

Wait, wait—don't tell me the good news yet

July 28 2014

Set goal, work to achieve goal, attain goal and react accordingly—that's the script we write when we set our sights on an achievement.

But what happens when the script isn't followed, and you learn too soon that you will accomplish what you set out to do? New research from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business finds that the positive reaction one would have when succeeding is lessened if it doesn't follow the expected course.

In "Feeling Good at the Right Time: Why People Value Predictability in Goal Attainment," Ayelet Fishbach, a professor of [behavioral science](#) and marketing, and Nadav Klein, a doctoral student, found that when people learned, for example, that they would win a game, get a job offer or be accepted to college before their predetermined time, the experience was muted twice—when they learned early, and then when the goal was achieved.

"We basically show that people want to feel good at the right time—that is, when a goal is achieved and not before then," Fishbach says.

The researchers conducted four studies, and found that people made script-consistent errors in recalling an attained goal, that people were happier when good news followed the predetermined script, that people value goals less if they learn early that they will be achieving them, and that people had a mellowed reaction to achieving the goal if they were certain beforehand that the goal would be achieved.

"When people learn that a goal will be achieved before it actually is, they often try to suppress the positive emotion in order to feel it at the 'right time,'" Fishbach says. "The result is that people don't feel as happy when they get the news—because it's not the right time—as well as when the goal is officially achieved—because by then it's no longer 'news.'"

Fishbach and Klein speculate that, among other possible reasons, this muting may occur because of the fragility of positive emotion, noting that it is much easier for a good mood to sour than it is to overcome a bad mood.

"Once positive emotion is 'tampered with,' it appears to be difficult to reignite," they write. "It appears that positive emotion can be dampened relatively easily, but reawakening it appears to be more difficult."

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Wait, wait—don't tell me the good news yet (2014, July 28) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-07-waitdont-good-news.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--