

A lot of us want to lose some weight, get more exercise, or save more money. These kinds of big and nebulous goals make it easy to fail. It's often better to think of smaller steps and to define our objectives more clearly. For example, more concrete and attainable goals might be:

- Eat no junk food during the week and have fruits and vegetables every day
- Add one day of exercise each week
- Walk for 10 minutes a day
- Re-do my current budget and see if I can cut something out

These specific goals lay the groundwork for additional goals later on, after new habits have been incorporated in your routine. They are also far more likely to result in success.

It could be worthwhile to talk to your therapist about exploring how you handle challenges and to help you craft realistic goals. Setting and meeting a goal can be empowering, and lead to better mood and health.

Support Groups

We'd love to see you at one of MDSG's weekly support groups. These groups allow participants to share their thoughts, feelings and personal experiences in small, confidential gatherings. Separate groups are available for newcomers, unipolar (depressive), Bipolar, Under-30s, and family and friends. Doors open at 7:00 p.m., and groups begin at 7:30 p.m.

Manhattan West Side Support Group meets on Wednesdays at 7:30

St. Luke's Roosevelt Adult Outpatient Psychiatric Clinic, 411 West 114th Street (b/w Amsterdam and Riverside)

Manhattan East Side Support Group meets on Fridays at 7:30

Beth Israel Medical Center Bernstein Pavilion, 2nd Floor, Nathan Perlman Place (b/w 15th and 16th Streets, First and Second Aves)

New Friday Night Group for Professionals

MDSG has added a weekly discussion group for people with mood disorders focusing on careers and education. The Professionals Group offers a safe, confidential place to discuss:

- Mood disorders and their effect on careers
- Managing relationships in the office / classroom
- Job / school applications
- Networking
- Interview preparation
- Disclosing a mood disorder with human/ student resources
- Public speaking

- Volunteering
- Financial resources (housing | job placement | financial support)
- Clubhouses (supportive environments)

Join us any Friday night for support, discussion, and an honest discussion of the struggles involved in being a professional with a mood disorder.

This group takes place at the same time as our other support groups.

The Details:

Fridays at Beth Israel Hospital (Bernstein Pavilion)

7:30-9:15pm
(Doors open at 7pm)

315 E 15th St between 1st/2nd Ave, 2nd Floor

\$5 suggested donation

Lecture Series Suspended

We are sad to announce the temporary suspension of the MDSG lecture series.

This educational program has always brought forth the most prestigious speakers and cutting edge information and it is with much reluctance that we suspend it. While we wish to continue this central part of our mission, we also see a need to deliver education in the most relevant and appropriate manner.

Low attendance and general support has further forced us

to put this hiatus into place and address the best way to provide continuing education to our community. It is our intent and desire going forward to find an alternative approach that best responds to the needs of our membership. In the coming months we will be reaching out to our members as we develop a continuing education program that reflects your needs and interests.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our

deepest gratitude to the volunteers who have made this series possible. We are also grateful to the illustrious speakers who have contributed their expertise and insights at our lectures and made the series a tremendous resource for our members and the general public.

Sincerely,
Paul Urbanski
Chairperson

Volunteer-run, Volunteer-supported

MDSG is a volunteer-run organization that operates primarily on funds received through your donations. We rely on your generosity to function.

There are many ways you can help us keep things running smoothly, ranging from volunteering (a little or a

lot, with skills or not) to making a financial contribution (any size is welcome).

Talk to someone at our sign-in desk any Wednesday or Friday evening to volunteer. Or make a donation today by visiting

MDSG.org.

Click on **DONATE NOW!**

In the upper right-hand corner for a direct link to our donations page.

Book Review by Betsy Naylor

This is How: Surviving What You Think You Can't

by Augusten Burroughs
Picador, New York
2012 paperback

Nothing drives people into a state of agitation and depression faster than the sense that they cannot survive. Self-esteem plummets. We feel diminished. All seems hopeless. But crises are not all bad news: they can also bring us something new, like a wiser, deeper self.

Augustin Burroughs wrote *This is How* to help us manage those times we think we can't handle life. This book might change your opinion of what a self-help book can be. We meet no made-up characters in hypothetical circumstances that are easily resolved by following the advice of the author. The problems discussed here are not simple.

Burroughs' earlier books *Running with Scissors* and *Dry* were memoirs that drew a picture of his troubles growing up, including living in foster homes and struggles with alcoholism. He did not have the wherewithal to respond to his circumstances in a constructive way. Hence he writes with considerable wisdom and experience. Many of his observations had resonance for me:

"Some of life's wounds have no resolution and no cure."
"Loss creates a larger surface area within a person. You expand as a result of it."
"The past does not haunt us. We haunt the past."

Burroughs notes that any deeply painful experience "essentially continues to this day, ever present in the background, shaping the choices made on a daily basis,

affecting the quality and range of...life." Take for example the death of someone we love. Not only have we lost a friend or close connection, but we lose the person we were within that relationship. This may be why, without being aware of it, survivors often take on some of the characteristics of the deceased, thus keeping him a little bit alive. In this way, even the death of someone else can be followed by some expansion of yourself.

Every encounter we have with others gives us choices, although we often don't see them. Being quiet or doing nothing is a choice. Suicide is a choice. In a contentious argument we may erupt in anger (a choice), lay blame on everyone else (a choice), be obnoxious (a choice), provoke (a choice), or be inflexible (a choice). These choices do depend on a certain degree of impulse control -- which may or may not be accessible, depending on mood -- but we can't make choices we don't see.

People who get caught up in what others think of them lose a great deal of confidence and freedom of choice, for thoughts of other people's judgments can be crippling. It becomes almost impossible to be yourself. Therapy is helpful in dealing with this because it can lead us to confront the hard truth... and from there we can begin to move forward. Therapy requires commitment, however -- as well as time and money.

Everything we are involved in becomes part of us, up to a point. We can choose what to hold on to, what to let go of, and where to

open up and broaden our lives. The back cover of the book says:

"Here's a problem and some ways to think about it. Two people argue about which one is right. They go back and forth with no resolution. Anger escalates. Each calls the other stupid. Each is hurting the other. Think. What part did I have in this argument? What aspect of me did this touch off? How do I get into these predicaments? Can I stop being upset? Is compromise possible? Could I agree to disagree? Can I let go of this issue and this person? Anger can escalate to resentment to retaliation. If you have ever wondered, how am I supposed to survive this? *This is How.*"

This is a book worth reading, and re-reading. There are ways to survive awful situations. We can start by tapping into the hard-won wisdom of those who have done it, like Mr. Burroughs.



