



Exercise #1:

Hope Mapping*

Goal:

Predict your future by learning how to create it.

*Adapted from Prof. Shane Lopez

Overview:

In this exercise, you'll learn how to map out your future hopes, create multiple pathways to get there, and identify the obstacles you'll need to overcome on each pathway.

Instructions:

Hope Mapping begins with identifying your future goals. Goals for your brain are critical, not just for creating hope, but also for unlocking learning and neuroplasticity.

Identify Your Goal:

Step 1: Identify Where You Are and Where You Want To Be

Imagine a ladder with ten rungs on it. The top of the ladder represents your best possible life and the bottom of the ladder your worst. First, ask yourself on which rung do you see yourself standing today? Then, once you've identified that number, ask yourself on which rung do you think you'll be standing in five years? This is called "Cantril's ladder," and has been used for decades in research on hope. Remember, as Prof. Shane Lopez has found, the first two beliefs of hopeful people are that: "The future will be better than the present," and "I have the power to make it so." Which leads us to step 2.

Step 2: Choose One Goal You're Excited About

When you look at your future self, what inspires you? What excites you? If you could snap your fingers and turn into the person that you've always wanted to be, who would that be? What's going to get you to that next rung on the ladder? What aspect of this new version of yourself would get you out of bed in the morning? Make life exciting again? Give you a sense of meaning or purpose? Most of us get caught in a mental trap of feeling like we "should" work on X, or we really "need" to work on Y. What we're doing in this exercise is the opposite of "should." We're asking what do you really *want*? What, when you think about it, leaves you feeling inspired, motivated, excited, and energized? That's the goal you want to work on!



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Step 3: State Your Goal Positively & Specifically

It's easier for the brain to *start doing* something than *stop doing* something. You want to harness the brain's "go system" (accelerator), not its "stop system" (brakes). The "go system" is simply more powerful than the "stop system." The way to do this is to state your goal positively. For example, if your goal is around physical fitness, it's better to state the goal as, "I will fit into my favorite pair of pants by _____ date," rather than "I will lose ten pounds." Or, "I will run a mile in under nine minutes," rather than "I will get rid of my love handles." (Trust the process -- the love handles will come off, even if you don't focus on them!) Another example might be to increase revenue in your small business. It's better to say, "I will increase my monthly revenue by \$2,000 dollars by _____ date," rather than, "I will have a better financial year this year than I had last year."

If your goal is vague, you'll have vague results. This is because the brain doesn't know *exactly* what it's looking for. When you tell your brain, "I will fit into my favorite pair of pants by _____ date," you're giving your brain the concreteness that it craves. Then it knows how to make decisions to help you get to that very clear goal.

Create Multiple Pathways

Step 1: Clarify Your Plan A

If there isn't a plan for how you're going to take your present self and change her/him into your future self, the process will break down. The first step in this part of the process is deciding *how* you're going to get to where you want to go. Let's go back to the physical fitness goal. There are many roads that can lead you to fitting into your favorite pants. But start with one. What do you need to put in place to make sure you actually do the hard thing each day? Is it calling your old workout buddy and setting a time each morning to workout together over Zoom (because your gym is closed due to coronavirus)? Is it setting out your workout clothes on your night stand each night after you brush your teeth? Is it creating a tracking system where you check off whether or not you worked out each day? Likely, it's a combination of these things.



Going back to the business example above, let's assume you already have a small business, and you have a new product or service you want to launch that you hope will create that additional \$2,000 of monthly revenue. Let's say your business is a private after-school tutoring business to help kids with college admissions and college test prep. You've already pivoted that "in-person" business to operate online because of the coronavirus social distancing requirements. But now you can also see that you and your team's skill set might be able to meet a real need for parents with younger children who are overwhelmed by the new homeschooling requirements. So your new service might be, "Parent-Tutoring for Homeschooling." The question now is *how* are you going to do it? Questions like, "Who of my existing customers has younger kids they're homeschooling?" "How do we assess whether or not they'd be willing to pay for parent-tutoring?" "What information do we need to gather to build a service that is genuinely valuable?" Next, you might ask, how do we build a "minimum viable product" that parents can experience and how do we learn from this? Once you build a minimal version of the service, test it with a small group of parents to see if they find it valuable, what suggestions they have for improvement, and find ways to test whether or not they'd pay for the new service. If it's working, start rolling the new service out on a bigger scale. If it's not, tweak it, and try again. (On a side note, the best book on this topic is Eric Ries's, "The Lean Startup.")

Step 2: Track Behaviors, Not Outcomes

The most powerful tool in your planning process is to change your goals into daily actions. You do this by focusing on what *behaviors* you need to do every day to get you to your goals. Remember that goals are the *outcomes* you want; behaviors are the *actions* you take to get there. So you'll want to measure and track your behaviors. In other words, if you want to fit into your favorite pants, you'll want to track whether or not you did your one-mile run that morning, not how close you are to fitting in your pants. Fitting in your pants is an outcome, but what will get you there is going for your run each day (the behavior).



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Step 3: Decide When and Where

The other part that will make your plan successful is to decide when and where you're going to do those behaviors each day. Research deciding when and where you're going to do it makes it 2.27 times more likely that we'll actually follow through!

Step 4: Create Plans B, C, and D

This is where most of us go wrong. We put too much stock in plan A. We assume that we've planned so carefully and thoroughly that Plan A is bound to work! The truth is it often doesn't. That's not a reason to lose hope -- that's a reason to switch strategies. The research has shown that the most successful people don't get discouraged when things don't work out as planned, they get curious. They assume failure is part of the process and that it's just a matter of finding the plan or strategy that works best for them. They believe the right strategy is out there -- they just haven't found it...yet. So when failure hits, they get creative, ask questions, and get moving on plan B.

Take yourself through the same planning process that you did for Plan A, but repeat it with alternative ways to get to your same goal. For example, with the physical fitness goal, you may consider trying a Peloton bike, or the 8-Fit at-home workout app. Perhaps what you need is to exercise outside in nature (e.g., trail running, hiking, biking, yoga in the park, etc.). Maybe what will really fire you up is increasing your heart rate variability to increase your stress resilience through exercise (as opposed to focusing on body size), so you'll need to look into how to measure HRV (Oura ring, apple watch, etc.) and track it over time. With the business example, it's possible that the new "parent-tutoring" service isn't viable (i.e., people aren't willing to pay for it). The best thing to do in that situation is to move on to plans B, C, or D -- your "multiple pathways. So, again, take yourself through a planning process of clarifying the plan, tracking behaviors, and tweaking as you go. These are all alternative pathways to achieving the same goal of that \$2,000 per month you want. Again, it doesn't necessarily matter what the "alternative pathways" are, what matters is *that you have* them and that they're concrete.



Plan for Obstacles

Most of us want to paint a rosy picture of the future -- full of happiness, ease, and soaking up the sun on a beach. But if you're pursuing meaningful goals, obstacles are inevitable.

Remember, in addition to believing that the future will get better and that you have the power to make it so, hopeful people also believe that "there are many paths to my goals" and that "none of them is free of obstacles." Or as Ryan Holiday puts it, "The obstacle *is* the way." So if you're facing obstacles, it probably means you're on the right path. It's not easy to do hard things. And hard things are often the things worth doing. So don't avoid them. Plan for them!

When you plan for obstacles, in a sense you're planning for "ifs." If X happens, or Y happens, or Z happens, then what? The best way to plan for these unknowns is to create what Prof. Peter Gollwitzer calls, "if/then plans." For example, "If I wake up and feel unmotivated, then I'll text my workout buddy and say, 'You ready for a good workout?'" Or, "If my kids wake up early and throw off my morning routine, then I'll exercise immediately after I eat lunch." Or, "If it's raining outside, then I'll do my Scientific Seven Minute Workout instead of going for my usual run."

In this way, you not only come to expect obstacles, you come ready with a plan for how to overcome them.

A Final Word:

In the end, hope comes from planning for the future and taking action to create it. As we identify the goals we are excited about, plan multiple pathways to get there, and learn how to overcome the inevitable obstacles, we're training our brains to choose hope over fear.



Exercise #2:

The 5 Second Rule*

Goal:

*Adapted from Mel Robbins

Get yourself to take action instead of overthinking it.

Overview:

This exercise is one of the best ways to get yourself to take micro actions toward your goals. While we know "just doing it" is often *what's* needed, this tool gives you the *how*.

Instructions:

Mel Robbins has popularized one of the best tools for getting yourself to take action again and again. It's deceptively simple and incredibly powerful. Here's how it works, according to Mel Robbins:

Whenever you feel an instinct fire up to act on a goal or a commitment, or the moment you feel yourself hesitate on doing something...use the Rule. Start by counting backwards to yourself: 5- 4- 3- 2- 1. The counting will help you focus on the goal or commitment and distract you from the worries, thoughts, and fears in your mind. As soon as you reach "1," move. That's it. It's so simple but let me hammer this home one more time. Anytime there's something *you know you should do*, but you feel uncertain, afraid, or overwhelmed...just take control by counting backwards 5- 4- 3- 2- 1. That'll quiet your mind. Then, move when you get to "1." (*The 5 Second Rule*, p. 49-50)

By taking away your brain's ability to make excuses, overthink things, or get in your own way, you've already taken action before you self-sabotage. Just "do something" -- no thinking required. This is one of the most powerful ways to overcome fear. Creating a habit of taking action again and again creates momentum. That momentum creates motivation, and that motivation then fuels you on to take more action. As Mark Manson in his book, "The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck" points out, we can hack our own motivation by taking action. It's this central skill -- taking small actions -- that over time turns into a broader skill set of what psychologists refer to as, "self-motivation." And the most exciting finding in the research about "self-motivation," is that scientists now believe it's a learnable skill. So just do it -- make a habit of counting down from 5, and when you get to 1, move!