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DO-ABLE GOAL SETTING The Power of Incremental Improvement

*"Motivation is an external, temporary high that PUSHES you forward.
Inspiration is a sustainable internal glow which PULLS you forward."*

– Thomas Leonard³²

Do-able goal setting – huh? Isn't that an oxymoron? Doesn't that mean you have set your goal too small? I realize I am speaking to the high achievers reading this, those whose goals are no doubt nothing less than solving world hunger. Does the very thought of setting goals make you tired? "Yeah, Jan, I know that we are all supposed to set goals in order to go anywhere or to move forward or to achieve... but why can't we just 'be'?" Fair enough! Life does not have to be a series of conquests, and, as we have discovered throughout this book, it is vitally important to be content where you are right now in order to achieve inner harmony.

Let's say that you are absolutely content and completely at peace and in harmony with every part of your life right now. There is absolutely nothing you feel that you would like to work toward, nothing at all you feel driven to do, either for yourself, your family or the community at large. If that is the case, flip to the next chapter and begin your celebrating!

For the rest of you, read on. I imagine you have read hundreds of articles on goal setting throughout your life and set thousands of goals for yourselves

³² Thomas Leonard, Founder, CoachVille.com. For more information, visit www.BestofThomas.com

that you have either achieved, partially achieved, gotten tired of working on and abandoned, or actually never took any action toward at all.

I believe that setting goals consistently and methodically, working towards them, re-evaluating and then re-setting those goals, are key to achieving success in life (whatever your definition of success is). Without setting goals, life just “happens” without any real purpose or direction. Days, months, even years can drift by. The positive results of making progress on and achieving goals are significant. Think of the sense of satisfaction you have when you finally cleaned out your closets and donated the clothing that hasn't fit you since high school. Think of the confidence you got when you returned intact from your first solo traveling adventure. Think of how much easier it was to make your *second* presentation in front of senior management.

One of the choruses with whom I worked had experienced what they considered a disastrous failure by not achieving a competition goal they had set for themselves. The fallout was tremendous for them – not only had they let their goal define them as a group, but also they were so intimately connected and intertwined with it that not to reach their goal felt to them as if they were failures – both individually and as a chorus.

The instant reaction by many was to assign blame and there were many different opinions of who to assign that blame to. This was a crisis for the group, it fractured them, pitted sub-groups against each other and after months of painful working through the divisiveness, they managed to begin to rebuild.

The chorus, however, then went into a period of timidity – of not wanting to set any goals for fear they might not achieve them and would be burned again. In a sense, the chorus was adrift – if there were no goals, why were they working so hard? Why were they rehearsing weekly and spending thousands of dollars on hiring coaches?

We spent some time together in a safe environment working through creation of new group goals that all could share and embrace without fear, and the chorus is now well on the way toward that new path of possibility.

My goal is to create some simple possibilities for you to not only create goals for yourself, but also to show you a simple step-by-step way to achieve them.

GETTING STARTED – CREATION OF GOALS – Three Easy Steps

1. Start here: The “Black and White”

Although the first use of the term S.M.A.R.T. goals is unknown, and although there are many slight variations, the principles remain the same.

S.M.A.R.T. GOALS –

- Specific (What exactly is your goal? Goals are no place to be vague.)
- Measurable (How will you measure it?)
- Attainable (By breaking the goal down, is it attainable?)
- Realistic (Is this a goal that you honestly are willing to work toward?)
- Timely (When will you achieve it? Set a time frame.)

Set yourself up for success by choosing S.M.A.R.T. goals. One of the biggest ways to bag out of achieving a goal is to make it too big and too vague. For example, “I am going to get fit in 2009.” What does that mean? Does “fit” mean percentage body fat, heart rate, how long I exercise, a feeling of well-being? Being 100% clear about what the goal actually is and what you really want is critical to the goal planning process.

2. Add this: The “Color”

On paper it all looks good. You have created a list of S.M.A.R.T. goals; sounds good, very linear, and eminently sensible. The thing that will give your goal that extra life and that extra humanness is to relate those goals to your feelings. Your motivation, your “why” behind the goal is really critical to your success in achieving your goals. The “why” of your goals must connect and be consistent with your values.

If you feel one of those nasty “shoulds” slide in there, take a long hard look at your statement – e.g., I “should get fit for health reasons.” Ask yourself: “Why do I want to get fit?” “I want to get fit so that I am healthier, and live longer so I can see my grandchildren grow up.” Isn’t that more powerful? Make sure that the goals are yours and not someone else’s!

Add in as much color as you can by using your five senses. What would achieving your goal look like, feel like, sound like, taste like, smell like? Adding in the sensory elements will add a layer of passion and excitement to your goal.

Let's try it out with the previous example:

My goal: To get fit in 2009

What does that look like? (I can run 10 km at more than a jog without stopping)

What does it feel like? (easy, exhilarating, strong, coordinated, lean)

What does it sound like? (Zen-like peacefulness in my head)

What does it smell like? (outdoors, fresh sea air on the seawall)

What does it taste like? (salty sweat)

By adding my five senses to create a living, breathing feeling of my goal, I have made it very, very real. That gives me a very powerful possibility to live into.

3. Then... Make it Real – Write it down.

“Goals in writing are dreams with deadlines.”

– Brian Tracy³³

It has been proven that to write down our goals and record our progress keeps our goals top of mind, keeps us focused, and can have a huge impact on our results. Brian Tracy, motivational author and guru, says that only about 3% of adults write their goals down and that those people accomplished many times as much as people who don't.

It is no accident that Running Journals have Running Logs included in the content program, and add descriptors such as: what was the weather like, the slope, etc., to make it more colorful and real, so go and buy yourself a journal or a notebook, and start keeping track of your successes.

Make this a daily practice – re-read, recommit and track progress to your goals every day.

33 Brian Tracy, www.briantracy.com

ACTION PLANNING – Three Easy Steps

1. The Long List – Brainstorm

Brian Tracy suggests brainstorming a “Long List” of everything you can possibly think of that you can do to help yourself achieve your goal. By doing this, you open up infinite possibilities and actions that might move you forward toward your goals; some of which may not have immediately come to mind when you first created that goal.

2. The Increments – Choose and Create

From your “Long List,” choose the top three things you feel will make the most difference and propel you the fastest toward your goals. Create a clear series of actionable objectives on how you will proceed toward those three sub-goals. When you break your long-range goals into actionable increments, be sure that each piece is kept bite-sized. Set yourself up for success and at least one daily victory!

3. The Commitment

A goal without an action plan is just a good idea. Make the commitment to reach your goal. Have an honest talk with yourself and ask yourself if you are committed to reaching your goals. Be clear and realistic about what might get in the way. If your goal needs to be revised, revise it and carry on.

HOW TO KEEP GOING – Three Easy Ways

1. Support

What and who will support you? What qualities do you have in yourself to draw on and support you? (e.g., motivation, drive, etc.) Which people will honestly be supportive of your goal?

Be careful with whom you share your goals. Sometimes those closest to us may not give us the greatest amount of support because they are fearful of what your change might mean for them.

What resources do you have to support you? (community, equipment, etc.)

2. Accountability

Have you made a contract with yourself, or with someone else? Find someone who will support your goals. Give them specific instructions on how you want to be held accountable.

For instance, in the writing of the first draft of this book I had two accountability partners – my coach, and a trusted friend. I gave them a schedule of when I would deliver chapters to them and if I didn't they were instructed to give me a hard time; to question me, to get me to recommit to when I would deliver a chapter. Having to be accountable drove my writing. I imagined my accountability partners sitting by their computers anxiously waiting for the latest chapter to come in. I couldn't disappoint them!

3. Rewards

I strongly believe in rewarding oneself when one achieves a milestone – or even gets bite-sized tasks completed. What that reward is can be as individual as you are. I rely heavily on a “sticker” system for my bite-sized goals.

Coach Laura West³⁴ relies on her “giggle goals.” “One of my favorite systems is my Daily Giggle Goals. Each day I sit down as I'm planning out my priorities for the day and I pick three goals (bite-sized is key) to get done today. These are three things that would have me smile and giggle with delight at the end of the day when I know they are done.”

34 Laura West, *Center for Joyful Business* www.JoyfulBusiness.com

HOW TO GET PAST THE ROADBLOCKS

Sometimes it may seem like the universe is conspiring to take you off your “road to success.” Here are a few ideas for ways to navigate around the potholes that get in the way.

Forks in the Road

Hitting an unforeseen fork in the road may require one to revise a goal. That’s okay! Think of revision as an opportunity that indicates you have received new insight about a previously held goal.

Switchbacks

The road to your goal may not be a straight one. There is a reason switchbacks were created on the mountainside. Sometimes going straight up is just too difficult. Remember – every step you take gets you closer to your goal. Celebrate each “switchback” – celebrate each fork in the road, each step closer to your goal. The entire hill does not have to be scaled in one go-round.

Dead Ends

Eek! Did you hit a dead end? Turn around and retrace your steps. Go back to your LONG LIST (or see p. 125) and travel a new route.

Overcoming Obstacles

“Obstacles are those dreadful things you see when you take your eyes off your goals.”

– Henry Ford

Take the inspirational story of John Di Lemme. John was clinically diagnosed as a stutterer at a young age and told he would never speak fluently. He describes himself as an “*Obstacle Overcomer*” and says, “*Obstacles are the enemy trying to keep you down. When you decide to face the obstacle, you head into the Promised Land.*”³⁵ He is now changing lives worldwide as a renowned

international motivational speaker with a passion for teaching others how to live a champion life despite the label society has placed on them.

Ask yourself: Is it an obstacle or an excuse?

The Road is Too Steep and I just have to rest.

That's okay! When you do rest, be sure to do as they do on San Francisco's incredibly steep hills – Curb your wheels. By “curbing your wheels” you will ensure you don't backslide. When you are ready to move again, just switch into gear, release your emergency brake and gun it full speed ahead!

THE POWER OF INCREMENTAL IMPROVEMENT

“Your short-term actions multiplied by time equals your long-term accomplishments.”

– Denis Waitley³⁶

Although there is nothing more satisfying and motivating than visibly seeing big leaps forward on your goal-o-meter, getting addicted to the big push can run counter to all of the amazing progress you are making daily.

Ultimately, you want to move forward toward achieving your goals. My thesis is that *any* step forward is an improvement over where you were before. “The Power of Incremental Improvement” is easily applicable to your individual goals. There is a certain momentum that is built simply by ticking off the signposts along the way. It is important to keep track of the strides you make, however big or small they are. They all contribute to the overall goal.

The exciting thing is that in a group or team situation, this “Power of Incremental Improvement” becomes exponential – much like the measurements of an earthquake. Groups with a clear, concise, common goal can achieve miraculous results by each member of the group moving forward toward the group goal in whatever measure they can achieve individually.

When preparing for 2009 International Competition, Lions Gate Chorus adopted a “One More Point” program in the month before the competition. The premise of this program was: “What would you be willing to do if it meant you could get one more point for the chorus?” For others that meant adding a couple of days of exercise per week to increase their stamina. For still others it meant asking their families for support so that their mental stress was reduced. For some it meant ensuring that they attended extra choreography sessions. Each person and each action was important and could make a difference.

One More Point – by itself seems small. Multiplied by 120 people could mean the difference between a bronze and gold medal: The Power of Incremental Improvement!

36 Denis Waitley, best-selling author, speaker and success coach www.deniswaitley.com

STAGE A HIT OF MASSIVE ACTION

Noted leadership coach, Kevin Eikenberry,³⁷ believes we must not only approach achieving goals with incremental improvement, but also must stage sessions of “massive action” in order to create momentum and make big progress. Along with your incremental steps, dream big, and plan for a radical hit of “massive action.”

“If you ever think you’re too small to make a difference, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room.”

– Dame Anita Roddick, environmentalist and founder of the Body Shop

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET THERE (OR NOT!)

I guess I should have called this section “What to do *before* you get there” because pre-planning for the part that comes after the goal being achieved or not is very important. Whether we reach or don’t quite reach our goal, there are fallouts and we must prepare in advance for them.

The celebratory part may sound easy, but all too often, we rush head-long into thinking about the next goal before taking the time to celebrate and close off the goal just achieved. Even with an achieved goal, as an individual, you may feel a gamut of emotions ranging from elation, to depression, even to fear. Expect the unexpected and you probably will be prepared. For individuals, it is a perfect time to re-group and re-assess.

In a group setting, those effects are magnified and even more varied, whether a goal is achieved, or not. There are a few steps that are key to institute so you have a place to go on the morning after your big celebration. Allow yourself and your team to spend the time they need on celebrating their achievement before you go screaming off into the next stretch goal. Consistently put value on the goal you have achieved by recognizing it, and the people involved in creating it.

As a leader in a group setting be sure to stay aware of how your team is feeling and acting. Create an environment that allows for open dialogue without judgment. Let everyone express their feelings, and listen to them without trying to heal them.

Let time pass and know that there may be a period of disinterest, lethargy, or fatigue with your team. If a goal has been missed, it is a fabulous learning opportunity for the group to allow the time for reflection and discussion of what happened – what went well, what could be changed for the next time. It is time then to re-assess and re-commit to another goal, building on the success of the past, and then look higher to a brand new beginning.

Perdita Felicien is a Canadian world-champion hurdler who was heavily favored to win the gold medal in the 100-meter hurdles at the 2004 summer Olympics in Athens.

The hopes of a nation were on her, expectations were high and the pressure was incredible. In the final race, she dramatically hit the first hurdle and fell hard, taking herself out of the race and shattering her Olympic gold medal dreams. At that moment, she was devastated. She had been training hard for that moment every day for years and in a heartbeat, the moment was gone.

After reflection, she talked to reporters and said “I have learned not to define myself by one event, no matter how big. My self-worth is not dependent on an event that lasts less than 13 seconds. Hurdling is what I do, it is not what defines me. That is why I know, in this challenging time, I will emerge better (for having struggled) and thrive once again.”

Perdita left a fine reminder to all of us – we are who we are, not what we do.