

# The Future Diary

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People who hope for a positive future and believe it is likely, we call optimists. It turns out that the main advantage of optimism is it makes people much more persistent. They don't give up easily when problems step in that would discourage most people.

For example, a man decides he will sell cars. When he goes out to talk to the customer, most of the time he will not sell a car. Someone average on optimism may give up. Someone high on optimism will not give up. He will keep meeting and working with customers, even when he doesn't succeed. And because he doesn't quit, he does finally succeed.

One way to develop a higher level of optimism is to keep a Future Diary. In this assignment you simply write a description of how your future has turned out, if it were a year, or two years, or five years in the future.

You write it in the present voice. Let's say that today is July 2015. You want to write a future diary, so you write, "Today is July, 2020. In the past five years I have been able to achieve the following . . . (and here you describe your life *if things worked out just the way you would hope*). Write about a future in a month, six months, a year, three years, and so forth.

But realistic optimism prepares you for setbacks and even failures. In research on goal setting, it was found that those who prepared to fail, and thought through how they'd keep going when a failure does occur, were about three times more likely to succeed.

For example, some women wrote weight loss goals. Some also wrote about how they'd keep going when the diet got tiresome, when exercise was not working, and so on. The ones who wrote about how to overcome setbacks lost three times more weight.

The best way to do that is to write about how you handled problems, *as if you had already faced those problems*. "At a certain point, I wanted to give up, but I kept going by doing . . ."

People who will keep a Future Diary for about three months, writing once or twice a week or so, showed a very nice rise in optimism.

We like being around optimists. They are somewhat more creative, they make better decisions, and they are more pleasant, as long as the optimism is moderately high and not extreme. Moderate optimists recognize that things will go wrong, and they take reasonable steps to deal with that universal truth.

In a way, you don't *learn* to be more optimistic. Rather, you remember. You see, when you were a child, you were optimistic. Children have an incredible ability to survive and even flourish under very difficult conditions. Their optimism keeps them going. When they learn to talk, they make grammar mistakes, but they keep going. As they learn to walk, they fall down. They get up. So may you awaken your innate hope. May you find your inner optimist. May you keep a hopeful eye on the future and reap the reward of greater success and happiness from growing your optimism.