

5. And another obstacle.
6. And another positive aspect.
7. And another obstacle.

Now, what do you think your chances for success are? Should you pursue this goal? By contrasting the things you have to gain with the obstacles standing in your way, you should now have a better sense of how likely you are to succeed, and how committed you are to that success.

In this chapter, we've talked about the importance of setting specific, difficult goals for increasing motivation. We've looked at how the ways in which we describe those goals, to ourselves or to others, can influence our chances for success. And we've learned how to direct and harness the benefits of positive thinking (and realistic thinking) about the goals we're setting. For some of you, if you stopped reading this book now, you'd already be more successful in reaching your goals than you were when you started.

But don't stop reading now. Instead, move on to the next chapter, and we'll talk about the goals you are already pursuing in your own life. Where did they come from? How did you end up choosing them over other, equally attractive goals? The answers may surprise you. And if you want to choose goals *wisely*, in ways that will make you happier and more successful, then you need to start by getting a handle on what you've been doing right and what you may want to do differently.

What You Can Do

I'm going to end each of the chapters in this book with a short summary of the main points I've tried to get across. That way, you can see at a glance the steps you can take in your own life to improve your ability to reach your goals. I'm giving you a lot to process here, so I hope this helps.

- **Be specific.** When you set yourself a goal, try to be as *specific* as possible. "Lose five pounds" is a better goal than "lose some weight," because it gives you a clear idea of what success looks like. Knowing exactly what you want to achieve keeps you motivated until you get there. Avoid "do your best" goals—they are too vague to be really motivating.
- **Make it hard.** It's also important when you set goals to make them *difficult*, while still being *realistic*. You want to challenge yourself and set the bar high, because challenges really get the motivational juices flowing, while avoiding goals that are more or less impossible. Remember that if you set the bar too low, you may achieve your goal but are unlikely to surpass it—most people tend to slack off once they've reached their original target. Nobody sets out with the goal of losing five pounds and ends up somehow losing twenty.
- **Think *why* or *what*.** Goals can be thought of in relatively abstract, *why-am-I-doing-this* terms or in more concrete, *what-am-I-actually-doing* terms. For example, dealing with the mess in your closets can be thought of as "getting organized" (*why*) or "throwing out clothes I never wear" (*what*). Think about your goals in *why* terms when you want to get energized, stay motivated, or avoid temptations. Think about your goals in *what* terms when you are dealing with something particularly difficult, unfamiliar, or anything that takes a long time to learn.
- **Consider value *and* feasibility.** Remember that we all tend to think more in *why* terms when contemplating our goals in the distant future. This leads us to give more weight to what's desirable or valuable about the goal (like how much fun a trip to Disneyland would be) and too

little weight to how feasible it is (as in, “How the heck am I going to afford this trip to Disneyland?”). In the near future, we naturally think in *what* terms, which can lead to too much emphasis on being practical and not enough emphasis on enjoying what life has to offer. The best goals will usually be the ones you’ve adopted after weighing both desirability and feasibility in an unbiased way.

- **Think positive but don’t underestimate.** When you’re setting a goal, by all means engage in lots of positive thinking about how likely you are to achieve it. Believing in your ability to succeed is enormously helpful for creating and sustaining your motivation. But whatever you do, *don’t* underestimate how difficult it will be to reach your goal. Most goals worth achieving require time, planning, effort, and persistence. Thinking things will come to you easily and effortlessly will leave you ill prepared for the journey ahead, and as a result can be a recipe for failure.
- **Use mental contrasting to set your goals.** When you are thinking about taking on a new goal, make sure you think about *both* the wonderful things that will happen if you succeed *and* the obstacles that stand in your way. This process of *mental contrasting* will not only help you to make a good decision about whether or not to adopt the goal, but it will naturally engage your motivational systems and maximize your commitment to the goals that you do decide to achieve.