



# Want results? Set daily intentions

By Priya Nalkur-Pai | June 1, 2016

As I sit down to write this piece about daily intention setting, I can't escape the irony: In the past week of frenzied business travel, client visits, and business development, I've somehow put off my writing and am now a day late to the editor.

I've wanted to write this for at least a week, but here I am: late, rushed, and concerned about whether I'll perform my best. I'm feeling disappointed and ineffective, but also determined.

Sound familiar?

Unfortunately, these stressful symptoms are all too common in the increasingly fast-paced culture of health care leadership. Even worse, the sense of being overwhelmed can easily become habit-forming – and trap us in ineffective patterns that can undermine our leadership.

This is where good habits can be helpful: A daily intention-setting practice can help increase productivity and fulfillment.

To begin, let's define intention as a cognitive representation of planned actions and desired emotions. This is different from a goal, which

represents a desired aim or an object of actions. Why is this distinction important? With an intention, you visualize the process, while a goal only gives you access to the result. In my own example, if I had set daily intentions to write, I would have actually visualized myself writing: I would have seen when, where, with whom, how, and why I write. Instead, I prioritized the goal, which allowed me to see only the finished product.

Next, let's look at why intentions work. Some compelling research relates to the placebo effect, the phenomenon in which a fake treatment has the effect of improving a patient's condition, simply because the patient believed it would. In other words, the patient had set an intention that the treatment would work. Our brains seek consistency between our thoughts and actions.

For example, if we see ourselves as hard workers, we're likely to behave that way. When our behavior isn't consistent with the way we see ourselves, we experience cognitive dissonance, which can be stressful and unproductive. When we set intentions, our brain naturally expects us to behave consistently with those intentions, and this motivates us to act accordingly.

Here are three steps to make daily intention setting part of your workday:

**Step one: Use simple, powerful language.**

One of my favorite ways to set intentions is to use this fill-in-the-blank structure: “Today will be a [desired emotion] day because I intend to [planned action]. I will do this by [action 1], [action 2], and [action 3]. If I do this and only this, I will feel [desired emotion].”

Let’s take my writing example. My intention today could be, “Today will be a celebratory day because I intend to write my blog post. I will do this by 1) canceling my lunch meeting, 2) reviewing my outline and researching concepts, and 3) finding a comfortable, quiet place to write. If I do this and only this, I will feel outstanding!”

Notice the simplicity of this: The statements are precise, actionable, and have clear parameters. Notice, too, the magnified language. While I could have said, “I will feel relieved,” “outstanding” raises the bar and makes my heart pound. Write or say your intention out loud before you set out to work.

**Step two: Support your intention with empowering beliefs.**

Ask yourself, “What do I have to believe for this intention to come true?” For me, I had to believe that I was capable of those actions, it would be fun, and it was important. Empowering beliefs are motivating, and they’re the fuel for intentions.

**Step three: Incorporate a feedback loop.**

Set reminders to track your progress – not only about your planned actions, but also to keep you focused on your desired emotions. Reminders will sharpen your awareness and provide clarity. Most importantly, as you return your focus to your intention throughout the day, you will naturally seek opportunities to fulfill the intention.

Maybe your curiosity is piqued, and you’re compelled to try setting daily intentions. But you might also be thinking, “Nope, this isn’t for me.” And yet, if we neglect – or “forget” – to set daily intentions, we miss

the opportunity to celebrate our wins, because we’re moving too fast. We miss the opportunity to thank our colleagues, because we’re too busy rushing to the next meeting.

This can make us feel out of alignment, stressed, unaccomplished, or unproductive. Great satisfaction comes from accomplishing planned actions and experiencing desired emotions, but that feeling of satisfaction can elude us if we haven’t bothered to articulate our intentions.

Intention setting is an incredibly accommodating practice: You can do it in the shower, on your commute, or as you sit down at your desk. It requires no extra time, just consciousness and purpose. Performing simple new behaviors consistently can lead to great results in the long term, because it builds effective, empowering patterns instead of draining, ineffective patterns like the one I found myself in this past week. The daily intention allows you to reset, refocus, and lead with purpose.

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