

Tame Your Elephant: Successful Goal Setting for Your Diabetes Management

*Key Points from the presentation by Jane Maliszewski on 10/21/20 to the
Mary Washington Healthcare Diabetes and Nutrition Program*

Watch this short video to learn how Dr. Jonathan Haidt's metaphor of the Elephant, the Rider, and the Path can help you stick to your goals:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9KP8uiGZTs>

Metaphors are very helpful to reinforce change as they engage different networks in our brain than the ones we typically rely on for our "logical" thinking. Memorable naming through metaphor gives us an easy common language to use to explain the swirl of thoughts inside our mind and turn it into an external object that we can deal with.

The Elephant represents our emotional self. It provides the strength, the power. It has little impulse control and goes where it wants to go. It only sees what's in front, the short term.

The Rider represents our rational self. The rider can see the long-term benefit and has patience to work towards the future outcome, exercising impulse control. However, it is dealing with a 6-ton animal who is very skittish about being controlled, so the rider gets tired quickly and gives up on his plans.

The Path is how you help your Rider move your Elephant towards your goal. How can you clear the path, so the Elephant doesn't get skittish and stop or go in another direction?

II. Activate Your Rider -- Setting Goals

Working on Goals leads to Change, and Change is Hard. Change is more than an intellectual exercise; it requires you to shift long-held beliefs, behaviors, patterns and self-views. Give yourself credit for embarking on this important and challenging journey.

Why Setting Goals is important to achieve what we want in life:

- Goals align our focus on what we should pay attention to
- Goals trigger actionable behaviors
- Seeing progress towards our goals can feel addicting, we get a boost of the "feel good" neuro-chemical Dopamine when we accomplish something we've been trying to do

- Goals help us learn resiliency
- Goals build self-mastery by helping us decide what is important and how to get it.
- Goals change our brain. Developing new patterns to achieve your goals creates new neural connections around what we want to do and lessens the neural connections that program what we no longer want to do, literally rewiring our brain (this is called neuroplasticity or long-term potentiation)

Set SMART-ER Goals:

You can't change what you can't manage, you can't manage what you can't measure

- **Specific:** Who, What, When Where, Why, and How
- **Measurable:** How will you know if you are making progress? How can you measure what you are doing?
- **Attainable:** Do you have the resources you need to make this happen? Going from zero activity to running a marathon is not attainable but participating in a 5KM race is. Set your goals so they are a challenge and attainable to reinforce success. Once you have achieved your 5K then choose another challenging yet attainable goal.
- **Relevant:** Why is this so important to you?
- **Timebound:** When will you start? How often will you do it? For how long? You must cut through the schedule clutter; you are putting something new in your already busy schedule.
- **Evaluate:** Check you progress daily (if appropriate)
- **Re-Adjust:** What is working well? What is not working well? What are you learning? How can you improve on this goal process?

II. Engage Your Elephant —The Power Behind Your Change

1. This is important to me because_____
2. Why? Why? Why? Drill down and deeply connect with the heartfelt reason why achieving this goal is SO important to you.
3. What will happen if I don't do this?
4. How will my life change if I achieve this?

“When the Why is Clear, The What is Easy.”

III. Clear the Path — Make the Change Easier

- What obstacles are in your Way?
- Where can you get support to help you get over/around these obstacles?
- What resources do you need to make the path easier? Medical? Gear/Equipment? Food/Nutrition? Transportation? Time? People? Money? Facilities?

Ideas to help “Clear the Path”—

- **Centering Your Whole Self on Your Commitment** – Description of the Centering practice attached separately
- **Disrupt old patterns** --ex., get up earlier, go to another location, break from watching mindless TV.
- **Lay down new tracks** -- ex., If you are going to start exercising in the morning, lay out your sneakers and clothes the night before, prep your morning snack and /or lunch. More actions tracking towards your goal, less to distract you from your goal.
- **Pay attention to Triggers and Sensations** --ex., Many people respond to high stress by overeating or eating “comfort” food. If high stress is a trigger for you, pay attention to the sensations you begin to feel as stress goes up. Tight shoulders? Clenched jaw? Heat? Uneasy stomach? When you notice these beginning, what can you do to lower your stress and alleviate them?
- **Mistakes and Growth Mindset** -- Mistake is not failure, it is learning. What can you learn/do differently as a result of that mistake?
- **Use your body** -- Active fitness, yes, if possible. And also, just shaking it out, “getting the blood flowing.” When you feel the urge to do something that hurts your goal, shake your body. Shake your arms, swivel your hips. Stretch your arms high. March your legs. Shake up the position that prompts your elephant to run rampant.
- **Multi-sensory experience** -- Add some music, a different location, even different plates for eating. Reinforce and associate the change with other sensory things that you enjoy—a pleasant smell, uplifting music, a delicious taste, an attractive color.
- **Humor** -- Make the change fun. Listen to a comedian, watch funny dog videos. Laugh at yourself when you mess up on your goal, and then start again.
- **Connection** -- Reach out to others. We are hard-wired to connect with others; you don’t have to go through this change alone. Let the others in your house know what you are trying to achieve. Enlist their help as reminders to the kind of life you strive to achieve. Find

an accountability buddy, maybe a close friend who can ask about your progress, or even an on-line support group. We are more likely to keep to a plan when we feel others have expectations of us.

- **Self-Compassion and Celebration** -- You are trying to rewire the way you have lived for many years. Expect that it will be challenging at times. Give yourself a break, and don't give up. Celebrate even small wins. Every positive experience helps wire your goal more firmly in your brain.
- **Write Down Your Goals** – research has shown that people who write down goals are 33% more likely to achieve them¹. Find a picture that symbolizes why that goal is so important to you. A visual connection engages a different part of your brain than where we come up with language and words. Post your written goal and your picture where you can see them to remind yourself what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Review:

1. Write Down SMART-ER Goals
2. Connect Deeply and Emotionally to Them
3. Practice Actions that Make Your Change Easier

Here is a helpful Guide to Goal Setting and Tracking from University of Exeter, United Kingdom:

cedar.exeter.ac.uk › Goal_setting_workbook_website

Our presenter, Jane Maliszewski, is a leader and life coach using Neuro-Transformation and Embodiment to help her clients learn new ways to take action towards what they really want in life. www.VAULTassociates.com. Jane@VAULTassociates.com.

¹ 2015 study by psychologist Dr. Gail Matthews at the Dominican University of California showed evidence of the effectiveness of three coaching tools is achieving goals: accountability, commitment, and writing down goals.