

Celebrating Your Small Wins

How would your life and work be different if you didn't focus only on the final big win? Or only on having a full success?

What if you celebrate the small wins?

What if you focus on celebrating wins that you are in control of?

What if you celebrated a partial victory?

When determining success we are generally too hard on ourselves in deciding if we won or lost. We think in black and white extremes of winning and losing when there is a big grey area in between the two extremes.

Working on a crisis and suicide prevention line

If as a crisis line worker I focused only on the big win, that the caller does not harm themselves, I am setting myself up for constant frustration. As a crisis line worker I never knew the final story, only what happened on the call.

So, I was trained to celebrate the successes along the way while helping someone considering self-harm:

- I attempted to connect with the caller and earn their trust - WIN
- I listened while they shared and provided empathy - WIN
- I shared resources with them if appropriate - WIN
- I completed a suicide assessment - WIN
- I asked for support from another worker in the call center - WIN
- I sent the police to assist (if necessary) - WIN
- I completed a debrief with a supervisor after the call - WIN
- Once I was ready I turned my phone line back on - WIN

None of these wins were dependent on knowing the final results. I did what I could to support the caller and needed to celebrate each small win to have a successful call. I also focused on celebrating success based on the actions I was in control of taking.

If the crisis line received a letter or call in the future where someone thanked us for saving them, this was a bonus success. This wasn't required for us to be successful in our work.

Steps for celebrating the small wins

1. Pick a task that you do at work.
2. Define the final requirement that you use to determine if this task is successful.
3. Break down the big task into the smaller steps you can track that are required from start to finish.
4. Determine which tasks/results you are in control of.
5. Determine which tasks/results you are not in control of.
6. Identify what success looks like for each smaller step that you are in control of.
7. When you complete these smaller steps successfully, celebrate the win.
8. When you have success with smaller steps that you aren't in control of, celebrate them as a bonus win.
9. If you achieve the big final result, celebrate the big win. Don't make your success based only on this final win.

Example as a group:

What you are in control of

It can be challenging to be honest with ourselves about what we are in control of and what we aren't in control of.

Here are some examples of what you are in control of:

- Yourself. Your emotions, thoughts, actions, judgements, responses, and reactions
- How you have a conversation - not the results of the conversation
- How you support a client/colleague/family member - not the result of that support, how they react, or if they actually listen
- Information you give to someone - not if or how they use it
- Filling out paperwork - not the final approval of that paperwork

Ways to track your wins

Our brains are quick to forget our wins, and excellent at remembering our failures. Tracking your wins can help build resilience, self-compassion, and remembering the successes we have had.

Here are some ideas for tracking your wins:

- Write a brief summary of your wins in a journal
- Track the different steps and wins on a whiteboard
- Talk with one of your trusted network about your small wins
- Discuss small wins in team meetings or leadership meetings
- Ask your direct reports to talk about their small wins

The theme system tracking system

I use a daily journaling process called the "Theme System"

<https://www.themesystem.com/>

Part of the journaling process is tracking your habits, but with a twist. In this system they suggest that you write down your habits, then determine what a full success looks like, and what a partial success looks like.

Example: Riding my bike 3 days a week.

- Partial success: I rode my bike.
- Full success: I rode my bike all 3 days.

Then, if you complete the habit completely you color the circle in completely. If you achieve the partial success you fill the circle in halfway.

I find this helpful because I am no longer using a black and white determination of whether or not I was successful with the habit. I can get partial credit which helps me go easier on myself, and build momentum.

I am working right now on adapting this system to track my wins, so I have a quick visual method of tracking how a project is going, how team communications is going, etc.

Celebrating your small wins

Once you start tracking your small wins, the next step is to figure out how you will celebrate these wins. You may decide to celebrate each small win, or celebrate after you collect a few wins. The key is to have gratitude and celebrate when things go well.

Ideas for celebrating your wins:

- Take a break, go for a walk, meditate - do something small in the moment to reflect on the win
- Buy yourself a yummy drink
- Go out for a meal
- Go to the library or buy the new book you have been waiting to read
- Take time to work on a favorite hobby: knit, scrapbook, bike, play a game, etc.

- Find a friend and celebrate the win
- Etc.

I have high cholesterol so have to limit one of my favorite things in the world: ice cream. A common ritual I have for celebrating a win is going to Dairy Queen for a banana split.

You can check out this RAFT podcast episode for more on rituals, appreciation, and celebrations: <https://www.raftcares.org/resources/podcasts/celebration-rituals-as-anchors-in-life/>