motivation in motion

workshops • retreats • one-on-one

Why do bad things always happen to me?

This is the question asked by miserable people all over the world. They get caught up in unfortunate incidents they feel are outside of their control, and this casts a shadow over their outlook on life. But are all of these incidents really outside their control? Could it be that they are actually **choosing** failure by refusing to set positive goals for themselves and by refusing to change the way they view the world?

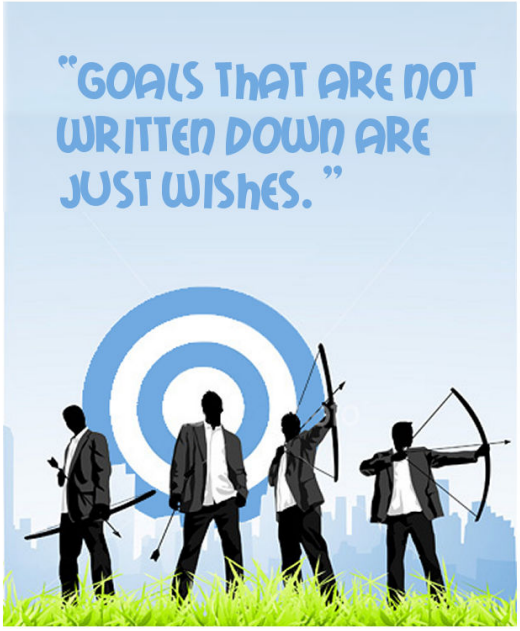
Community Drug Alert recently spoke with Jaime Kessel of Motivation In Motion. She is a motivational trainer with an extensive background in the area of health and wellness who is passionate about working with people who are coping with addictions issues. She notes that "many people fail because they simply do not have a blueprint for success. They can't see farther than their immediate problems or their desire to get their next hit. Establishing healthy, long-term goals is essential in helping them to turn their lives around."

Different Motivations

Our neighbours in the United States stress the importance of '*Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.*' That's the basic goal of every human being - to maximize the happiness in their lives. There are two basic motivations that help people to pursue happiness: moving away from pain; and moving towards pleasure. These two motivations may sound synonymous, but there's a world of difference between them. Using an addictive

substance is the perfect example of moving away from pain. When addicts experience stress, discomfort or emptiness in their lives, they attempt to block it out by using drugs or alcohol. It's a temporary solution that only makes matters worse in the long run. They are not doing anything to eliminate the underlying pain. They are only running away from it.

Moving towards pleasure occurs when a person has a positive goal in their life. Jaime notes that "the central question I ask my clients is '*what do you really want in life?*' I get people to close their eyes and visualize the types of homes they want, the types of careers they want, and the family they want. I'm not planting any suggestions in their heads. They are making their own choices and their own decisions. Once they've got that goal in mind, they have something positive to work towards and they are not simply running scared anymore."



Many of the people who come in to see Jaime are on the verge of bankruptcy or may already have lost everything they own because of their addiction. It can seem overwhelming to be setting long-term goals when your world is in a shambles. Jaime uses the following analogy to motivate her clients: "when you climb a mountain, you do it one small step at a time. When you are creating a healthy and successful future for yourself, you also do it one step at a time. I let my clients know that the fact they've turned to somebody for help is the first and biggest step that they need to take. They simply need to plot out the rest of the small steps that will help them achieve their goals in life."

Jaime points to an example from her own life to show how effective visualization can be. She tells us that "a couple of years ago, I set a goal for myself to do motivational work on an international level. Shortly after this, I met a man at a conference who did speaking tours around the world - and I was able to use this connection to find work in England and South Africa. If I hadn't consciously set this goal for myself, I wouldn't have had my eyes open to the opportunities for success that really allowed me to broaden my horizons."

Filters

All of us go through our lives with filters on, blocking out the things we don't want or need to see. For example, there are pages of advertisements for new cars in the newspaper - but you don't notice any of these advertisements until you are ready to buy a new car.

When people have addictions problems, they are often filtering out the positive aspects of their lives and concentrating only on the negatives. If a man looks in the mirror and says '*I'm such a loser, I can't control myself,'* then that will always be the result he gets. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. But if we look for the positives in life, we will find them. This doesn't mean wearing rose-coloured glasses and ignoring the problems in life, it means being aware of all aspects of life and **choosing** to focus on the positive.

"I've worked with a number of women who've been in abusive relationships," says Jaime. "They tell themselves that all men are manipulative, abusive liars, and that's what they end up with time-after-time. It's almost like they go out of their way to choose that kind of guy because they have filters blocking out all the decent people."

Jaime had another client who was a recovering addict. He could walk down Whyte Avenue and point out all the different drug deals that were going on in the neighbourhood. Most people walking by wouldn't have noticed these shady dealings, but this man was so caught up in his addiction that was all he saw.

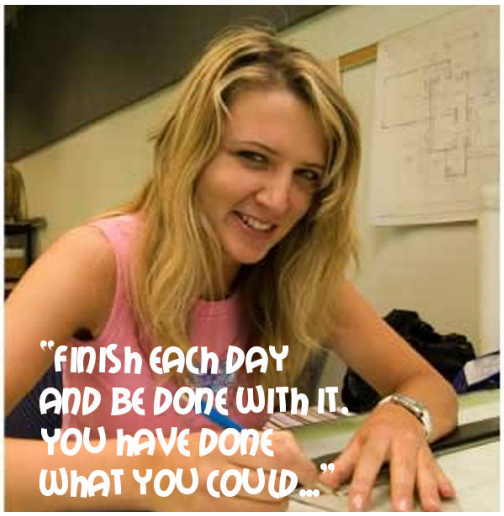
How is it that people can stay mired in a life of addiction when they desperately want to change. Jaime explains that "thoughts lead to feelings, feelings lead to actions, and actions lead to results. When people are caught up in negative thoughts and a negative mindset, it's like they are hard-wired for failure. They constantly dredge up past mistakes and dwell on them. They think of themselves as losers, so they feel like losers. If they feel like losers, they are going to act like losers. The end result is always going to be disappointment."

We learn tasks like driving a car or playing a piano by practicing over and over again until our brains develop neural pathways for these activities and they become automatic. Unfortunately, we can also develop neural pathways for addictive behaviour or self-doubt. When stress arises, the addict's automatic response is to turn to drugs or alcohol, that is

the coping mechanism that has been imprinted on his brain. When a challenge arises, a pessimist always assumes he's going to screw up because that's the way his brain has been conditioned to respond.

Resorting to addictive behaviour and simply accepting failure can be a "comfort zone" for many people. As much as they don't want to be this way anymore, it's the devil they know. Change is scary - but it's necessary. It's important for them to develop new neural pathways and new coping mechanisms.

"I tell my clients to write down five things that indicate their success throughout the day and focus on those," says Jaime. "This doesn't mean that people need to ignore the problems in their lives. There's a big difference between positive thinking and positive focus. If people only resort to positive thinking, they aren't always being honest with themselves. But if they have a positive focus, they tell themselves '*these are* ***all*** *the facts, but here's what I choose to focus on.*'"



Over the years, Jaime has worked with a number of clients in the area of weight loss. People who are overweight often have a very poor self-image. They may be ashamed of the way they look, so they turn to "comfort" food to cope, and that only makes the problem worse. "I ask them if this sort of self-deprecating spiral ever worked for them in the past, and they are forced to admit it hasn't," says Jaime. "If simply being ashamed of their appearance served to motivate people, then North Americans wouldn't be spending billions on fad diets and gym memberships. The more negative thoughts they have, the harder it is to deal with their problems."

What's a healthy way to deal with weight issues? "The first thing I do is tell people to *lighten up*," says Jaime, only partly in jest. "They need to be able to look in a mirror and feel safe in their body. They need to be able to like the way things are going and be proud of the progress they are making."

Earlier in the article, we discussed different types of motivation - how some people are moving away from pain, while

others are moving towards pleasure. People who are ashamed of their bodies are moving away from pain. People who set a goal for themselves and visualize a healthy body weight are moving towards pleasure.

"I was overweight when I was a kid, and I was very self-conscious about it," says Jaime. "My parents had me taking part in synchronized swimming, and I couldn't do many of the moves the other girls did. I tried to lose weight by going to the gym when there was no one else around to see me because I was so uncomfortable with my appearance. My motivation was very much one of moving away from pain. I didn't start to make changes in my life until I changed my motivation, started to pursue positive goals, and became more comfortable with who I was."

In addition to changing our motivation, it helps if we can change our relationship with food. Too many of us use food as a coping mechanism. If we have a bad day at work, we go home and scarf down a bag of potato chips. Our brains may be hard-wired to turn to "comfort" food as a way of coping with stress. It might help if we start to view food as **fuel** for our bodies. You would never put water in your car's gas tank, so why put an inefficient fuel in your body? If we adopt healthy choices in our diet, our brains become hard-wired for these choices instead, and we don't crave junk food as much.

Food is fuel forour bodies. Fill it up right!

Drumming

Finding positive recreational activities can be a difficult proposition for people in recovery. The peer group they've hung out with for years are other addicts so obviously they can't go back to that environment.

One of the activities Jaime often introduces to her clients is drumming with small drums imported from Ghana. She uses them for small to large groups. "Drumming is a great way for people to express themselves," says Jaime. "It's basic, it's primal and it's a lot of fun. It's important for people to realize that they can still have fun without addictive substances or addictive behaviours."

Is drumming a form of stress relief? "I see it more as a coping skill," says Jaime. "Addictions are an example of a really bad coping skill. Addictive substances are something addicts turn to when emotions and troubles arise and they feel overwhelmed. Drumming, on the other hand, is a good coping skill. People feel calmed, rejuvenated and get a sense of relief. It's something they are able to do by themselves, and for themselves, and it helps them to feel empowered."

For more information on the programs and services Jaime has to offer, visit her website at www.motivationinmotion.ca