

## **'Targeting Success' - Why set goals and how to make them work!**

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### **Why set goals?**

We all set ourselves targets all the time, things to do, things to NOT do, or not do AGAIN... For those of us who've worked or been involved in managing projects of any kind then we recognise the value of targets, objectives, and deadlines as a way of ensuring some form of progress is made.

Progress is key, so how can we keep moving forward and how can we tell that we are in fact moving forward? By establishing clear destinations with helpful markers on the route we should be able to not only make progress but prove it too!

If we don't set goals we will just aimlessly wander happening upon progress and success by accident, if we progress at all. If however we know where we want to go, we know what it looks like so we'll recognise it when we arrive. We also know what the route looks like, so we should get there more quickly and easily!

It is surprising sometimes that while we might set out in business, or on a trip, or even on a night out with a plan, we probably don't have a plan for our lives... OK, there are a lot more variables, but we could still plan to do certain things and achieve certain things by particular points in our lives.

Maybe the problem is that we don't like setting personal goals because we're scared of not achieving them. Maybe it's just more comfortable for it all to be by accident or 'in the hands of fate'?

Good goal setting bypasses the fear factor and still throws down a challenge that will motivate us and give us a method for creating success.

### **The Challenge Barometer**

The real issue of goal setting is adapting to change and becoming comfortable with change. It would be pretty difficult and disconcerting to change part of your behaviour 100% in a couple of days and it would destabilise a large part of your lifestyle. But how about changing your behaviour by 10% consistently every couple of days? Effecting a slower and more gradual change that allows you to 'bed-in' changes as part of a subtler lifestyle shift.

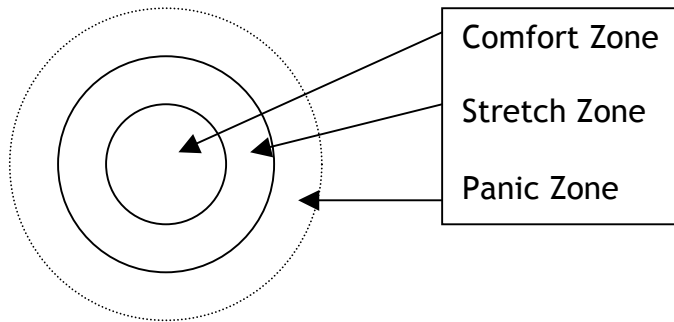
A massive change of behaviour causes too much pressure on the system and we're more likely to crack, panic, and even collapse. We'll certainly not want to try it again.

A subtle or gradual (but consistent) change in behaviour allows us to make change happen in a comfortable way and redevelop our lifestyle.

10% change every day. Easy.

## Comfort Zones

We each have 3 zones in which we operate - the 'Comfort Zone', the 'Stretch Zone', and the 'Panic Zone':



Inside the comfort zone are all the ways of doing things and behaving that we're comfortable with. To use an exercise analogy this is the kind of exercise that doesn't really hurt much but it isn't making you any fitter either - it is only maintaining form at best.

The stretch zone is any behaviour or act that requires you to stretch your abilities, beliefs or attitudes to undertake it. It is not so easy but if you regularly stretch then eventually it becomes comfortable. To use the exercise analogy this is about running further or longer or working out with greater weights in an attempt to get fitter - it hurts a bit but 'no pain, no gain'.

The panic zone is where you stretch too far; you push yourself so far from where you're comfortable you actually panic and maybe even hurt yourself. To use the exercise analogy again you might have tried to run too far or tried to lift too much and actually incurred an injury that will prevent you exercising for a while!

In one sense the idea is to make the Comfort Zone as large as possible by constantly stretching it out - the more things that fit in your Comfort Zone the more comfortable you'll be with life in general!

Goals are a way of identifying good points to stretch to and eventually encompass within your Comfort Zone. Goals should avoid taking you into the Panic Zone.

### What kinds of goals could I set?

Your goals should be things you desire rather than things you feel you ought to target. We'll say more on motivation later but right now its important to realise that whatever goals you set you have to *want* to achieve.

If you're struggling to think of goals don't worry - it's perfectly natural as we're rarely asked to think about what we really want out of life. Here are some good places to look for inspiration:

### **Auditing current ability or situation**

Sometimes when you review your existing state you find things you'd like to do more of, less of, or do better. By reviewing your existing abilities you might find areas you wish to improve. Likewise, by reviewing the activities you're engaged in you might find room for changes.

At the end of this document you'll find a sample Skills Audit. By evaluating your existing skill levels against your desired skill levels you'll establish some clear areas for improvement. You could prioritise your development in these areas by setting goals related to improving them.

Also at the end of this document you'll find a sample 'Life-Map' that draws out the priority areas of your life and how much time and effort you devote to them. It might quickly become apparent that there are areas of your life that are not receiving sufficient attention or alternatively are dominating your time and energy in an unhealthy way. This map can then be used to help set goals that rectify imbalance and maybe even create new areas of activity.

When developing goals from perceived areas of weakness or insufficient activity you need to be wary of setting goals that you feel you "ought" to achieve rather than "want" to. Without a desire to achieve goals you will struggle, and "ought to" goals tend to end up being frustrating chores.

### **Observing other people**

We all know people who do things we'd like to do or they do something in a way we'd like to be able to do ourselves. Maybe they're always calm, or charming, or effortlessly capable? Maybe they're doing an activity you'd like to be able to do too?

Usually we observe these differences and quickly find ways of explaining why they can do it and we can't, we justify our own inabilities by highlighting the differences between them and us.

How about identifying a few key activities, abilities or behaviours that others do (and we admire) that we'd like to be able to do ourselves? Then rather than justify why we can't do it we take steps to make it happen for ourselves?

Admired abilities or activities in others make good goals for ourselves - especially because we have a successful model to follow!

### **Translating wishes**

We write off some ideas as wishes, or dreams, or fantasies because they seem so far away from where we are now. Just stop for a moment and think about what would need to be true for that wish to become reality... maybe there are some things you could actually work on? You have to buy a ticket to win a lottery! Sometimes if we break the process into achievable stages we find ways of succeeding with really big goals.

Sometimes wishes are exaggerated versions of things that would make us happy and are in fact achievable - maybe we don't actually need to be a billionaire and just being financially secure would be enough? But if we're constantly getting frustrated by waiting for the lottery result when we could be working towards a more realistic target that would make us happy then we're doing something wrong...

Also dreams and fantasies can cloud our real objectives; maybe we'd like a really big house and lots of material possessions? Maybe what we actually want is to be respected and acknowledged as successful and we see all those trappings of success as necessary for that? If you do have a wish or dream what is it you *really* want? What would *actually* make you happy?

By translating or breaking down dreams and wishes into workable goals we can build towards really satisfying long-term objectives.

### **How to set great goals**

Firstly you need to think about timescales; long-term goals need to be broken down into short-term goals that you complete as stages on the route to major success.

Draw a line across a piece of paper. At the left-hand end is now, at the right-hand end is 10 years from now. Mark along that timeline any major goals you want to achieve in those 10 years - and when you want to achieve them. Some, if not all, of those major goals will have stages you need to complete along the way or at least start dates and 'review of progress' dates - mark those on too. As you break down the stages and add in the progress markers you find it quickly fills up and gives you targets for 5 years, 3 years, 1 year and tomorrow!

Writing more detailed goals could be undertaken for all 10 years or more but they're better focussed on your shorter-term goals maybe up to 2-3 years away, and certainly for monthly and yearly goals.

### **SMART Goals**

The better the wording and phrasing of your goal the more powerful it becomes - vague goals create vague results. When you write out your goal make sure it's SMART:

- Specific - *what exactly is the goal?*
- Measurable - *can your progress against the goal be proved?*
- Achievable - *is the goal within your ability? (Not too easy or too tough?)*
- Relevant - *is the goal appropriate to what you actually want to be doing?*
- Time-bound - *is there a deadline at which point you can measure your success?*

If your goal works with all of these criteria then it should be effective.

## Creating 'Well-Formed Outcomes'

SMART goals are a good first step towards creating motivating and achievable objectives to work towards. There are some additional factors worth considering:

### Is it stated in the positive?

Compare these two statements:

*"I need to stop being late everywhere."*

And...

*"I need to start being punctual and managing my time better."*

The second statement is more powerful because it contains a positive instruction - to do something (although it'd need a bit more specific about the steps to be taken to be really powerful). The first statement is weak because it says nothing about what will actually be done - it only says what should not happen.

When the brain is told "don't" or "shouldn't" it is being told not to do something - but it isn't being told what it should do instead. In consequence it simply thinks about the activity it shouldn't do.

For instance - If you were told: "Don't think of a pink elephant." What is the first thing you do? Its think of a pink elephant, and then you have to find a way of erasing that image - but not until you are told or you tell yourself to think of something else will you actually be able to do so.

When people give up smoking they often need to do something else instead - like chewing gum - because it gives them something to do rather than simply 'not smoking'.

By stating in your goals the positive you give yourself a destination, rather than simply trying to avoid a location. By not setting a destination you always remain tethered to the thing you're trying to avoid, because that has remained your reference point.

Positive language is all about doing things, achieving things, moving forward. Make sure your objectives are positive statements.

### Standards of success

How will you know you've completed your objective? How will you be able to tell how close you are to doing so? Consider this statement:

"I want to be more assertive."

Ok, what is "more assertive"? What will you be able to do when you are more assertive that you can't do now? How will you be able to prove you are more assertive than you were before?

Such a vague objective means you haven't really created a means for changing anything and not set a standard to achieve. You'll never be able to judge progress or prove to yourself that you've achieved what you wanted. You'll also never have to reprimand yourself for failing to achieve the goal.

Goals should have a standard of success: a clearly stated criteria for evaluating success - what is your evidence? When you have improved an ability what should you be able to do? How will you behave when you've developed to a particular point? What will you be doing when the goal is reached?

### **Does the goal relate to a specific context?**

This is just another test of the goal - does it relate to a specific situation or context? Does it not apply elsewhere? Maybe your new assertiveness only needs to be utilised with a particular group of friends?

What, where, when, why and with whom will you be adopting this changed behaviour or activity with? The better thought-out and greater level of detail considered concerning the goal the more likely you are to succeed. If you've considered how it'll actually look, sound and feel to be doing things differently you're less likely to encounter problems in reality.

### **Can you achieve it on your own?**

Is the goal within your ability (even if it will be a stretch)? Do you have all the resources (time, money, energy, space etc) to allow it to happen? If you are going to need the assistance of others or access to greater resources then identifying these and seeking them out is another goal for you to target.

Goals that require the help of others need not be avoided, but just be conscious of that requirement and don't try and over-stretch yourself by attempting it on your own.

Be aware that whilst you might not need someone else's explicit help to achieve a goal you might need to stop them sabotaging you! For instance if you're trying to create more time for yourself to indulge a new interest you'll need to make sure the people you live with understand this and don't overburden you with other activities.

### **Advantages & disadvantages**

Every goal we undertake will have positive and negative repercussions, although hopefully the positive will outweigh the negative! For example, if we set ourselves a goal of being more assertive then whilst the positives might include: greater self-confidence, greater respect from those around us and getting more of the things we want. We also have to expect the occasional risk of conflict with people used to us rolling over. We have to be willing to stand by our opinions and decisions. We also have to expect that people's expectations will change - and they'll expect us to assert ourselves!

There might be short-term difficulties for long-term gains as you experiment with new ways of doing things. There might be a 'ripple effect' as one change impacts on areas of your life you hadn't contemplated - they might be positive as well as negative though.

For any goal, just have a think about the advantages and disadvantages of enacting it.

### **Is it worthwhile?**

Why is this goal you've set important to you? What will happen if you don't set it? Are you setting it because you feel you ought to or because you are convinced of the value it will have in your life?

Goals have to be desired; the reason why most New Year Resolutions fail is because we feel we ought to do them rather than because we want to do them. Using positive language can make a big difference to this, but ultimately we need to be motivated.

### **Understanding motivation**

There are two key types of motivation: *motivation-to* and *motivation-from*:

**Motivation-to:** This is incentive and reward based motivation; some form of prize is on offer for performance so we head towards it and its presence motivates us - the carrot.

**Motivation-from:** This is fear and punishment based motivation; we'll suffer, get hurt, get embarrassed, or fail if we don't perform. We thus head away from poor performance through avoidance of pain - the stick.

Both forms of motivation move us all. We all have areas of activity in which we are motivated by the prospect of reward and other areas in which deadlines and punishments motivate us to perform well. For instance I might be motivated to go hill-walking as I love being outside and enjoy the physical sensation of an epic day out whereas another form of exercise - say the gym - I'm more motivated to go because I don't want to put on weight. Suffice to say I don't really enjoy the gym but I do go.

Motivation-from is effective in the short term - e.g. student essay deadlines produce decent performances in desperately short spaces of time. However performance is never really amazing, it is rarely consistent, and it's not enjoyable. You tend to slack off until the fear or threat suddenly spurs a burst of productivity and then you slack off again.

Motivation-to means you continue to develop steadily towards a goal and you then maintain that level. You can't always progress rapidly but you're always progressing nonetheless. Motivation-to is based on having a clear target in mind - a level of performance beyond where you currently lie. Consistent improvement is satisfying but it does require a strong incentive to maintain that interest over time.

When considering your goals think about your motivation to achieve them. Can you create goals with powerful incentive-based motivators or will you need a few threats and deadlines to help you along the way? Building in rewards, punishments, enforcement and endorsement methods as part of your goal-setting strategy can have powerful results.

### **How to keep maintaining progress**

There is little point having goals if you don't regularly check your progress against them. The best motivator for setting and achieving goals is seeing how you're actually progressing against your existing goals. By creating a steady succession of success stories you give yourself the confidence to push yourself further.

Whenever you achieve a goal consider whether you wish to take it further. If you encounter problems in achieving a goal you may generate ideas for alternative goals or further goals.

Small goals should work towards major goals, and when major goals are achieved you may feel that there are even bigger goals that you could attempt. Self-improvement is a never-ending process and it is also a consistently satisfying one.

### **Self-Coaching**

One effective way of continuing to progress against goals is to either find someone to coach you or coach yourself! Coaching is basically a supportive process that encourages you and guides you in the improvement of your performance.

A simple but much-used coaching model is the GROW model:

**Goals** - where do you want to be? How well do you want to perform?

**Reality** - where are you now? How are you currently performing?

**Options** - what methods have you got for bridging the performance gap?

**Willingness** - what methods are you actually willing to undertake?

These four simple themes of questions should produce practical answers for continued development and progress.

### **“What if I fail to reach a goal?”**

Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, is supposed to have been asked if he got discouraged when his first 700 trials failed to work. He replied: “I haven't failed, I've discovered 700 ways how not to do it.”

There is no failure, only feedback as the result of an action. So long as we learn and adapt from our experiences we're always gaining something. Maybe the goal was unrealistic, maybe there were additional factors you hadn't taken into account, and maybe you had overestimated your desire for the goal. As long as you do identify what happened then you have learnt something about how to get it right.

Not all goals are achieved. That is not to say that certain goals cannot be achieved, but that sometimes we can't account for everything that life throws at us. We need to remain positive and robust in the face of adversity - are we entirely at the mercy of fate or can we shape our own futures through taking action? The latter opinion is certainly the more effective, positive, and ultimately successful.

### **Finally**

Goal-setting is a great way of taking charge of your life, of putting yourself in the driver's seat and not being at the mercy of other people. It is scary sometimes to set yourself challenges but the benefits of adopting a more pro-active attitude to life are enormous.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **Further Reading**

The NLP Workbook - Joseph O'Connor. Element. 2002.

Be your own Life Coach - Fiona Harrold. Coronet. 2001.

The Life Coaching Handbook - Curly Martin. Crown House. 2001.

## Skills Audit

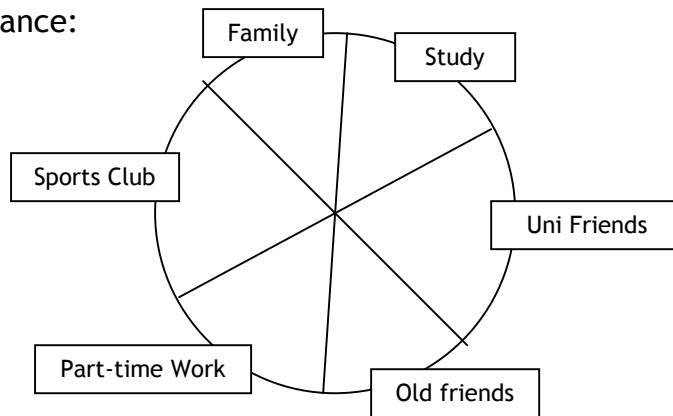
How would you rate your existing ability and your desired ability in each of these areas? Score 1-10 with 1 being low and 10 being high.

Skill	Current Rating?	Desired Rating?	Priority area?
Listening			
Expressing ideas/opinions clearly to others verbally			
Written communication			
Questioning effectively			
Developing conversational rapport			
Negotiating successfully			
Asserting yourself with confidence			
Working with others			
Dealing with disagreement and conflict			
Supporting & encouraging others			
Motivating others			
Taking responsibility			
Managing other people			
Influencing others			
Decision-making			
Public speaking			
Constructing arguments & debating			
Creative thinking			
Critical thinking			
Research skills			
Data analysis			
Problem solving			
Adapting to new situations			
Managing own time			
Prioritising tasks			
Staying motivated in adversity			
Setting plans			
Keeping to plans			
Crisis management			
IT Skills			

## Life-Mapping

Draw a large circle and mark a series of spokes emanating from the centre so it looks like a wheel. Each space between spokes should represent an area of activity in your life.

For instance:



The spokes can be marked 1-10 with 1 in the middle and 10 out at the edge. Rate each area of activity for how much time and effort you give it: e.g. family might get 2/10 because you rarely see them whilst your sports club might get 8/10 because it dominates your time and thinking. Each section can thus be filled out to an appropriate level.

It should graphically illustrate where your life is being spent - now ask yourself these questions:

- How happy am I with how I spend my time and energy?
- Are there areas in which I'm giving too much?
- Are there areas in which I'm giving too little?
- What is the difference between the activities that makes me spend so much or so little time doing them?
- What will I change?

Example Goals Sheet:

Goal	Date set	By what means?	Standard of Success?	Deadline	Achieved?
<i>Improve Time Management</i>	<i>3/11/05</i>	<i>Attend time management workshop, Get a diary, Create daily to-do lists.</i>	<i>Stop being late everywhere, No deadline panics, Feel less frantic.</i>	<i>3/1/06</i>	
<i>Get fit</i>	<i>3/11/05</i>	<i>Do gym induction, Weekly run, Research sports clubs.</i>	<i>Feel healthier, Lose a stone of weight, Be able to run for 30 mins.</i>	<i>3/1/06</i>	