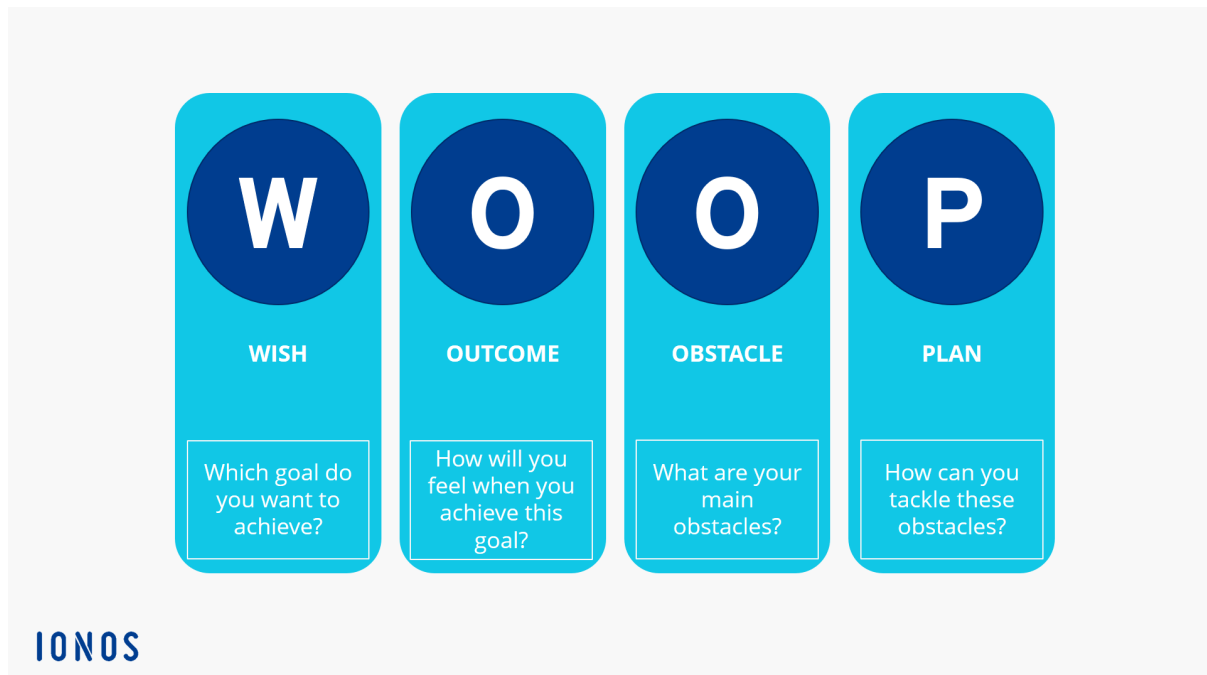


The Tip #13

"The diminutive chain of habits are seldom heavy enough to be felt, until they are too strong to be broken". Samuel Johnson

"Stability is not immobility." Klemens von Metternich

"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do". Johan Wolfgang von Goethe



The Tale #13 - Helping you attain your goals through W.O.O.P.

There are many Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic (CBT) practices that flow from Positive Psychology and there is one technique that would be useful for leaders to practice. Mental contrasting is one such technique that takes us out of the fantasy world and into the action world. *"Mental Contrasting, therefore, is a more realistic and solution-focused thinking process where we prepare the mind to see both the good and bad and choose our actions accordingly"*. Madhuleena R Chowdhury (What is Mental Contrasting and How to Benefit From It - positivepsychology.com)

We are so often implored to follow our dreams and encouraged to develop a positive power of thinking. 'Follow your hearts' and 'shoot for the stars' is almost a Hollywood dictum. However, for Gabriele Oettingen, there is a more useful and a more realistic technique to help us attain those much-desired goals. She says we need to dream a bit smaller as we have a problem when fulfilling our wishes and goals.

Gabriele Oettingen (*NY University professor and author of 'Rethinking Positive Thinking'*) believes we are inundated with advice to 'think positively'. Gabriele Oettingen's research into the science of human motivation reveals why and how conventional wisdom falls short. While optimism can help us alleviate immediate suffering and persevere in challenging times, merely dreaming about the future actually makes people more frustrated and unhappy over the long term and less likely to achieve their goals.

Based on twenty years of research and large-scale studies, Oettingen developed a new strategy called 'mental contrasting'. It combines focusing on dreams with visualizing the obstacles that

stand in our way. By experiencing our dreams in our minds and facing reality we can address our fears, make concrete plans, and gain energy to take action.

Through mental contrasting, people in Oettingen's studies have become significantly more motivated to quit smoking, lose weight, get better grades, sustain fulfilling relationships, and negotiate more effectively in business situations.

When Oettingen came to America she found the contrast stark compared to her German upbringing. No one ever told her to 'shoot for the stars' and to dream big when growing up. However, in the US, she was initially energised by the strong assertions to follow dreams but sadly, it wasn't long before she understood that positive fantasies zap us of our energy.

Her research explains why the more positively men and women enrolled in weight reduction programs and fantasised about their success, the fewer the kilograms they lost. Or the more university students fantasised about their transition into work life, the fewer job offers they were offered. Or the more positively students fantasised about getting a good grade in their exam, the less well they did. And interestingly, the more students were to positively fantasise about getting it on with a girlfriend, the less likely they were to find themselves in a relationship! In and of themselves, none of these dreams were bad. But this is the beginning of action. *"It gives action the direction but not the necessary energy,"* she says.

The more idealised and the more positively people fantasise the less well they do because they don't put in the effort needed to reach the goal.

Mental Contrasting (more an offshoot of positive thinking - they are not interchangeable concepts) ties the conscious and the subconscious mind together. Chowdhury (positivepsychology.com) describes the W.O.O.P. Process as:

W – Wish

Like most positive interventions, Mental Contrasting starts with a component of desire or expectation 'to be.' It is always something that we want to achieve through the visualization – to be happy, to be successful, to be healthy, to be safe and secure. The stronger the desire, the higher are the efforts.

O – Outcome

The outcome is the ideal state that we wish to achieve at the end. For example, if we want to achieve professional success, the result would involve identifying what we would feel and how our lives would change once we have reached the goal.

O – Obstacles

The third part of the process is a reality check-in. Here we reflect on the possible hurdles and difficulties that we might have to face while getting to the desired state, for example, the number of rejections, failures, and criticisms that we have to go through before we reach the ultimate professional success. Mental Contrasting allows us to face the possibilities of negative encounters rather than shunning away from them.

P – Planning

The final stage of Mental Contrasting is where we do the decision-making and planning of actions. This stage can include creating S-M-A-R-T goals that could lead us to stage 2 and working on efficiently executing them. Researchers suggest that the fourth stage of Mental Contrasting is where the real shift of energy takes place, and we work on reflecting our thoughts into action.

Different to S.M.A.R.T. Goals which are:

- **Specific** (simple, sensible, significant).

- **Measurable** (meaningful, motivating).
- **Achievable** (agreed, attainable).
- **Relevant** (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **Time bound** (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

Having high expectations of success when implemented is important. Those who approach this 'visualisation' technique negatively are unlikely to achieve their goals. The website mentioned above is worth a read as it gives much greater insight into the process. (In addition, Gabriele Oettingen was interviewed on the podcast - [The Hidden Brain](#) (25 August - WOOP WOOP)).

It could be that the WOOP process has real potential for leaders in assisting them to achieve realistic goals. The technique is simple and the focus on planning and execution (follow through) is one that should be appealing. It is not a substitute for other therapies that may address deeper personal issues, however, it is a practical 'tool' for reaching desired, realistic goals.

How are you at setting goals – both personal and professional? Are you finding it harder than you thought? Goal achievement is the essence of coaching. Coaching & Mentoring (Moaching) can help. Call +61 410 586 700 **Be and Become**.