

Life Strategies for Empowerment

By Gwen Kesten, Ph.D., EAP Coordinator

This month, eTIPS will elaborate on several particular “empowering strategies” discussed in last month’s segment. As the economic downturn continues it becomes more important than ever to take control where possible in areas of our lives. This is helpful *specifically* in leading to more positive paths in those areas in which we devise / follow-through with an action plan. It is also beneficial *generally* in that it reminds us that we do have the capacity to impact our lives and our life experience.



Take a look at your life in several key arenas - emotional, social, financial and physical. Are there things in these areas you feel positive about? Are there aspects which you would like to improve? List a few (2 or 3 strengths and improvement goals in each area) so that you can look at them concretely. Don’t overwhelm yourself with too many. The idea is to look in a **manageable** manner. Here are some examples:

EMOTIONAL	<p>Strength - I’ve been able to recognize the signs that I’m feeling anxious and identify situations that increase my anxiety</p> <p>Improvement goal - learn to use relaxation strategies when I feel anxious</p>
SOCIAL	<p>Strength - reached out to close friends to confide my worries about my personal situation</p> <p>Improvement goal - broaden my social network</p>
FINANCIAL	<p>Strength - earn a good salary and save a portion of it</p> <p>Improvement goal - learn more about how to best protect my earnings</p>
PHYSICAL	<p>Strength - followed through with wellness visits / exams at my physicians’ offices</p> <p>Improvement goal - incorporate more physical activity into my everyday plans</p>

Make a list of your own as the “kick off” to taking more control of the way you feel. Next week we’ll elaborate on how to make use of your chart.

Having spent some time thinking about **strengths** and **improvement goals** in key life arenas, it’s now time to take action. It is important to act in both fields - recognizing strengths and defining / implementing steps to take toward meeting improvement goals.

Take note of your strengths. They may be strengths that come very naturally. Or, perhaps they reflect things you’ve worked hard to attain. Look over strengths listed in your chart and elaborate. It may be helpful to jot down specific actions you’ve taken. For example, refer to the chart presented last week. To elaborate on the **emotional strength** of recognizing anxiety

symptoms and triggers, you can list situational triggers that you have found lead to anxiety. As you discover additional situations which have similar effects, add them to your list. This serves as a reminder of the ongoing positive step you are taking to get better control over anxiety in your life.

Consider setting aside some regular time to acknowledge strengths. Some folks formalize this process daily - perhaps at dinnertime or before bed. Say one thing that you did today for which you are proud. State it out loud. Say it to yourself or to whoever is in the room. Alternatively, come together with a group and have each person recognize out loud, something someone else in the group did that day that left a positive impression. It can be surprising to learn what makes an impression on others. Whatever method you use, regular focus on strengths can help enhance appreciation of the many positive things in all our lives.

My importance to the world is relatively small. On the other hand, my importance to myself is tremendous. I am all I have to work with, to play with, to suffer and to enjoy. It is not the eyes of others that I am wary of, but of my own. I do not intend to let myself down more than I can possibly help, and I find that the fewer illusions I have about myself or the world around me, the better company I am for myself. [Noel Coward](#)

Acknowledging personal successes is a first step toward empowerment. We utilized our chart format from week 1 to demonstrate a concrete means of doing that. In that same chart we documented **improvement goals** as a second empowering measure. By writing specific goals we move them from vague ideas floating in our heads, to objectives toward which we can plan actions. Using the emotional arena to illustrate, the improvement goal listed was to learn relaxation strategies. Toward that goal one might gather articles describing various relaxation techniques. After reviewing these, choose one that is appealing. Write out a brief and clear description of the steps involved in that technique. Plan a time and place where you can practice. Be sure the plan is realistic and fairly easy to execute so you can stick with it successfully.

In the social arena the improvement goal listed was to broaden your social network. Action-oriented steps toward this goal could include joining a group or club or class in which you are likely to meet new folks. Alternatively, you could commit to reaching out to an acquaintance with a phone call or email suggesting some social get-together. This can be done casually. Ask a coworker with whom you spend little time to join you for a walk during a work break or meet for lunch in the cafeteria.



The critical empowering step is to specify actionable, measurable objectives which will bring you closer to your personal goals. There are things in life that are not under your control. How you view them and what you **do** about them are the aspects which you **can** control!

Continuing to implement our chart as a means of impacting things we can control, look at what you wrote for improvement goals in the physical arena. Regular physical activity is beneficial for body health and appearance as well as for optimum mental health. Feelings or anxiety and of depression can be ameliorated with physical activity. The goal we suggested of incorporating physical activity into everyday plans can be “made actionable” in various ways. Consider parking your vehicle further from work or any other destination and walking more. Perhaps you can avoid using a car altogether for certain trips, and walking or riding a bike instead. Choose climbing stairs rather than using an elevator at times. Move around during breaks

at work instead of sitting and snacking. Incorporate physical activity in recreation / social gatherings. Suggest getting together to hike or play tennis or any other sport in place of automatically considering a movie or a restaurant meal. The former is likely healthier and less expensive.



15 MINUTES OF CARDIO, 15 MINUTES OF WEIGHTS, AND AN HOUR OF TALKING MYSELF INTO IT.

Finally, we'll address improvement goals in the financial arena. Learning to better protect your earnings can involve both broad and more detailed strategies. With either it's important to move past cognitive impediments to take action. Blaming yourself and/or others for a negative economic state is one such impediment. Your current financial situation is the result of many factors. To improve it requires thoughtful attention *and* actions in the present and future.

Broad strategies include getting a handle on where your finances are now. Look over statements, tax returns, and other documents detailing your finances. If they are confusing, try to get help from others to better understand. Consider a financial counselor, a bank representative or someone you know who has general expertise in financial matters. More detailed changes that protect your money, involve habit changes. Do you pay monthly fees for things you rarely or never use; gym memberships,



extra cable networks, enhanced services for your phone or computer, or other such things? Are you in the habit of stopping for coffee daily at an expensive coffee bar or going out for lunch from work several times each week? How much could you save by brewing your own coffee or brown bagging your lunch? Would the savings each week be worthwhile? There are not right or wrong answers. It's all a matter of your values and choices for spending. Create or revise a personal budget that reflects your financial situation and values. Use it to guide your financial actions.

For additional help in managing any of these arenas - emotional, social, physical or financial, EAP can help. We can provide direct confidential services and/or help you to access resources. Remember, EAP is easy to access and it's FREE. Use us as part of your personal empowerment plan.

**Call Solutions EAP at 1-800-526-3485 for assistance for all of life's challenges.
It's free, confidential and open to family members.
Check us out on-line www.solutions-eap.com**