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Do you have a niggling feeling your life is not as good as it could be? Sarah Marinos discovers how to unlock your hidden potential

REACH YOUR

potential

Most of us have had moments where we think our life could be better.

"Many people know they're not really happy or fulfilled, but keep doing what they've always done," says Lindsay Tighe, chief executive of Inspirational Coaching in Melbourne.

If you fail to identify your personal and professional values and goals, you won't reach your potential, says Paul H Saunders, a psychologist and author of *You Can Live Your Potential* (LN Consulting, \$24.95).

"You can take control of your potential with the right thinking, behaviour and techniques," says Saunders.

These seven steps point you in the right direction.

1 Know what's important

Some people call it intuition. Before you can uncover your potential at home or at work, you need to identify what's really important to you.

"What's your belief system?" asks Saunders. "If you want to live your values, what sort of behavioural changes will you need to make? If you don't know what's important, then you will just respond to what's in front of you without thinking about the consequences."

Tighe says that you need to clarify what is, and what isn't, important. To achieve clarity on this matter you need quiet time out.

"You don't need to go on a retreat for a week, but take half an hour every so often to think about yourself and your

life," she suggests. "What would you like to change? What are you currently doing and what could you do differently? What drives you? What values are important to you? What do you want to do now and in the future? Be clear on these things and you can start acting on plans."

2 Know what motivates you

What turns you on and off? What excites and annoys you? Some people are motivated by anger because it's a pattern of behaviour they learned from angry parents, while others are driven by fame.

"Ask yourself what drives you and how can you channel

that motivation into realistic and acceptable behaviour," advises Saunders.

Tighe believes that in today's busy world, very few of us prioritise self-awareness and thinking about what drives us to do the things we do. We need to take time out from our daily routine to think about what makes us get up every morning, and what aspects of our lives fulfil or drain us emotionally.

"We're too busy in our 'busyness'," comments Tighe. "But we need to work out what motivates us because then we know more about who we are and what we want from our lives. When you know those things, you will have a strong foundation to move forward."



3 **Have vision and goals**

Once you've identified what's important and what motivates you, use that information to set visions and goals. Tighe estimates that only five to 10 per cent of us do so.

"Some people are scared to set goals because they think that if they don't achieve them they'll be disappointed," she explains. "But I say, 'Some you win, some you learn.' You don't really lose, because you can learn from any outcome. Think of setting a goal as a learning experience."

And when you want to define your vision and goals, what do you ask yourself? "Think about the legacy you want to leave," says Saunders. "Is the way you're living your life now going to get you there? Set a goal to achieve in the next 21 days to get you going, then review your progress in six months."

4 **Have a positive self-image**

Saunders believes a factor in Australia's high rate of youth suicide is a generation of young people with negative self-image. "We have to make people feel like they don't have to have a set image. It's about getting encouragement from people around you that the person you are is okay," he says.

"We all have an image of ourselves – but is it healthy?

Stand in front of the mirror every morning and say positive things about yourself. Think about your body language. Don't hang your head, but stand tall."

Identifying your strengths, listing qualities friends love about you and surrounding yourself with things that are reminders you're a good person all raises a better self-image, says Tighe. ▶

5 Align your self-talk

The high-achieving sports and business people Saunders works with have one thing in common – they're determined self-talkers. "They confidently talk about what they're going to do next," he says.

"People who are quite negative and depressed don't talk about the future – they talk about the past and what went wrong. To discover your potential, you need to talk about the here and now, and the future. If you've run negative messages through your brain, you need to change that pattern immediately."

Tighe adds we need to remember that if we had a friend who talked to us like we often talk to ourselves, they wouldn't be our friends for very long! "Be very conscious of how you talk to yourself. Be kind, calm, and – most

importantly – don't berate yourself, because the language we use impacts our happiness and the sense of control we have over our lives."

6 Create a supportive environment

Surround yourself with people who are positive about your goals and their own lives, says Saunders. "People who live long lives have good friends, feel good about themselves and are optimistic."

Tighe recommends we make our physical environment welcoming, too. "Place things around you that remind you of the good things about your life. Also surround yourself with things that keep you in a positive space. I have a list of kind things that people have said about me at work and, if I'm having a particularly bad day, I read over that list," reveals Tighe.

7 Develop successful habits

"The brain develops programs based on the activities we do regularly – our habits," says Saunders. "But habits can be changed and the brain will adjust if you work on it. You have to practise a different behaviour until it becomes another habit."

A coach or counsellor can help you do this. You can also put up visual reminders at home and work or in your diary to remind yourself to stick to your new successful habit.

There's no point procrastinating when it comes to changing a negative habit for a more successful one, says Tighe. "Be aware of what works for you and make that a habit. If one thing doesn't work, try something different. Find the recipe that makes you successful in the way you want to be successful." 

