

Effective Goal Setting

How to Reach the Goals
You Set for Yourself



Life Skills
Education

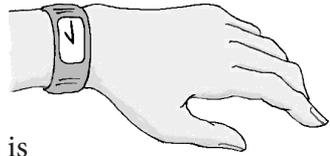
"I really need to get this house cleaned up. But it shouldn't be a problem — I've got all day. I'll wash the floors this morning and do the vacuuming this afternoon."

"I have to get that report done this week. If I spend two hours today on it and two hours on Thursday, I should have no problem getting it in by Friday's noon deadline."

"Even though the kids are young, we should be saving for their college education. Let's start putting away \$100 a month now, and then we'll have a head start by the time they're ready."

A matter of time

Planning how to make the most of our time so that we can get done what we need to get done often looks fairly easy. And if all we had to do was *talk* in detail about things working out as we'd like, it would be.



But for many of us, actually accomplishing what we set out to do is difficult, if not impossible. Some of us can't seem to get started until the project "was due yesterday." Others are gung-ho starters but poop out halfway through the job.

Not an endless supply

Time, like money, is limited: there's only so much each of us has to spend. How well we use it depends partly on factors out of our control (sickness, lay-offs, the weather, etc.) and partly on how well we set realistic goals, balance our wants with our needs, and learn to prioritize.

**"He" and "she" will be used interchangeably throughout this booklet to represent both males and females.*

Mastering time is *not* easy, which is why all of us at one time or another are unable to accomplish what we set out to do — an especially thorny problem if we're trying to reach an important life goal and can't seem to get anywhere with it.

The answer is not necessarily to put off your goals until life slows down; the fact is that successful lives are generally busy lives. So, the answer must be to learn to *manage* our time in such a way that we can meet the goals we set for ourselves.

Do you have a problem with time?

If being unable to accomplish tasks and realize goals creates an uncomfortable amount of tension in your life, you've got a problem. This tension can come from inside you or it can originate from others. In either case, you'd do well to make some changes. You may have a problem organizing your time if:

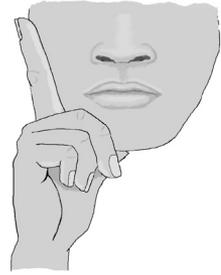
- your job is in jeopardy because you haven't been meeting your deadlines;
- your relationships are suffering because you don't have time to do what you've said you would do;
- you're constantly late;
- important goals are not met;
- you feel anxious because of things that haven't been done;
- you feel bad about yourself (even if no one else notices) when you can't complete a project in a timely manner.

Dealing with these problems sometimes involves looking at the hours in the day and actually figuring out how to budget your time. On other occasions, it involves examining your motivation and your own personal style to determine what is preventing you from identifying, planning for, starting, or completing a task.

Setting yourself up — to succeed

Many of us take lessons learned in childhood to heart, and apply them to every situation in our lives. Age-old wisdom like: *Don't start something you can't finish. Something worth doing is worth doing well. Practice makes perfect.*

But if you followed these maxims *all* the time, you'd be setting yourself up for failure. Not all things we start *can* be finished; some things are not *worth* doing, and some things are worth doing even if you don't do them very well; and, when time is not a factor (as in childhood), practice will improve performance — but perfection is not a reasonable goal.



When you set particular goals, think about what makes sense for you. Be honest in assessing what you are *capable* of doing and what you are *willing* to do. Aiming too high is as much of a mistake as aiming too low.

Make sure that the end result is what *you* want — not some pie-in-the-sky ideal that may impress others but really has nothing to do with your own needs and wishes. In short, you need to know yourself: your strengths and limitations, your wishes and dreams.

Some of the questions you might consider are these:

? **Do you work better under pressure, with deadlines and guidelines?** Or, are you more apt to achieve what you want by keeping to your own schedule?

Be honest! How we'd *like* to see ourselves and what we actually *do* are rarely the same thing. And don't think you have to be just like so-and-so to be successful — there is no “correct” answer to life's questions. What

works for one person will not necessarily work for another; and habits that led to the failure of one person may lead to success for someone else.

- ? *Do you want the support of others, or are you better off if everyone leaves you alone?*
- ? *What are the physical requirements of getting the job done?* Do you need an office? Do you need certain materials or tools? Does climate make a difference? Can you work with noise, or do you need complete silence?
- ? *How will your lifestyle change as you pursue your goal?* Will you need to find time in the evening or weekends? Will you have to give up other activities (volunteering in your child's school, playing a sport)? Will you need to find and pay for day care? Are these changes you are willing and able to make?
- ? *What has worked best for you in the past?* Past successes are a great indicator of *future* successes.



The bottom line? Base your strategy on what fits *you* — *your* work style, *your* personal obligations, *your* approach to deadlines, and so on. To do anything else will leave you feeling as though you're wearing a set of clothes that just don't fit.

Setting goals

Before you can get anything done, you need to decide what you need or want to accomplish. Without concrete goals, it's easy to drift through the day (or week or year) in a pleasant haze, only to realize too late that you've run out of time!

Making a list

Whether you're planning for a day or for a lifetime, a good way to get started is to *make a list*. When thinking about your goals, you need to organize them into time frames: immediate goals, weekly goals, annual goals, and so on. You also need to consider the various parts of your life: financial, professional, family, leisure, etc.

It's often easiest to work backwards. Start with your longest-term goals — the ones that will take the longest to reach — and then figure out what shorter-term goals you'll need to meet in order to eventually reach the long-term ones.

Examples of long-term goals: finish school; achieve a certain position at work; own your own house; start a neighborhood or community program; support your children through college; travel to far-off countries; run for office; own your own business. Once you've listed your long-term goals, you need to think more short-term.



“What do I need to do to achieve my long-term goals?”

Some shorter-term goals might be: pass this semester's final exams; become a team leader at work; save \$500 a month for the next 18 months toward a down payment on a house; start selling those crafts you make; buy a savings bond each month for your two children; go away on vacation using the frequent-flyer miles you've accumulated; attend city council meetings to learn how politics work at the local level; talk to owners of small businesses to see how they got started.

Then you'll need to break down *those* goals even further. **How** do you become a team leader? **What** purchases can you delay so you can put the money into your savings account? **Who** is most likely to act as a mentor so you can learn what you want to

learn? **Where** can you go to learn the skills you want to master?

One of the advantages of making lists is that they allow you to see right off the bat (*before* you experience them) inconsistencies and unrealistic expectations. (For a sample of how you might break down a major goal into its component pieces, see the last page of this booklet.)

You can't do everything

When setting goals, either short or long-term, you will need to *prioritize*. This doesn't necessarily mean scrapping goals, but rather assigning importance to them.

After listing your goals, rank them in order of importance. Again, start with your longest-term goals and work backward.

Be realistic and keep reminding yourself that some long-term goals are simply not compatible. For instance, it would be unlikely that you could start a family, go to night school, work, and run for office, all at the same time.

Needs and wants

Deciding what you want out of life also means *differentiating between needs and wants*. Both are important; but some can be postponed while others can't.

Strictly speaking, needs are things that make your life possible: food, shelter, clothing, safety, companionship, health, etc.

Wants, on the other hand, are extras. We all *need* a place to live, but we may *want* a large house on a lake with two new cars and a boat in the garage.

When you mistake a want for a need ("I need a sports car to get to work"), *real* needs may go unmet. Needs include paying taxes, health insurance premiums, utility bills, dentist bills. Too often, meeting our *wants* softens the blow of not meeting our needs. People don't say it in so many words but their behavior would suggest what they are thinking: "I may not have health

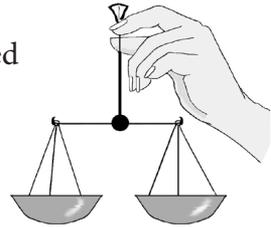
insurance, but I have a new smartphone and a nice car. Of course I'm doing fine and everything is good!"

Creating a balance

Other than providing for basic survival needs, there are no goals that *have* to be achieved. Your goals are as personal as you are — and we're all different.

But regardless which goals you choose to pursue, **the key to a healthy and happy life remains balance.** Hard work must be balanced with recreation; providing for necessities must be balanced with an occasional luxury.

When making a list of your goals, be sure to include time for personal interests. These can be as simple as a half-hour a day of quiet time for reading or as organized as every Saturday night out with friends. Budgeting time for pleasure is like adding a safety hatch to your plans. It's not selfish; it can only be selfish when it significantly interferes with the goals and needs of others.



A goal is not a plan

Many of us are much better at figuring out *what* we'd like to have happen in our lives, than figuring out exactly *how* that might come about. In a sense, long-term goals are easier to deal with because they primarily involve thinking and dreaming of the future. Short-term scheduling is tougher because you have to *make a plan and then actually get to work!*

The process for planning out your weekly goals is the same as for long-term goals — only compressed. There's a little more pressure, because it quickly becomes obvious whether or not you're meeting your deadlines.

Again: make a list. Write down what you plan to accomplish

in a given *week*. Then break these two or three goals down into smaller *daily* tasks. Keep your list in an easily accessible place, such as on the calendar, in a notebook, or on the task list of your phone — any place where you can glance at it frequently. Not only does this serve as a reminder, but you can check off the tasks you've completed, giving you a sense that you're making progress — which you are!

Little things can make a big difference. Try the following:

- ✓ **Do your best to eliminate the distractions** that divert you from following through on your daily plans. If it helps you to have an uncluttered workspace and you have three small children and a dog, you are going to have to find a system that is realistic for your situation. Perhaps a corner desk which is off limits to toys, books, etc., or one that can be closed up, will help.
- ✓ **Enlist the help of others** (spouse, employer) so that your schedule is consistent — and be sure to include your kids. Most experts agree that children do better with a regular routine when it comes to chores and household rules — and so will you! There's an added bonus: You'll be instilling good work habits in *them*.
- ✓ **Assign regular tasks to a specific time of day** to help establish a routine, so that everyday chores don't sabotage the work you want to get done on a special project.
- ✓ **If you do better with deadlines, set them for yourself:** "*I'm going to finish these letters by 4:30.*" Some people set up a deadline by scheduling a meeting, or making an appointment, to insure they complete a project on time.
- ✓ **Periodically, check your progress and re-assess your goals.** Have some become outdated? Do some need to be revised? It also helps to sit down with someone who knows you well and get some feedback on how you're doing and how you can keep on track.

End of sample pages. There are 16 total pages in this title.

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