



PERSONAL GROWTH

This Daily Habit Can Cultivate Hope (When We Need It Most) + How To Do It Right

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Hope is a reaction spurred by unexpected experiences of wonder that occur amid extreme difficulties and crises. Specifically, hope as a facet of wonder can arise from a surprising moment or sign that lets you see a glimmer (sometimes algae-sized) of possibility toward an otherwise uncertain or dark future. The psychologist and renowned hope researcher C.R. Snyder offers a metaphor. Snyder, who developed the [Adult Hope Scale](#), a model that measures an adult's level of hope, stated, "A rainbow is a prism that sends shards of multicolored light in various directions. It lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible. Hope is the same—a personal rainbow of the mind." It's a telling metaphor because the rainbow has been the central study of wonder for centuries among theologians, philosophers, and scientists. Hope is the rainbow facet of wonder.

The science-backed benefits of hope.

Both bewilderment and hope as facets of wonder can build fortitude and resilience. Hope, as we will discover, is more than just an optimistic state of mind; it is an action-oriented vision. If we can still track wonder while we face grief, adversity, illness, and other critical setbacks, hope will allow us to find purpose and creativity no matter what the circumstance.

It turns out that there is a science of hope that has led to many therapeutic practices. Recent research correlates hope with higher academic and athletic performance, higher levels of physical and psychological well-being, improved self-esteem, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. Shane Lopez, Ph.D., a former student of Snyder, said, "Hope is the belief that the future will be better than the present and the belief that you will be able to make it so." In his formulation, to truly access hope, you must have optimism, a sense of personal agency, and plans for how you will act. He found that people who measured high on scales of hopeful attitudes were much more productive. "Hope for the future," he wrote, "pays off today."

People who track hope have commonalities. For one, hopeful people set their sights on future goals, however close or far away. Lopez's research shows that they define and pursue two to three goals doggedly. Even if you think yourself goal averse, consider how this simple act could shift your experience. Setting and taking small steps toward two to three goals provides meaning and purpose under otherwise distressing crises or setbacks.

Hopeful people also tend to interpret adverse events more as challenges than as threats. Hoping, Lopez emphasized, is notably different from wishing. With a wish, the energy behind the thought is more like a magic spell. You don't connect your actions to the desired outcome, which can disempower you. Think of it this way, metaphorically. You're stranded in the middle of an ocean. If you rely only on wishful thinking and optimism, you simply say to yourself, "Everything is going to work out fine. Everything is going to work fine."

Hope, on the other hand, helps you forecast how to get from the middle of the ocean to a safe shore and to take small actions accordingly. Like the people I work with who expect some things to go wrong, hopeful people believe they can overcome those obstacles because they

know they can be flexible and find a new route. As the 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza understood, both fear and hope are responses to an uncertain future. He wrote, "There is no hope unmingled with fear, and no fear unmingled with hope." Fear and hope can spur each other when you are in danger, as they did van Schyndel in the sea storm.

How to cultivate hope through daydreaming.

Let's track hope a step further with a counterintuitive practice: deliberate daydreaming. Yes, daydreaming. If parents, teachers, or bosses have admonished you for daydreaming, then realize that much of our culture has been as biased against daydreaming as against wonder. Yet in my experience working with and interviewing so many innovative people, I kept wondering why some of them floundered just after launching a dream project, while others flourished. The reasons, I suspected, had little to do with external factors such as financial means, obligations, or sudden setbacks. I thought the difference might have something to do with the individual's degree of intrinsic drive and commitment, especially in the face of such setbacks.

It turns out that they daydream. If you deliberately daydream about your desired future, you could boost your chances of achieving your goals, according to research from Germany. In the study, college students identified a study goal and kept a daydream diary for two weeks. Actively daydreaming helped those students already driven by achievement and excellence. They were the group best able to achieve their study goals.

How to daydream correctly:

But *how* you daydream is essential. The psychologist Jerome L. Singer's body of work challenged many of his fellow psychologists' bias against that mind-wandering faculty. In his book *The Inner World of Daydreaming*, Singer distinguishes three different ways to daydream.

The first form that Singer identifies is when you might have poor attention control and you use daydreaming as a way to escape some kind of effortful focus. Call it *distracted daydreaming*. The second kind, called *the guilty-dysphoric type*, is when your thoughts trend toward anguished fantasies—more like catastrophic nightmares than playful daydreams. What Singer calls *positive-constructive daydreaming* is the sweet spot, where we find benefits to daydreaming.

Neither fantastical escape nor catastrophic thinking, this playful, artful approach engages your

imagination to explore *your* possibilities for a better future, however distant or near. This kind of daydreaming leads to making plans and solving problems in a way that complements Lopez's research on setting your sights on a meaningful goal or two. A component of hope is that you begin to envision actions that will lead to your ultimate aim.

Bottom line.

If you don't allow regular time to daydream deliberately, you might feel even more distressed and myopic when it comes to seeing a positive future. Just as night dreaming allows our nervous system to sort of "expel" a lot of unconscious pressure, this type of daydreaming gives our minds space to integrate the daily challenges or hardships we face, especially amid despair.

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