

Now that you know how cues in your environment can trigger the unconscious pursuit of goals, it's time to take a good look around and see what *your* environment may be triggering. And even more important, take the time to figure out what is *missing*. If there are goals you want to pursue (losing weight, stopping smoking, remembering to call your mother, fixing up the house), are there triggers in your environment that will help your unconscious mind activate those goals? Remember that the triggers can be anything, so long as their meaning is clear to *you*. Leave healthy snacks out where you can see them. Leave a fitness magazine lying on the counter in your kitchen. Keep a to-do list, in big letters, someplace where you see it every day. Put a nice, framed photo of your mom next to the phone. It doesn't matter what kind of cues you use—as long as you fill your environment with them, you can count on your unconscious mind to start giving you a hand in reaching the goals you want to achieve.

Of course the same advice applies to times when you want *someone else* to be more successful in pursuing a goal. Are there cues in your teenagers' rooms that will help them remember to do their homework? (My parents gave me Einstein and Beethoven posters in high school. Very clever of them.) Are there cues in your employees' workspace that will inspire them to work with enthusiasm and efficiency? Are there cues in your home that will encourage your spouse to be more cooperative and supportive? When you think about the kinds of triggers you might add to these environments, remember that the same trigger may lead to very different goals, depending on the person. For example, being in a situation of holding power over others seems to unconsciously trigger social-responsibility goals (like helping others or giving to charity) in people who strongly value community. The same situation triggers more self-interested goals (like getting ahead at work or obtaining financial rewards) in people who are more individualistic.

So tailor the cues you create to the person they are meant for—this may take some creativity on your part, but it will be well worth the effort. Delegating goal pursuit to the unconscious parts of the mind is a great way to free up mental space and energy for all the things that constantly require your attention. It's a great way to keep yourself on track when temptations and distractions arise. And just like when you find yourself pulling into your driveway at the end of a long day, you may find yourself achieving goals without really knowing quite how you got there.

What You Can Do

- **Know what is influencing you.** If you want to make better choices when it comes to setting goals, it's helpful to understand some of the hidden influences on those choices. By bringing them to light, we can evaluate whether they are right or wrong, and if we want to, lessen their influence.
- **Know what you believe about your abilities.** The goals we set for ourselves are shaped in large part by our beliefs about our abilities. If there are goals that appeal to you, but you have avoided setting them in your life, it's time to ask yourself why. How sure are you that your beliefs are correct? Is there another way to look at things?
- **Embrace the potential for change.** Believing you have the ability to reach your goals is important, but so is believing you can *get* the ability. Many of us believe that our intelligence, our personality, and our physical aptitudes are fixed—that no matter what we do, we won't improve. These “entity” beliefs focus us on goals that are all about validating ourselves, rather

than about developing and growing. Fortunately, decades of research suggest that this belief is completely wrong—“incremental” beliefs that our characteristics can change over time turn out to be supported by scientific evidence. So if you believe there is something about you that you *cannot* change, and that belief has shaped the goals you’ve chosen in your life, it’s time to toss it. Embracing the (accurate) belief that you *can* change will allow you to make better choices and reach your fullest potential.

- **Set up the right environment.** Another powerful influence on the goals you pursue is your environment, and that influence is almost always unconscious. The words we read, the objects we see, the people we interact with—just about anything we encounter can trigger unconscious goal pursuit. Role models motivate us, in large part, through goal contagion. In other words, we adopt the goals we see other people pursuing, provided we see those people in a positive light.
- **Use triggers to tap your unconscious.** To keep yourself motivated, fill your environment with reminders and triggers that will keep your unconscious mind working toward your goal, even when your conscious mind is distracted by other things.