

SET GOALS TO ACCOMPLISH THE EXTRAORDINARY

By Jerry Acuff

Few people have clearly defined and articulate goals, exact statements of desired end results. Most have never said, "I *will* achieve this," whether "this" is a personal or a business result. Most have never thought through what they truly want to achieve, nor do they realize what they could realize if they were to have clear, written goals, which are not simply "To Do" items but are significant accomplishments.

A 1952 survey of graduating Yale seniors found only 4 percent had clearly-defined, written goals. Twenty years later, a survey of the same group found that the 4 percent with goals had a greater net worth than the other 96 percent combined. To learn if this were a fluke, a duplicate study was conducted in 1971 of Harvard graduating seniors. Again, 4 percent had goals, 96 percent didn't. Ten years later, the 4 percent who had goals were on average earning ten times more a year than the 96 percent who did not have goals. While money is not the only (or best) test of accomplishment, it is relatively easy to measure. But whatever your measure, you can't hit a target you don't have; you can't reach a goal you haven't set.

I, and the people I've counseled, have found that you can achieve dramatically more in life with goals than without. Goals provide focus and direction to your life so that, rather than drifting rudderless through the days, you are steering deliberately toward the future you want.

It's important not only to set goals, but to understand what you must do to achieve them. Anybody can set goals, but if you don't have some guidelines to reach them you're not

likely to achieve them. Ron Willingham, in his excellent book *When Good Isn't Good* writes:

"In the late 1920s after years of practical research with the most successful people in our country, Napoleon Hill produced his first great work, *The Law of Success*. In it he wrote this about the power of goal setting: 'Any definite chief aim that is deliberately fixed in the mind and held there with determination to realize it finally saturates the entire subconscious mind until it automatically influences the body toward the attainment of that purpose.'" So goal-setting – having a chief aim and fixing in our minds- is an important part of being successful.

I believe that each of us has a built-in goal-seeking mechanism. Dr. Maxwell Maltz in his book *Psycho-Cybernetics* points out that every creature on the planet has a goal-seeking mechanism. In plants and animals, the mechanism focuses on two things only: survival and procreation. But in humans it's focused on more: How do we achieve those things that within our limits and capabilities? How do we achieve those things are within our gifts and talents?

This goal-seeking mechanism, says Maltz, is like a heat-seeking missile. But it has to be activated. If we know how to worry, we know how to activate the goal – seeking mechanism. Worry is the goal-seeking mechanism. Worry is the goal-seeking mechanism gone bad. Worry is the visualization or thought of something negative. The positive goal-seeking mechanism visualizes something constructive happening. I believe that we all do have this goal-seeking mechanism, and if we do two things – (1) learn that we have it and activate it

and (2) develop a process to reach goals-there are virtually no limits to what we can achieve.

Goals should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-sensitive.

Specific means your goal is not something like “I want to earn more” or “I want a better job.” These are too vague, too nebulous. How much more? Better in what way? A specific goal is something like, “I want to earn \$75,000 this year,” “I want to be a branch manager in two years,” or “I want to live in a three-bedroom house in the mid-South, no more than 30 minutes from the ocean within five years.”

Measurable means you can tell when you are making progress. You can look at your cumulative pay stubs to see how you’re doing toward an earnings goal. If you get promoted to assistant branch manager, you’re on your way to branch manager.

Achievable means the goals are challenging but attainable. Reaching the goal may take many preliminary steps, but you are able to take them.

Realistic means you can reach the goal within the time frame you decide and with the skills and resources you have or can obtain. True, many goals require hope to override skepticism. By their nature, goals are subjective. Nevertheless, too many people settle for much less than what they are capable of accomplishing.

Time-sensitive means there’s an end point – \$75,000 this year...branch manager in two years...new house in four years. One might argue there are no unrealistic goals, only unrealistic time frames. If you are 44, have no savings, retiring at age 45 is unrealistic, retiring at age 50 may be a stretch, and retiring comfortably at age 55 be realistic.

To achieve your goals, I’ve identified five rules:

1. Have goals and be clear about what you truly want and believe what you can achieve.
2. Write down your goals.
3. Set goals in line with your gifts and talents.
4. Don’t let others talk you out of your goals.
5. Let your goal-seeking mechanism do the work and take the pressure off yourself.

Let me talk about each of these five in detail.

Rule 1: Be absolutely clear about what you truly want to achieve.

Remember a goal is a statement of a desired end result. To have clarity we need to believe that our goals are attainable. Napoleon Hill wrote, “Anything the mind of man can conceive and believe it can achieve.” Ron Willingham writes, “What you believe you *should* have and *can* have is what you *will* have.”

Don’t set too many goals. Focus on the three or four things you feel compelled to accomplish and develop a plan to start moving you in their direction...and do it today! Again, make your goals specific and have target dates. Doing so, you will know exactly what to visualize to achieve the goals as a part of your goal-seeking mechanism.

Rule 2: Write them down.

The experts say you increase the likelihood you will achieve your goals by 90 percent if you will simply write them down. Putting them on paper gives them a reality, a solidity; they become more than nebulous hopes. Put the paper in your pocket, your purse, or your day planner, but write down your goals and look at them at least once a week. Mine are in my pocket at all times. I write them once a month. I read them once a week. And when I write them, I will sometimes change them because circumstances change.

Rule 3: Ensure your goals are in line with your gifts and talents.

In truth, your ability to achieve expands by setting goals beyond your current level of achievement. But we need to be aware of just what we can accomplish realistically. For example, if you're in sales, your goals should be bigger than your forecast. Forecasts are for the average person and I don't know anybody who wants to do great things who is average. Surround yourself with people who bring out your best and who help you stay in touch with your capabilities.

A personal story: A boss name Don Cutcliff changed my life. Don and I had been colleagues for a long time, had been successful in sales, and then Don was promoted to become my boss – when I thought I would be the one promoted. The night that he sat down to talk to me as my boss when I thought I would be his, he said, “Jerry, this job of regional manager isn't big enough for you. You need to be running this company.”

At the age of 39, I'd never thought of running the company. My whole focus was on being regional manager. But at that moment Don Cutcliff helped me see that my capabilities, my gifts and talents were greater than I'd thought. Because I had such faith in Don, it was easy for me to see that might be right. But the point is that your gifts and talents may not be as obvious to you as they are to others, so surround yourself with people who can help you understand what you have to offer.

One of the ways to expand your gifts and talents is to read books like *Psycho-Cybernetics* (Pocket Books, 1989) by Dr. Maxwell Maltz, *Think and Grow Rich* (Aventine Press, 2004) by Napolean Hill, and *When Good Isn't Good Enough* (Doubleday, 1988) by Ron Willingham. These will feed your mind and help you begin to understand just what greatness is in you – and never forget that greatness is in you.

At the same time, of course, you have to be realistic. I might set a goal of becoming Pope, a rock star, or an Olympic skier but given my religion, musical ability, and physical condition, none of these are realistic. Still, most of us can accomplish far more than we might believe possible.

Rule 4: Don't let other talk you out of your goals

The first person you have to worry about is yourself. You will think about things you would like to accomplish, and then you'll start asking yourself, “Can I really do that?” if you can't convince yourself you can do something, it's not going to happen. Don't let yourself talk yourself out of attempting things that are within your capabilities.

The next hurdle is that when you begin to talk about significant things you want to accomplish, that stretch you, you'll start playing mental tapes of what other people will/may say. You may not talk yourself out of it, but you'll allow your thoughts of other's reactions talk you out of it: “My mother will think that's crazy.” “My father would think that's stupid.” These imaginary conversations can stop you.

Finally, there will be the actual nay-sayers, the people you share ideas and your goals with who tell you that you can't succeed. They will tell you these are beyond your capabilities. They do that not because they don't believe in you but because in many cases they don't believe in themselves. In some way, any success you enjoy makes them look bad because they are not willing to extend the same effort.

Rule 5: Once you get incredible clarity about what you want to achieve, let your goal-seeking mechanism take over.

It will help achieve your goals. The pressure to deliberately achieve generates negative energy when goal-seeking; the trick is to relax and be open to opportunities. The universe

will bring your goal to you if you have incredible clarity about what you want. This may seem mysterious, but may be that, because you have written your goals, you are now attuned to possibilities you would have ignored or dismissed earlier. It is a little like deciding to buy, say, a flat-screen TV. Suddenly you are aware of ads and information about flat-screen TV; they were always there but you ignored them.

You can accomplish much more in your life if you have goals and if you develop the habits, the skills, the specialized knowledge, and attitude that you need to achieve them. If you *do* develop the habits, skills, knowledge, and the attitude that you can achieve incredible things, there's almost no limit to what you can accomplish. Indeed, I can virtually guarantee that if you set your goals and follow the five rules, you will accomplish the extraordinary.

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Jerry has been featured in Sales and Marketing Management Magazine, Investors Business Daily, Managed Care Pharmacy Practice and Hospital Pharmacist Report. He has been an Executive in Residence at Northern Illinois University and The Amos Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. He is a graduate of The Virginia Military Institute.