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The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

Battling a sedentary mindset? Ready to get active? Dr. Sara Powell is ready to help you set some goals. I'm Nicki Donnelson and Powell is my guest today on the Missouri State Journal.

Dr. Sara Powell:

Setting goals for physical activity you need the S of smart to occur, because we want them to be specific. Instead of saying, "Okay, I want to exercise more," say, "Well, what kind of exercise do you want to do?" Well, maybe you want to start walking more. Okay, that's great. Then we want that something to be measurable as well, so something that you can say, "Okay, I walked for X amount of time or for a certain distance on this day of the week. I can have some way to measure that." A is action oriented and R is realistic. We want these goals that we set for ourselves to be challenging, but we also want them to be within our current scope of capability.

The T of that is time-based. We want them to be set within a specific time window. Maybe, for example, if we're talking about our walking, we want to be able to walk up to three miles within the next 12 weeks, for example, if you're just starting out. The E and the R are evaluate and revise. Within the process of goal setting, we constantly have to be checking in with ourselves and say, "Okay, am I meeting the goals that I'm setting for myself? Are they too challenging? Are they not challenging enough?" Then, if necessary, make those revisions.

Nicki Donnelson:

Powell encourages people to not take on too much, too soon as it's a recipe for being discouraged.

Dr. Sara Powell:

One of the mistakes that folks make when they set goals is they try and do too much, too soon. We want to do a little bit of a self assessment. Figure out, where are we currently at? Then, where can we set our goal that's going to be within those parameters of our current ability level, but also still challenging enough that it makes us want to stick with it? A lot of us, we have set a goal that we want to be able to walk a 5K within a certain amount of time. Well, as much as we would love to be able to, if we're not currently engaging in that physical activity, to be able to go out and do our end goal on day one, the likelihood of that is not feasible. We're setting ourselves up to not succeed.

What I like to say with goal setting is that if we look at it as a staircase, you start with your initial goal. Then you set incremental shorter goals that are going to get us up to each step to get to the top of the staircase where that long-term goal is. Like I said before, as much as we all would love to be able to jump from step one to the top of the flight of stairs, that's not going to happen.

Nicki Donnelson:

Even if you're working out with a partner, Powell emphasizes that you should set individual goals. Genetics, body type, physical abilities and diet are all unique to you, so you shouldn't compare yourself, she says.

Dr. Sara Powell:

Something that we really need to consider when we are setting goals, and especially if you are setting goals with an accountabilibuddy, is that goal setting needs to be an individualized process. The goal that I set for myself may be completely different than the goal that maybe my husband sets for himself, or a friend, or a different family member. As much as we want to have someone work with us to be able to hold each other accountable, which I fully support, it's a great way to help us stick to the goals that we set, they do still need to be individualized. Say, for example, we have a goal to lose weight by being physically active, especially if you are working with a spouse or significant other, a different gender orientation, those goals are going to be achieved at vastly different time points.

I actually try and stray folks away from weight loss-specific goals, because the body adapts at such a different rate to exercise physiologically, psychologically, it's very easy to become fixated on the scale. If you're not seeing instant progress, that's going to be a big hit to your self confidence and your self esteem. Instead of focusing on the scale, I like to help transition people over to, "Okay, let's focus on maybe your physical ability as far as getting stronger, increasing your endurance, those sorts of things." The likelihood of seeing weight loss as a byproduct to that is great, but it's not as difficult on the psyche and on the self esteem.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Dr. Sara Powell from the Kinesiology Department at Missouri State University. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

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