

# Sense and Psychotherapy

Dear Reader,

I'm a bit embarrassed to admit it's been two years since my last newsletter. I was determined when I first started writing these that I would send them out four times a year, and I worked hard to maintain this.

Unfortunately, I was diverted from this goal two years ago. I took on the position of supervisor at Teen and Family Counseling Center, and then, a few months later added the Presidency of the Santa Clara Valley chapter of CAMFT. Combining these two duties with my private practice left me with very little time to devote to writing or any other creative activity.

For the first several months, I was very disappointed with myself that I had dropped this writing, and I grew increasingly self-critical as the months went by without sending out a newsletter. However, after a lot of introspection and reevaluation, I eventually came to accept that this goal simply had to wait for a while.

Several months ago I decided I wanted to return to my earlier goals and I left TFCC in the spring. My tenure with the chapter will be over soon. This frees up time, and I'm excited at the prospect of devoting this time to my practice, my family, and my writing.

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## Just the facts...

- People who focus on attaining success set more realistic goals.
- Those facing extreme adversity fare better when holding onto a purpose.

## What are you striving for?

From my observations of my clients, friends and myself, I have come to believe that working toward some sort of goal is an important ingredient in feeling good about life. Generally, when we have a sense of what we want to achieve, whether this is an over-arching life pursuit or a simple plan for the day, we feel better. Having a sense of purpose provides us with a direction to life. Without any goals, we may begin to drift, and sometimes even lose our sense of self. Life is difficult enough, but without anything to strive for, it can become overwhelmingly tedious and bleak.

Yet, although it is important to have goals, there's a danger in getting hung up on the goal itself, rather than what the goal will provide. We risk losing sight of the original purpose of the goal. It is helpful to remember that in many ways, it may not even be that important to reach the goal; the journey may be more meaningful than the destination. It is easy to forget the importance of who we are as we work to achieve our goals, and how we handle what we encounter along the way.

Especially with long-term goals, we need to remain flexible and open to new opportunities. It helps to regularly reevaluate the merits of our goal and the manner in which we are pursuing it. We occasionally have to take side paths and later, when we return to the original pursuit, we may find our purpose has been enriched. We may even decide to change courses completely, and discard old goals for new ones as we grow and change.

Achieving a goal, especially a long-standing one, may give us a huge sense of accomplishment and pride, yet it may also seem anticlimactic. When this happens, we may want to examine why; was it a well-thought-out goal, what were we really hoping to achieve, did we do it for someone else, not ourself? We may even mourn the loss of purpose the goal provided. Sometimes we wish for greater recognition about the efforts we have put forth. The feelings may also just be a natural reaction to a long, difficult journey that has reached an end.

The in-between times when we've achieved a goal or discarded ones that are no longer appropriate, and we're not sure what our new goals are, may be uncomfortable, scary, or even painful. Yet these transition periods may also be very fruitful. We can use this time to sort out our priorities, reexamine our values, and sift through our achievements. We look back to see where we've been, how we got here, and how we feel about our current situation. This is a good time to take a breath, slow down, and rest before determining where we want to go next.

I like to think that goals are dreams with a plan. We use goals to turn our desires, hopes, and fantasies into reality. Once we have a goal, then it is possible to begin to determine what steps are necessary to achieve it. We can break it down into do-able, concrete activities, which can provide the energy we need to sustain us as we set forth on what may initially seem an impossibly long journey.

## *Drifting along*

I recently discovered the joys of books on tape, and this summer I listened to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* on tape. I was enchanted by Mark Twain's descriptions of the Mississippi. I could almost feel myself floating along with Huck and Jim, gazing at the stars overhead. These days I feel as though I'm drifting along one of those wide, apparently calm sections of the river. I've been through some turbulent rapids, there's a deep slow-moving current underneath, and I know there are some significant challenges ahead. But for now, I'm resting and surveying the waters around me.

I have achieved a goal I set for myself over 25 years ago. In high school I knew I wanted to be a therapist (without a clue of what that really was!). As I went through college, got my degrees, and actually began working with clients in my internships, it became clearer to me what it really means to be a therapist. The more I learned, the more my confidence in my goal grew. I have been in my private practice for several years now, and this feels really good.

I am now asking myself, 'what next?' I know I want to continue as a therapist; it's clear to me that's the general direction of the river I am floating on. What is in question, is what I can do that will make me an even better therapist. How do I continue to improve my skills and knowledge? Where and how do I want to focus my professional energy? How do I use my life to enhance my work, and how do I use my work to enrich my life?

One thing that has always attracted me to psychotherapy is the endless opportunity to learn more. There are always new theories to learn, new techniques to try, new ideas to absorb. I am exposing myself to new ways of approaching therapy these days, dipping my toe into strange waters, testing to see where I want to dive in next. For example, I am beginning to study psychoanalytic readings with the goal of improving my skills, yet am not sure how deeply I want to explore this area. At the same time, I am also interested in developing a greater awareness of the impact of culture on my clients, and how living in a multicultural community affects us all.

Along the horizon I can see a number of possible landings ahead, and I am uncertain which one I'll steer toward. I don't know which ones will take me to a dead end, which will lead to unexpected adventures, and which will just keep me on the general course I've been on. I must admit, there are times when I feel like I'm drifting aimlessly, lost in the fog, and I am tempted to do something, anything, just to feel as though I am actively in control. But, I know in my heart that this is a time for me to take it slowly and just observe what's going on.

I have faith that as I check out different approaches and new ideas, I will choose wisely which direction to take. I am open to new adventures and confident in my ability to navigate the unknown waters ahead of me, and for the moment at least, I am enjoying the ride.

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*The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal.  
The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach.*

*Benjamin E. Mays*