“Starting Where You Are” Resolution Activity
(developed from “Words to the Wise” by Martha Beck)

STEP ONE: Pick a goal, any goal

Brainstorm an overarching goal. The sky is the limit so think big. At the same time, be honest rather than politically correct. Some people have deep desires to establish world peace, stop global warming and end poverty, but maybe you actually think more about something like reaching your target weight. What you want to do here is fess up to your real desires then choose the biggest, most ambitious one.

Sample goals:

I want to feel like I can handle anything that’s thrown at me both at home and on the job.
I want to lose 50 pounds.
I want to feel less stressed and overwhelmed.
I want a huge promotion.
I want to win the lottery.
I want to travel to Europe.
I want to become the President of Binghamton University.
I want to earn a six figure paycheck.
I want to be recognized as the most valuable employee on campus.

STEP TWO: Gaze into the future

Imagine you reached your goal and were perfectly happy. What would it look like? Create a detailed fantasy about it and savor it, observing your dream-come-true with your mind’s eyes, ears, nose, skin.

STEP THREE: Generate some adjectives

When you visualized accomplishing your goal, how did it make you feel? Fill in the blank “I felt _________ when I thought about reaching my goal.” Brainstorm adjectives, words or phrases to describe your feelings.

Examples:
in control relaxed secure valued connected
energized proud accomplished focused
STEP FOUR: TIME TO PICK YOUR RESOLUTION

Come up with one or more resolutions, specific strategies/tasks, you are willing to try for the next week. These experimental behaviors should be aimed at getting you the feelings we just brainstormed. For example, if your overarching goal is to lose 50 pounds but your adjectives are “strong, confident and healthy”, you might realize that your actual aim is to get fit. Therefore, the strategy of dieting might not get you what you really want.

Sometimes tweaking isn’t enough. Your adjectives might utterly contradict your stated goal. For example, if your overarching goal is to win an Academy Award, you may imagine your acceptance speech and feel “valued, satisfied and unstoppable”. Odds are that taking acting classes and actively pursuing movie stardom isn’t going to get you what you are looking for. On the other hand, if you focus on the aspects of your present life that make you feel valued, satisfied or unstoppable and increase the number of times you do those activities, you are more likely to get a positive result.

Examples of strategies used by Happiness Experiment group participants:

- Get to sleep by 10pm each night to feel relaxed, energized and ready to work.
- Make a priority list at the beginning of each day to feel focused.
- Complete a project from start to finish to feel accomplished.
- Collaborate with a co-worker to feel connected.
- Clean your office to feel in control.

The Science of Deliberate Happiness

Over and over researchers studying happiness have found that the situational elements people crave – money, social status, possessions – don’t reliably lead to an experience of well-being. By contrast, learning to find joy in the present moment increases life satisfaction improves health and allows us to live longer, more fulfilling lives. It is experiences not situations that we really want so get out there and get started!