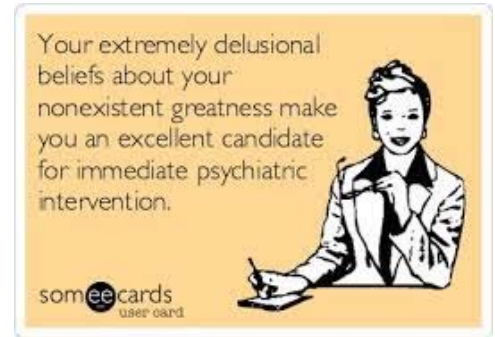


Five Minutes to Thrive: 31 Dec 18 – 04 Jan 19

Why Your Fantasies Are Dumb

Probably a few too many times (including the 5M2T from last week) you've heard me talk about the importance of setting future goals and executing a plan to make steady, concrete progress toward these objectives. I'm sure many of you have prodigious aspirations for both your personal and professional lives, and if were asked could outline a 5-, 10-, or even 20-year plan. Which is great!! But here's why that's also dumb:

We tend to have unrealistic, grandiose views of ourselves. If you recall earlier this year when I talked about the *Fundamental Attribution Error* (FAE), you'll remember that we tend to be more forgiving of our own faults or flaws than those of others. This can lead to us thinking too highly of ourselves, ignoring our (mis)behaviors or limitations, and thinking we are far more capable (and deserving) of success compared to others. This, in turn, can lead us to develop fantastically unrealistic goals, which inevitably leads us to cognitive dissonance-associated turmoil when we *shockingly* fail to reach them. I mean, I'm smart, cool, and seriously motivated—why *didn't* I lose 20 pounds in 5 days? Or make E-7 by age 25??



Moreover, sometimes when we focus too much on envisioning the end-state of our desires, we actually begin to neurophysiologically experience the internal state of reward that would (or should!) come from having achieved it. Essentially, we start patting ourselves on the back for things we haven't even done yet! Like, "Wow, I'm such a good person for thinking about taking time out of my schedule to feed the homeless this holiday season," or "I'm so intelligent for having thought of earning my degree in two years from now," or "I'm generous for envisioning what it would be like to treat my colleagues to lunch later this week." Weird flex, but okay....

So don't let yourself get caught up in your desired end-state, or hype yourself up so much that you develop unattainable expectations for the future. (As a side note, it's purely coincidental that this message comes to you on the "eve" of New Year's resolutions.) So here's how to make your fantasies more of a (realistic) reality, as well as how to keep them from being dumb:

- **Set S.M.A.R.T. goals.** Write down your goal(s), and then state **Specifically** what you hope to achieve. Make it **Measurable** by operationalizing the goal; discern mechanisms for feedback, and try to convert it to numbers. Ensure it's an **Attainable** goal in the timeline you've proposed, as well as **Realistic** given your current commitments, responsibilities, "free" time, and other challenges or barriers. Then, figure out how to **Track** it weekly or monthly.
- **Ask for feedback.** The 360 feedback process is effective largely because the collective view of others tends to be more "honest" than our own self-assessments. Review your goals with close confidants, and heed their input; you may also find some partners with shared goals!
- **Follow through (and revise).** Commit to your plans, but don't be afraid to modify them **a bit** if you begin to find that they're actually dumb (i.e. not S.M.A.R.T.). HNY, and good luck! ☺