

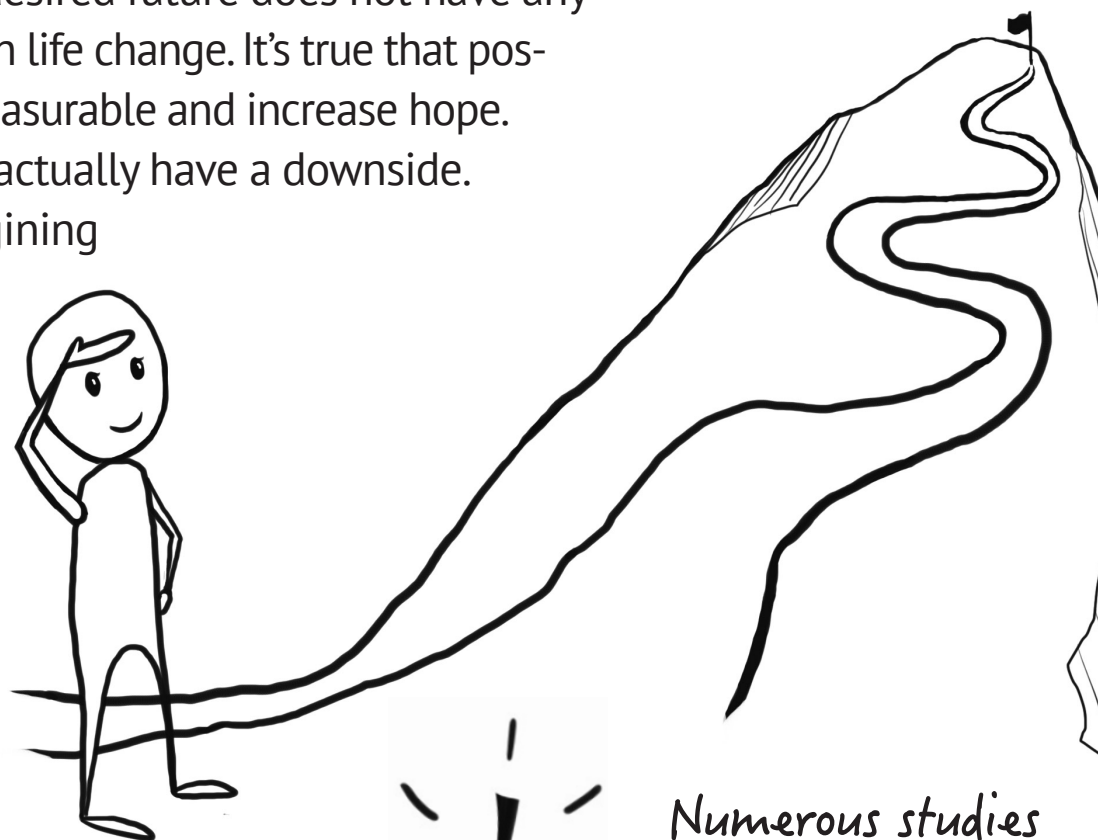


# The Science of Goal Achievement

*Why Positive Thinking Isn't Enough  
and What to Do About It*

# Part 1 Setting a Goal

**Have you ever been frustrated by some of the “easy fix” strategies** that self-help gurus sometimes promote? For example, have you ever been skeptical that the universe is ready to fulfill all your desires simply because you visualize them? Us too! The truth is that fantasizing about a desired future does not have any measurable relationship with life change. It’s true that positive thinking can be fun, pleasurable and increase hope. But thinking positively can actually have a downside. As it turns out, merely imagining a positive outcome can communicate to us internally that we have actually achieved the goal as we are visualizing – reducing our vigor and motivation. It can sometimes cause us to become complacent!



Numerous studies have shown we are more successful in hitting our goals when we balance positive thinking with the consideration of likely obstacles.

So how do we optimize the process of positively imagining our future and moving toward our goals? Studies show that when we identify and commit to goals, we are more likely to succeed. It’s simple: goals motivate humans.

*We like targets.*

But we also need to consider potential challenges. Numerous studies have shown that people are more successful in hitting goals when we temper positive thinking with thinking through obstacles we might later encounter en route to our goals. **This worksheet is designed to help you do just that: select a goal, bask in visualizing attainment, and then stop and consider the reality of likely obstacles in our lives.**

**Let’s start with a goal.** Think of a goal that you want to accomplish. It can be big or small. While you are at it, give your goal a deadline and make sure it’s measurable.

*Ready?*

1. What is your goal? .....
2. How are you measuring it? .....
3. When will you accomplish this? .....
4. Before moving on, one more thing. Let’s do a quick “gut check.” Take a moment and think about how you feel after writing down your goal. Are you excited? Optimistic? How do you feel? .....

*You are on your way!*

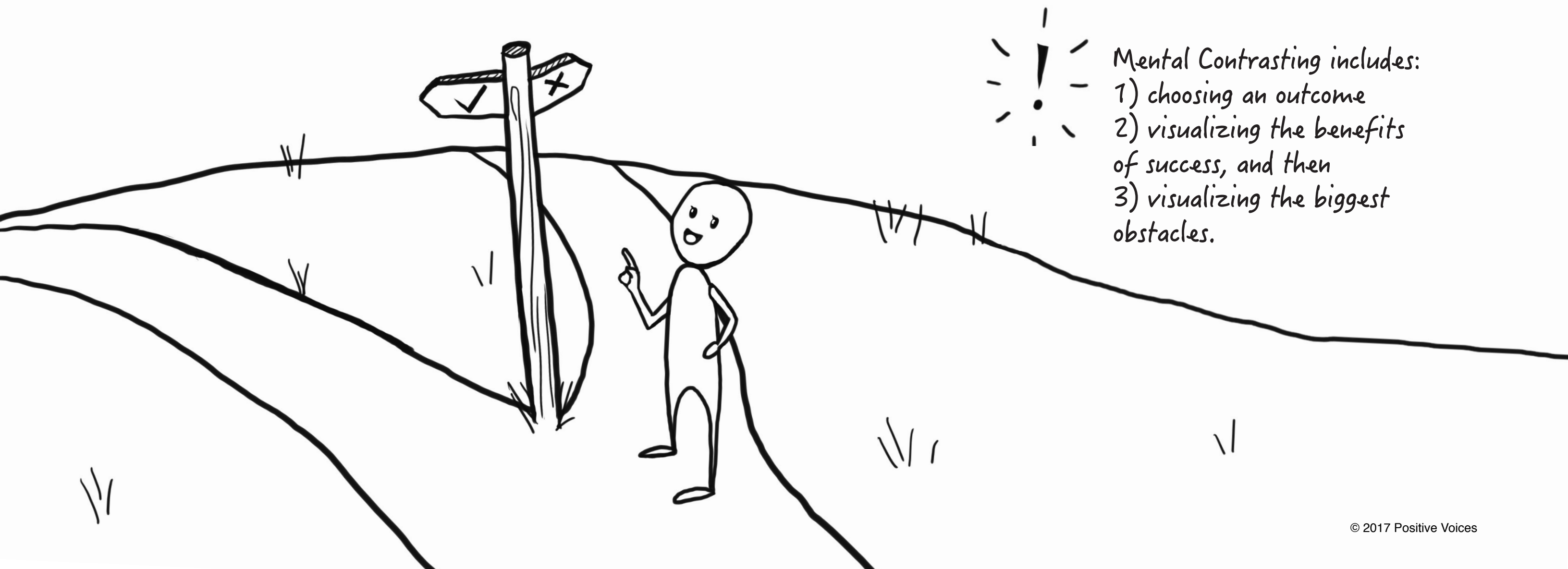
## Part 2 *Mental Contrasting*

### So, how can we “smarten up” your goals?

Learn about *Mental Contrasting and Implementation Intentions* (MCII), a practice that has been empirically validated (that means studies have shown this practice to work). MCII can help reduce any snags that might accompany pure positive thinking. Let's start with Mental Contrasting and then tackle Implementation Intentions in the next part.

**M**ental Contrasting includes imagining a desired outcome along with any obstacles that might stand in the way. First we indulge (visualize a successful outcome of a goal) then immediately identify and imagine obstacles (dwelling) that might stand in the way.

Mental Contrasting can help us dream and inspire ourselves but with some balance—within reason. Mental Contrasting can be used for goals big and small—exercising or writing a book. Mental Contrasting includes choosing an outcome and then both visualizing the benefits of success and your biggest obstacles, where we iteratively move to problem solving. We start this practice by indulging.



### A WORD ON INDULGING

Imagining hitting our goals is not only fun, it can fill us with hope, which is a great thing. Hope moves us forward in our goals. So go ahead and indulge—we aren't saying indulging is bad, but here it is part of a larger practice.

**Ready to try?** Let's get started with some indulging and really visualize all the sweet fruit achieving this goal might bear. To help you, let's start with an example.

<b>Example</b>	<i>lot, met some great new contacts, and will be able to bask in a job well done. Should she hit her deadline, she imagines being free to join her husband on a highly anticipated weekend trip to the Bahamas. She can picture herself toasting a job well done with her husband on the terrace of their hotel, overlooking the ocean. She also imagines the article being published to rave reviews.</i>
<i>Jen, a seasoned business leader who has been nurturing a writing career, has an opportunity to write an article for a long coveted publication. Her deadline for the first draft is June 15.</i>	
<i>Jen indulges: She imagines how satisfied she will feel as she turns in her final draft of her article. She imagines she will have learned a</i>	

**5.** Write your goal again: .....

**6.** Indulge. Really imagine all the positive results of achieving your goal. What do you see, hear, smell, feel and think? (Really savor it.)

**7.** How are you feeling? Once again check in and write down your thoughts here: .....

### A WORD ON DWELLING

When we look at obstacles in the context of our goals, it can move us to either increase or decrease our efforts. This can also cause us to realize when our wishes are unrealistic for us, causing us to move past these goals and, perhaps, pursue another goal that aligns better with our lives and considerations.

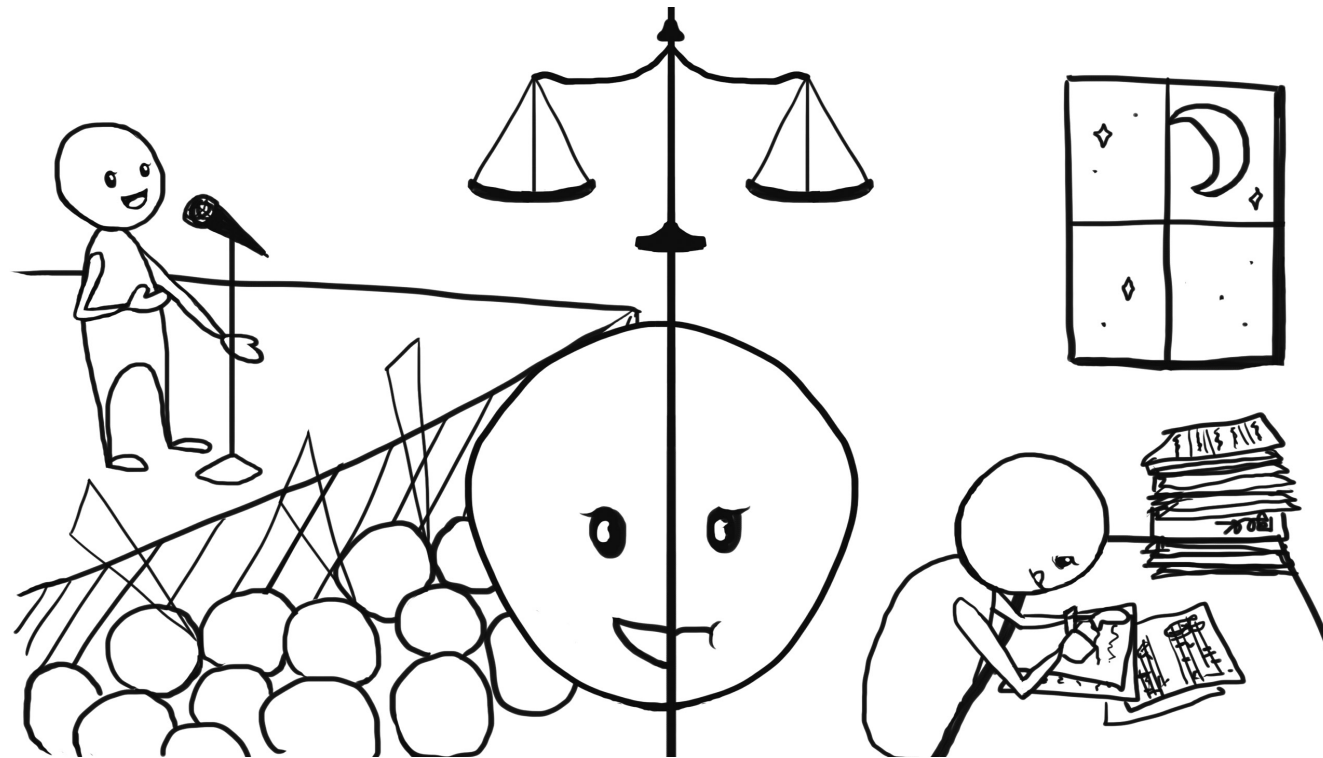
**Ready to try dwelling?** This is where you imagine likely obstacles that might stand in the way and really feel the impact of your goals as they encounter the realities of life.

<b>Example</b>	<i>as having to work late into the evening. She realizes that she often is distracted by email, social media and phone calls. As she dwells on these obstacles, she visualizes how her obstacles will manifest and how she feels in these moments.</i>
<i>Now it's time to dwell. Jen imagines what obstacles might stand in her way to have finished a final draft by June 15. She realizes her biggest obstacles include distractions and scheduling. She thinks through obstacles such</i>	

**8.** Write your goal again: .....

**9.** Dwell. Really imagine all the likely obstacles related to achieving your goal. Truly imagine those top things you know will pop up. What do you see, hear, smell, feel and think? Really be with it. ....

**10.** How are you feeling? Once again check in and write down your thoughts here: .....



**Indulging and Dwelling** can help us more quickly determine if the goal is worth pursuing and find if our level of commitment is enough to carry us through. It's especially handy in the early stages of goal setting, where we can take the time to make a "go" or "no-go" decision. This might save us from investing in the wrong projects. It is most often helpful to do another cycle or more of Indulging and Dwelling.

**Do you feel like you have enough information to make a choice of whether you want to make a "go" or "no-go" decision?** If not, try another cycle of Indulging and Dwelling. Do it until you feel like you are ready to make your "go-forward" plan.



## Part 3 Go or No-Go?

**Time to do some sanity checking.** Not all goals are good goals, in that they might not realistically fit your life. It's time to make a choice!

**Example**

Jen asks herself if her goal is reasonable and if she is still committed to its pursuit. She is still enthusiastic

about pursuing her writing goal and feels she has a better handle on what needs to be done.

**11.** Are you a go or no-go? .....



Do you have the commitment to carry through? If not, you may need a new goal that fits your life.



# Part 4 Implementation Intentions

**Implementation Intentions help us create strategies ahead of time** for obstacles that might occur. The benefit is it increases the likelihood we will recognize the obstacle when it happens, enabling action. Basically, what we are doing is pre-deciding and pre-committing to how we will handle a later challenge.

### Format of an if-then plan

If ..... then .....

Here is an example of an If-then plan for someone who is hoping to curb snacking:

If I want to snack then I will drink a glass of water and wait 10 minutes to see if the urge passes.

To create our own Implementation Intentions, we create an “if-then plan” statement that spells out how to act when a particular cue (related to an obstacle you anticipate in achieving a goal) surfaces. By having and executing on if-then plans, we don’t have to draw on as much will power to meet goals, creating the opportunity for behavior to become more automatic.

**Ready to try?** Now create your Implementation Intentions that address your specific obstacles.

**Example**

Jen realizes that she needs to 1) schedule her writing, 2) commit to focusing during these writing sessions and 3) manage distractions. She decides she wants to get up an hour earlier each morning and do her writing first thing in the morning, when distractions are at a minimum. Jen also sets the following

*Implementation Intentions.*

- *If I find myself distracted by other online tasks, I will turn off my WiFi.*
- *If I find myself distracted by my family, I will move to my bedroom.*
- *If I have a hard time focusing, I will take a walk to the kitchen for a beverage and immediately try focusing again.*

**12.** Rewrite your goal: .....

**13.** Write your top obstacle here: .....

A. What can you do when this arises? .....

B. What else can you do when this arises? .....

C. Anything else can you do when this arises? .....

**14.** Write your next obstacle here: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

A. What can you do when this arises? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

B. What else can you do when this arises? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

C. Anything else can you do when this arises?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**15.** Write your next obstacle here: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

A. What can you do when this arises? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

B. What else can you do when this arises? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

C. Anything else can you do when this arises?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 5 *Putting It All Together*

**Now that you know what your obstacles might be and how you are going to handle them, it's time to put it all together. Simply write down your goal and fill in the Implementation Intentions below.**

**Good luck!**

Goal \_\_\_\_\_

If \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_

If \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_

If \_\_\_\_\_ then \_\_\_\_\_

We at Positive Voices hope you have found this exercise useful. We'd love to hear from you and hear how it is going for you. Did MCII work for you? What did you like best? What tips or tricks might you suggest?

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