

# THE SET FREE LIFE

## Rough Sledding

Is January a tough month for you? Finding it hard to get started, rev up, get rolling, and stay motivated? I'm sure there are a hardy bunch out there who have already set goals and are zipping toward completion, but I'm skidding through a plateau, working every muscle to prevent myself from sidelining until March.

This month I offer you a bit of fire-under-the-behind encouragement: remind yourself of dreams and plans and break them down into tiny, manageable, digestible pieces you can address day by day. When we're in a state of seasonal downturn, we often put a mountain before ourselves and demand a gigantic leap, inviting failure so we have an excuse to retreat to the cave of dejection. "It will never happen!" we tell ourselves. "Why do I even try?"

Instead, pull some strands from those aspirations and *work them*. You don't have to write the whole book in three weeks, but you can create an outline for a table of contents. You might not land ten big sales accounts by your birthday but you can focus on signing one or two of the smaller prospects.

One of the emotional dangers we frequently encounter is the temptation to lose perspective of a situation, overdramatize, and spin it into an unattainable fantasy where it was once a reachable prize. Nobel Prize recipient Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist with a string of designations (Eugene Higgins Professor of Psychology at Princeton University, professor of public affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School, Senior Scientist for Gallup) has researched the way our individual decisions are based on factors easily manipulated, such as perception and context, and on faulty reasoning. In a *Gallup Management Journal* interview two years ago, he pointed out that when

we are in a bad mood, we see the world as more dangerous, feel more pessimistic about the future, and find it hard to relate to happy, smiling people.

Quite simply—almost simplistically—the truth is that by making an adjustment in your thinking you can change your beliefs about yourself and the world. Dr. Kahneman sites an experiment in which people were given an opportunity to find a quarter in a phone booth, thus making their call free. Upon completing the call, a researcher approached and asked if a survey might be conducted; one of the questions had to do with how generally happy they were with life. "People who just found a quarter in the phone booth were much likelier to say that they were much happier with their life in general these days than people who didn't find a quarter," he told the interviewer. "So even a small event . . . will make thoughts of happiness much more accessible. If your first thought is a negative one, you are likely to continue to have negative thoughts for a while. You also tend to think about the past in the light of your current mood."

You see, it's a matter of *accessibility*. Don't block even a hint of progress toward that for which you yearn by staying in a place of unhappy comparisons or sad withdrawal. I always tell myself it's okay to complain for a little while; it's not a crime to have a moment (or two or twenty) of weakness, but for

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### Quick Links

Professor Daniel Kaheman

New York Times

Adopt-A-Greyhound

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goodness' sake, *don't stay there!* You create a fortress of impenetrability with each passing week. Make well-being accessible by creating an environment for even the most minor of joyful, energizing moments. Give yourself the little push you know will put your head back into the land of the living.

I know all of you reading may not struggle with the excessive rumination that leads to discontent, but I do, and this is my newsletter and I've written this to encourage myself. Hope it helps you, too! ♡

## Love that Java



I'm so happy about coffee! Yes—*coffee!* For years, I've defied the reports that coffee is bad, bad, bad, and I've continued to drink, drink, drink. It does nothing to wake me or keep me awake; caffeine has little to no effect on me. Larry and I drink gallons of java before to going to bed, and I fall asleep as easily as I always have. I actually wish it *did* give me a little energy, but nevertheless, I love the taste of coffee, the smell of it, the delicious reward of my personal mixture of dairy and sweetness and bean. Whether I'm cooking up a batch of espresso on the stovetop to make my own version of Cuban coffee or perking a pot of preferred brew, *I love coffee!*

So it's been deeply satisfying to hear continuing reports of its health benefits. The latest: coffee may play a role in preventing dementia. The *New York Times* reports that a study from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden found that subjects drinking 3 to 5 cups of coffee a day, followed for an average of 21 years, showed a reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease once other factors had been controlled. Researchers note that caffeine has been shown in animal studies to reduce amyloid plaque formation in the brain. Drinking coffee appears to also have an effect on the risk for type 2 diabetes and Parkinson's. People who, like me, drink more than 5 cups a day also experienced the antioxidant properties of coffee, but the main focus was on the 3-5 cup group.

Coffee, an antioxidant! Who knew? Vindication is sweet, dark, and piping hot! ♡

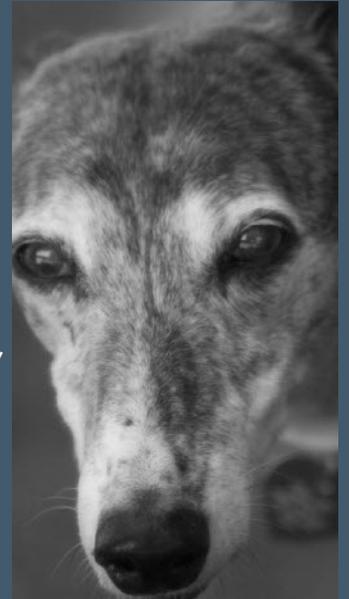
## Quotable

*I am tomorrow, or some future day, what I establish today. I am today what I established yesterday or some previous day.*

James Joyce

## Teddy Bear Says...

There's a saying that The Teddy Bear finds amusing: "Try to be the kind of person your dog thinks you are." It implies we of the canine community believe in the merits of human character in spite of evidence to the contrary. But speaking as a very wise and cultured pup, let me use the words of the French and say, *au contraire!*



In a December article in the *Wall Street Journal* (12/11/08), an article on employee theft was featured in the "Marketplace" section. "New research shows that employers are seeing an increase in internal crimes," wrote author Sarah Needleman, "ranging from fictitious sales transactions and illegal kickbacks to the theft of office equipment and retail products meant for sale to customers. Employers suspect that workers are pilfering from them to cope with financial difficulties at home or in anticipation of being laid off."

What a sad time it is for all of us when humans show themselves to be driven by the lowest of unjustifiable motives. To use difficult financial times as an excuse to steal, particularly when one *has a paying job* and is stealing from the resources of the employer currently providing said job, is indefensible. Were a man or woman homeless and destitute with no means to provide for him or herself, we might find some measure of compassion for thievery. But we are discovering in this day and age that all bets are off: mankind seems to be slowly losing the moral infrastructure that once prevented this kind of behavior—indeed, the kind of reasoning that would prevent a person from arguing its rightness. I can hear it in my soft little ear: "This is a big company. They have all kinds of cash. They won't miss this item/software/money. They won't know I'm getting a kickback. What's more, even if they did know, they wouldn't care. Look at how the big CEOs are robbing us all blind! I have a right to mine. Everyone's doing it, anyway. Why not me?"

My friends, your character is showing. Please—stop this slide into situational insanity. Your dogs would like to think your species is bigger than this. We know it can be, and we appreciate your attention to this important matter.

