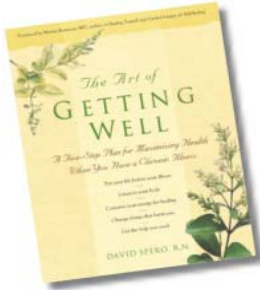


IDEA SUMMARY – Positive Goals

David Spero RN 3 Grijalva Drive San Francisco, CA 94132-2353
415-585-9851 Nurse@DavidSperoRN.com

Nurse/Coach/Author of *The Art of Getting Well: Maximizing Health When You Have a Chronic Illness* (Hunter House 2002) and *The Politics of Diabetes: Social Causes and Cures of a Chronic Illness Epidemic* (New Society 2006) Faculty member, IHI's "Quality Allies: Improving Care by Engaging Patients" Learning Community



In 1989, when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), my life and my career took a sharp turn. I had been a nurse for 15 years, and I had to learn something harder than taking care of other people, which was how to take care of myself. I didn't get much help with this from my medical practitioners. I turned to other sources, such as support groups. In 1998, I trained as a lay leader in Stanford's Chronic Disease Self-Management Program and became totally committed (some might say fanatical) about self-care. I have devoted my life and career since then to helping people help themselves and found it much more enriching, rewarding, and successful than trying to take care of others without their help.

I almost always work with groups: people with MS, with diabetes, health professionals, or mixed groups. The core of my workshops involves participants' setting positive goals for themselves and figuring out how to work toward them. A goal is usually medium-term (a few weeks to a year) and should be something the person sees as improving his or her life in a significant way. It can be about health or fitness, but it doesn't have to be. If it's important to the person setting it, it's probably a good goal.

An action plan is for one short-term concrete step towards a goal. The action plan is a form of self-contract. The time frame is usually 1 week. My version of it is based on Kate Lorig's of Stanford, with the change that my forms ask people to identify, in advance, potential barriers and possible ways over those barriers.

Along with positive goals, a second key to successful self-management is building self-confidence (or “self-efficacy,” to use the Stanford term. Self-efficacy (SE) is self-confidence applied to a particular behavior.) Building self-confidence and SE can change people’s lives. Having some success with self-care can be a turning point, raising their self-confidence and enabling them to make other changes in their lives.

People build their SE by: succeeding at something, by seeing someone with whom they can identify succeed at something (“vicarious success”), by keeping records and logs of their successes, and sometimes by persuasion and support from others. The most important part is actually succeeding, which means that action plans should be calibrated with confidence levels to maximize chances of success. As with goals, the action plan should be chosen by the person doing it.

RESULTS

Over the long term, people’s confidence, health and lives -- and your jobs -- tend to get easier and better. There are hundreds of studies. A PubMed search for <Lorig K> gives you 80. A search for <self-management> yields 22,000. I’m not involved in any of them.

PRACTICAL TIPS

Use “Confidence Levels” (CLs) to assess people’s probability of success. The CL is a self-rated self-efficacy. If their CL is less than 8 on a scale of 1 – 10, ask, “what would get your CL up to an 8? (or at least a 7 – less than 7 almost guarantees non-success; 8 is better).

It’s best to do these in groups of 2, 3, or 4, so people can help each other.

If they seem uncertain, ask, “Where is your help going to come from?” Self-Care is not Do-It-Yourself-Care. Finding, asking for, and accepting help are usually key skills.

Note: Unlike the Action Plan, the goal-setting sheet is not evidence-based. I’ve never done a study on it. But in my experience, it seems to get people started and motivate them.

NEXT STEP

I’m now using positive goals / action planning with groups as a whole. Community organizations, families, church groups can use these techniques for making health changes (or other changes) in their environment that will help everyone in the group. Individual self-management and group self-management are synergistic. Consider working with families as a whole in this way.