

IT IS NOT AN END, BUT JUST THE BEGINNING

By Rashi Chhabra



Good day, everyone! Now that the winter semester is coming to an end, everyone is loaded with final tests and assignments. Many of us are currently under a great deal of stress and pressure to meet deadlines while keeping our work calendars in order. Several others are frantically looking for summer jobs, academic positions, and other possible commitments. While we are juggling so many responsibilities, we must remember to look after our own health and appreciate ourselves for all of our work. On the same note, Active Minds is back to encouraging you to take care of yourself, share some stress-management ideas, and help you be your best self for all the challenges ahead.

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SELF-REINFORCEMENT OVER SELF-CRITICISM

Have you ever found yourself thinking, "Why do I always make the same mistake? Why cannot I get this right?" and making comments such as, "How dumb of me! I am such an idiot!". Don't worry, you're not alone! Many of us have been there and chastised ourselves for the roadblocks we've encountered or the areas where we might use a little more help. This little negative interaction that we have with ourselves is called Self-Criticism. According to Blatt and Zuroff (1992), self-critical individuals "engage in constant and harsh self-scrutiny and evaluation and have a chronic fear of being disapproved and criticized, and of losing the approval and acceptance of significant others". People with this personality feature strive for perfection and overachievement in order to persuade themselves and others that they are worthy of their acceptance.



Self-compassion, on the other hand, has been shown by McKay and Fanning (1992) to be a promising protective factor for persons who suffer from extreme types of negative self-evaluation and is thought to be the remedy for self-criticism. According to research, people who are more self-compassionate have a happier and more hopeful attitude toward life's obstacles (Neff et al, 2007). Rather than reacting angrily and punitively to themselves in the face of adversity, some people accept their flaws and do not allow them to get the best of them (Leary et al. 2007).

Self-compassion is a psychological quality that can assist self-critical people to deal with life's problems (Neff, 2003a, 2003b). Self compassion's protective features may help people become more resilient in the face of hardship because a self-compassionate person is more likely to recognize their flaws and limitations and react kindly.



**You yourself, as much as anybody
in the entire universe, deserve
your love & affection**

- Buddha

Subsequently, self-reinforcement is a great strategy to reward a positive behavior to increase the likelihood of it happening again in the future. It can be anything such as a nice, brewed cup of coffee, an ice cream, going for a hike, watching your favourite show, or for a couple of extra hours of sleep. Reinforcing an aspect of the behavior shifts our focus to seeing the positive side of things and concentrating on the progress made rather than on the failures. Pep talks with oneself boost self-esteem, improve mood and wellbeing, and contribute to enhancing the efficiency of doing tasks. For example, I reward myself by praising myself in front of the mirror and journaling or listening to some music whenever I study for a continuous time and resist the temptation to check my phone over and over again.

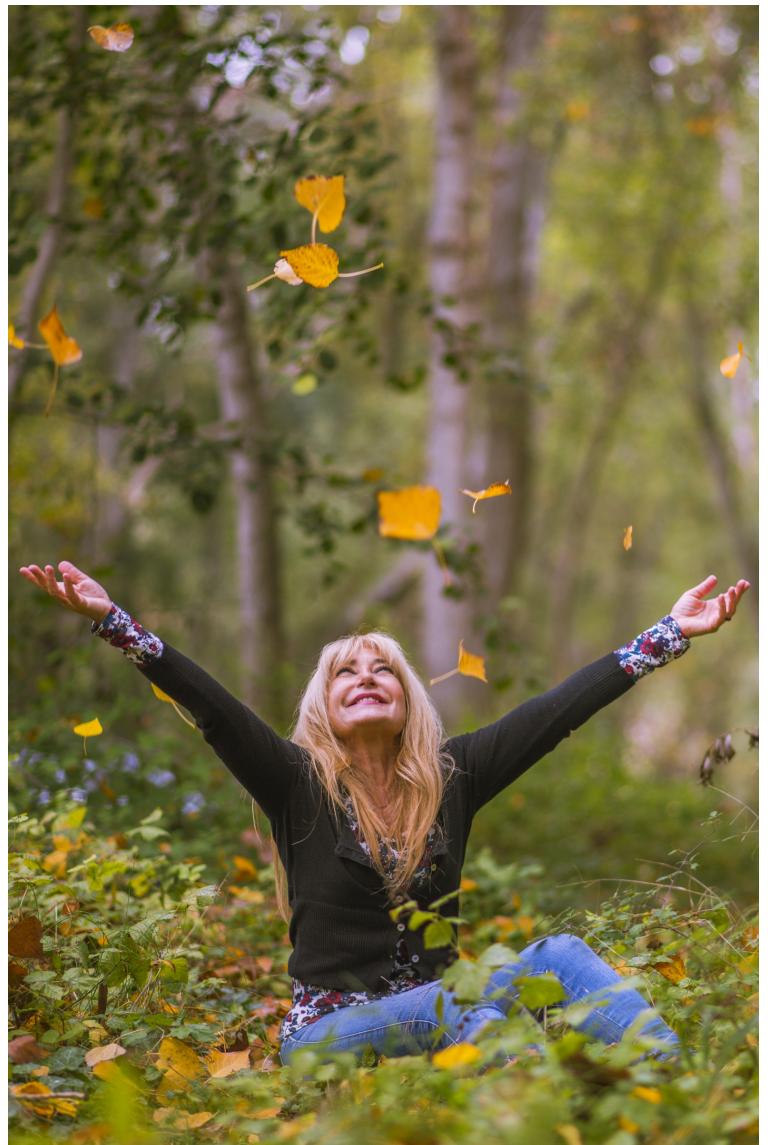
SMALL CHANGE IN HABITS BRING MONUMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

Have you noticed that there are times during final exams when we try to grasp everything in the final weeks? Maybe we were not able to manage our time properly or maybe we tried our best to concentrate, but just couldn't? The most transformative changes start with small, but consistent, increments of effort. To achieve well-intentioned goals, the decision to change must be made on a daily basis, through small, repetitive habits that are simple to implement.

The book *Atomic Habits* (2022) by James Clear is one of the most appropriate and useful tools for creating effective habits that are discussed below:

Clear (2022) broke down the process to form a habit into four simple steps:

1. Cue
2. Craving
3. Response
4. Reward



Cultivate an ACHIEVERS Identity

Focus on an achiever's identity and have a solid belief system. Our behaviour is influenced by our beliefs about who we are and the values we hold. This builds a sense of motivation, and achievement inside of you while giving you room to fall back if something was not to work out.

Focus on LEARNING Systems

Pay attention to following your dreams, checking in on where you are at achieving your goals, and focussing on the journey and the steps that lead to the destination instead of only the destination itself.

- i) Create a Vocabulary Journal to pen down your goals, your plan to execute them, and the steps you follow each day. For example: Write what you have to do, set deadlines to fulfill those steps, plan to achieve those goals, and then follow up in frequent intervals as to whether you were able to meet the deadlines or not. Identify success, challenges, and what you can improve in your strategy.
- ii) Write regular prompts to remind yourself of things to do to keep yourself on track
- iii) Pomodoro Technique: Francesco Cirillo's Pomodoro Technique can help you break your tasks, reduce mental strain, take accountability, maintain motivation, and finish the tasks in time. The idea of this technique is to break your tasks into highly focused chunks separated by short breaks ensuring you are working on one task at a time. It involves setting a timer for 25 minutes and taking a 5-minute break after. After finishing four 25-minute work chunks or pomodori, take a 20-30-minute break. This will help you to relax, refresh and repeat this cycle if needed without feeling exhausted.
- iv) To form new habits, focus on the cue, craving, response, and reward. The cue refers to noticing the reward, craving stems from a desire for the reward, the response is concerned with obtaining the reward, and ultimately the goal of rewards is to satisfy your desire and teach us which actions are important enough to remember in the future.

Whether it is university-related, personal, or work-related stressors, always stay kind to yourself, take care of your mental health, practice self-compassion, and use these strategies to create new success stories! Share your stories with us through Instagram @uofm_activeminds or by sending us an email at activemindsumanitoba@gmail.com.



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