



A Rational-Behavioral Approach To Goal Achievement

by Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.



We do what we think. How we think about what we do influences our behavior. Our coordinated thought and behavior enables us to establish and achieve goals. The decisions we make concerning the viability and achievability of our goals allows us to prioritize goal importance and execution. Unfortunately, we derail goal achievement through irrational thinking, in turn unproductive behavior. We inhibit our achievement

by choosing impractical, illogical, and non-reality-based thinking. We sabotage ourselves. However, if we instead adopt rational, data-driven, and reality aligned thoughts and actions, we will be better positioned to achieve the goals we desire.

Some high achievers report employing a rational-behavioral approach in setting and achieving their goals. Others agree that adopting rational-behavioral strategies relative to goal achievement is logical; *it makes sense!* However, when all achievers were asked to describe the methods they employed to achieve their goals, the achievers *sense making becomes senseless!* Instead of outlining goal achievement plans that were rational, data rich, and milestones-specific they delivered checklists of irrational demands identifying conditions that must exist and resources that *should* be available that were necessary for them to succeed. What a conundrum! How can seemingly rationality formulated goals be achieved through irrationally conceived methods? Let's consult an expert!

Dr. Louis Primavera is the Dean of the Graduate School of Psychology and School of Health Sciences at Touro College in New York City. He is an award winning clinical psychologist and educator, influential author and educational leader, and nationally recognized expert in Rational-Emotive-Behavioral Therapy (REBT) having collaborated for decades with the late Dr. Albert Ellis, creator of REBT.

Rationality and Thought. Dr. Primavera offers that we socially construct our worlds; thoughts fuel emotions and drive behaviors. "As cognitive beings we are active, thinking, and choosing organisms that control our lives and behavior, as a result we are able to create and achieve goals." Drs' Primavera and Ellis share the view that rational and irrational thinking is inherent in human nature. Unlike rational thinking which is generative, enabling people to make data informed decisions concerning their goals that are consistent with reality, irrational thinking is preventative. It disables people's ability to evaluate the viability of their goals and capabilities; in turn rendering decision making suspect and inconsistent with reality.

Irrational thinking is characteristically rigid and absolute. Dr. Primavera states "A key driver of irrational thought and belief is *absolutism*. Absolutism manifests in several forms. People use these forms to develop irrational, dysfunctional, and unproductive thinking and behavior associated with achieving goals." The *absolutes* include:

- Awfulizing: The result of not achieving goals is complete and abject failure. This condition is absolutely *awful* and worse than it *should* ever be.

- Low Frustration Tolerance (LFT): A cognitive state in which people insist they cannot endure a set of conditions or be satisfied.
- Excessive Criticality: Being overly critical of oneself, others, and situations.

Irrational thinking and *Absolutes* impede goal achievement. Working with a coach trained in REBT methods can promote rational, non-absolutist thinking, foster effective decision making, and encourage behaviors enabling goal achievement.

Rationality and Change. In his 1992 seminal book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, social psychologist and change expert Dr. Edgar Schein wrote "If you don't manage change, it will manage you." Attempting to manage change is an important exercise in establishing a sense of order and stability in our lives. However, the powerful forces inherent in change often frustrate our desires and actions associated with goal achievement. As a result, people often translate their frustrations into demands; demanding that certain conditions *must* exist and mandating *shoulds* that *must* occur in order for them to achieve their goals.

Dr. Primavera shares "Absolutes such as *musts* and *shoulds* are demands. They decrease our effectiveness in making rational decisions concerning our goals." *Musts* are especially demanding and particularly pernicious. They inhibit flexibility and minimize productivity. Dr. Primavera endorses three categories of *musts* identified by REBT founder Dr. Ellis. The *must-demands* include:

1. Demands on self: I must achieve my goals or it is awful and I can't stand it! These beliefs foster anxiety or guilt.
2. Demands on others: I must be helped to achieve my goals. If others don't help me it is horrible and I will fail! These beliefs foster anger and aggression.
3. Demands on life: I must achieve my goals in order to live in the way I want. If this does not happen it is terrible and I can never be happy. These beliefs foster self-pity and inertia.

Irrational thinking and demands hinder goal achievement. Working with a coach trained in REBT can guide the development of non-demanding approaches life and realistic behaviors associated with achieving our goals.

Rationality is the antidote of irrationality. Rationality promotes informed decision making and disciplined action. Coaches training in REBT methods can enable access to the power and potential residing in rational-behavioral approaches to goal achievement.

Get rational; Be successful; Get coached. ■

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