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Why Celebrating Small Wins Matters

Keep up your momentum by acknowledging and rewarding yourself for each step forward.

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May 30, 2024

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Many of us tend to celebrate life's big wins: graduation, marriage, a first big job, or buying our first home. But accomplishing big projects successfully requires many small steps along the way.

It can be difficult to see the bigger picture when you're working toward a long-term goal. Recognizing small wins along the way is not only an important part of making progress, but can also help keep you motivated.

We don't always celebrate those small steps as the wins they are, but they are necessary to keep the big wins coming. So, how do we celebrate our small wins?

What Is a “Small Win?”

There is a 5th-century Chinese proverb, “A journey of 1,000 miles starts with a single step.” There's a reason that has stood the test of time! A journey of 1,000 miles can feel so overwhelming that you may never begin it.

A small step is a win because it creates momentum that will propel you toward your bigger goals. Breaking projects into small steps can also reduce fear, clarify direction, and increase the probability of future success.

What are small wins? If you are trying to improve your health, getting up a little earlier to take a walk is a small win. Going to the gym after school or work is a small win. Choosing a nutritious option at a restaurant is a small win. Each of these achievements brings you a little closer to your long-term goal.

While small wins might not feel like much at the time, with consistency and persistence, they will lead you toward a larger, more ambitious accomplishment. They are worthy of celebration because small wins are building blocks for future success.

What Are the Benefits of Celebrating “Small” Accomplishments?

Celebrating small wins can boost your mood and improve confidence in your accomplishments, keeping you motivated as you pursue a larger goal. It helps you form good habits, like healthful eating or consistent study habits, and proves you can take on challenges.

Setbacks in life are common, especially when dealing with complex problems, so celebrating the small wins will help you see that long-term achievement doesn't always happen in a linear way. If you suffer a setback but can acknowledge even a small advance, that can be enough to keep you on track.

By celebrating small wins, you can hone skills such as maintaining focus, goal setting, prioritizing, and organizing, which can lead to greater self-confidence and self-esteem. Celebrating each small step creates a sense of purpose as you navigate life's challenges, whether big or small.

Leveraging quick wins can also inspire and motivate others. If you are working on a project as part of a team, celebrating these milestones can create a culture of encouragement and help prevent burnout.

How Can You Recognize Achieving a Small Win?

You can recognize small wins in multiple ways. If you spent an hour filling out a summer program application, reward yourself! There is no one "best" way to acknowledge smaller steps along the way to larger goals, but here are a few ideas:

Track progress for a mental boost in a journal, spreadsheet, or app. Crossing items off the list is often a reward unto itself!

Treat yourself with a small reward, even if it is just a 5 minute break to get some fresh air.

Share your win with friends, family, or colleagues.

Have both a short- and long-term plan toward larger goals, such as setting smaller milestones along the way.

Aim for progress, not perfection.

If you are working as part of a team, acknowledgment during a meeting shares group success with all the team members. Recognition can also be more formalized, such as a post on social media, sharing your success with a wider audience.

How Can You Achieve Greater Success?

One way to stay on track is to establish SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for effective steps to set and achieve goals, and can help you practice goal setting:

Specific: Make sure goals are clear and well-defined.

Measurable: You should define what you consider completion, so you're not chasing a never-ending goal.

Attainable: Set a goal that is challenging but reasonably within reach.

Realistic: Consider resources available and time constraints as you set reasonable, attainable goals.

Time-bound: If a goal has a date attached, you are more likely to achieve it. If it is a big goal, break it down into those small wins to help you stay on track as you move toward that ultimate prize.

Here are a few other ways to keep the momentum going:

Learn from the steps along the way — what did the small wins teach you?

Have fun — it is much easier to reach your goal when you are enjoying the journey!

Think positively and seek support if you are feeling discouraged.

Change your perspective — turn a challenging situation into a better one by refocusing.

Take away distractions — turn off your phone and put it in another room! Same for the computer and/or TV.

Most importantly, keep learning! Whether you are in high school or college, Harvard Summer School has courses that can help you build valuable skills such

as programming, communication, and public speaking and propel you toward accomplishing your goals.

If you are a highly motivated and passionate learner who enjoys being challenged, you may find success through [Harvard Summer School](#). Programs help students develop a wide variety of skills, including time management, building connections, and others that will help smooth the transition to college and work life.

Registering definitely counts as a small win!

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About the Author

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Melissa Russell is an award-winning journalist and editor living in the Boston area. She has written for many news outlets as well as for websites, trade publications and other platforms.

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