



The 8 Myths of Goal Setting

How to Reach Your Goals Without Getting Stuck

Lisa Turner

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CONVENTIONAL WISDOM in the goal setting arena is very clear: goals should be brainstormed, prioritized, time bound, written down, and adhered to rigorously or we won't achieve them.

Not so.

In my experience, using these principles without an intelligent framework dooms us to failure and disappointment. It is no wonder that so many people have an aversion to the phrase "goal setting" or "New Year's Resolutions." These feelings come from repeated failures in trying to get a goal system to work for us. We would rather not think about it and skim along hoping that we will get some of what we want in life and not have to deal with the process.

As a result, most people do not achieve the level of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure that they could otherwise have in their personal lives and in their careers and businesses. Understanding the myths of goal setting is the first step in learning how to discover the power and ease of goal achievement.



Myth #1: Start your goal setting by brainstorming a list of things to work on (goals)

No. This idea presupposes that you already know what you should be working on. Most people do not even have a good understanding of themselves and their motivations, much less their goals in life. Nearly 95% of the population cannot succinctly

answer the question “What do you want out of life?” If we cannot answer this question, and we do not know what we want, how can we set life goals? There is certainly a place for brainstorming in the goal setting process, but it is not at the beginning. Without alignment between self-knowledge, beliefs and values, and your passions, your subconscious mind will reject most efforts at goal setting.



Myth #2: All goals must be time bound

No. Desperation and depression follow from putting dates on goals and then not meeting them. What is the worst thing that could happen? There are goals that have dates and must be accomplished (buy gas for the car), however, goal setting is more complicated than this, and without constant adjusting of deadlines, if you have deadlines at all, our minds will not embrace them.

While we certainly spend time looking at the long-range picture of what we want in life, we have to be flexible in assigning timeframes. An example would be “getting fit.” Does this have an end goal? Yes, and it has interim goals, but it’s a moving target. If we get sick and interrupt our schedule, are we failures because we did not reach the interim goal? No, because we adjust the times out to accommodate circumstances. To be rigid about deadlines will damage self-esteem, and produce discouragement and fatigue. This is a major contributor to stress and the feeling of overload, especially in the workplace. Self-esteem and confidence are critical to achievement, balance, and happiness.

Myth #3: “Just Do It”

This is a fun saying that Nike invented, and it’s been used everywhere to mean anything and everything . . . but in the goal setting arena what does this tell us? It tells us to just pick something and then pursue it, no matter what.

No.

While it is not a bad thing to pursue something important with passion and energy, to be spending all that energy on something that is not going to get you where you want to go will be a waste of time. The supposition here is that we simply settle on something and go for it. In the book (and movie) Alice In Wonderland, Alice finds the Cheshire Cat perched up in a tree. “Oh Puss, could you please tell me which way to go?”

“Well, that depends on where you want to get to,” said the cat.

“Oh, it really doesn’t matter, as long as I get somewhere,” said Alice.

“Then it really doesn’t matter which way you go!” said the cat.

The point here is if we have not figured out the best route, if we don’t have a map, and we run off in any direction, we may end up in a place where we do not want to be.



Myth #4: Always prioritize your goals

No. Prioritization is used when brainstorming multiple goals, not after they are established. Prioritize what you are going to do RIGHT NOW, in this moment. Change is always going on around us, and we must have the flexibility in our schedule and in our stance to be able to respond to changing circumstances.



Myth #5: Stick to your goals and don’t quit

No. Again, the hallmark of our world is change. If the underlying reasons for a certain goal change, you must adjust appropriately to that change. This is tough psychologically, as we normally hold on to stable environments and resist any changes. But doing this will really hold us back.

As for quitting, quitting can be a terrific strategy to get off the wrong track and on to the right one. There's a little book that you might have seen or heard about called, The Dip by Seth Godin that tells us quitting can be the best thing we can do if it gets us unstuck and in to a track where we can be the best at something – realizing and pursuing our passion.



Myth #6: Share your goals with your family and friends so that you are committed to achieving them

No. And, it's fine if you disagree.

Self-esteem is critically important to the goal-setting process and all you need are your friends telling you that you are a fool, or a dreamer, or “round the bend” or plain crazy. This isn't to say you shouldn't share an important goal with a loved one or close friend, just be judicious about it. You're not doing this for your friends; you are doing this for yourself.

The time to be secretive is in the beginning, as your plan emerges. Protect your ideas and excitement until you are clear about your journey. Be ready for ridicule and criticism, outright as well as veiled when it arrives. This will give you conviction and strength of purpose. I spent months planning my airplane purchase before letting anyone know – and then easily endured “You must be crazy” and “What are you thinking?”

Your passion is first a secret passion . . . and then there will be time to share it.



Myth #7: Goal setting should be done in a logical way so that your emotions don't steer you in the wrong direction

No. If your logical mind comes up with your goals plan, but your emotional brain, or heart, if you will, does not “like” the plan, then it will NEVER happen. I see this all the time at the end of the year when people set the goals that they “should” do . . . they “should”

lose weight, stop smoking, save more money. We know that the results are usually less than what we hoped for. Without alignment between our inner beliefs and our goals, we just can't get traction for accomplishment.



Myth #8: A Goal Plan should drive Project Plans that are detailed, written down, and worked on every day

Don't make it complicated. Do the up front work. Once you understand that your goals have to be aligned with your values, your beliefs, and your passions, you can put the process on auto-pilot and find that things are being delivered to you. This is an important concoction of logic and emotion – establish the logic, allow the emotional alignment, and watch the Universe deliver what you want. Once you get good at the process, you no longer have to do the paperwork, so to speak, to get the deliveries.

You have probably seen the acronym for goal setting, called "SMART."

S = Specific

M = Measurable

A = Attainable

R = Realistic

T = Time bound or Timely

One of the reasons I don't like acronyms is that someone made it up to be clever, and maybe the capital letters don't really do a good job of saying what the formula is. Let's look at this one. S is ok for Specific. Your goals SHOULD be as specific as possible. M is ok for Measurable, we should be able to measure our goals. A for Attainable is redundant; why would we even list a goal if we did not think it was attainable? Let's replace this with Aligned Action. We know that if our goals are not aligned with our values and beliefs, we will not take action on it. The goal must be aligned. R for Realistic is redundant once again. If the goal was NOT realistic (in our own mind) we would not be attempting it, and many big goals are NOT realistic at the outset. Let's replace this with Reinforcing.

If our goals are reinforced by our values and beliefs, then we can achieve them. And lastly, Timely. We already said that most goals should not have a specific hard and fast date assigned to them. So this won't work. Let's replace Timely with Tempting. If your goal is not tempting, if it is not interesting, fun, and something to look forward to, you won't do it, will you? So we now have:

S = Specific

M = Measurable

A = Aligned Action

R = Reinforcing (values)

T = Tempting

Realize that accomplishing some of the tasks in your plan will require you to give up other things. Don't let this discourage you; stay focused on your goals. Your brain will work in tandem with your emotions to drive you to completion.

Your mind and all the resources available to it are working in concert to accomplish your goal. You WILL achieve your goal, and it will bring lasting joy and self-confidence.

Congratulations. You are now one of less than 5% of the human population with a values list, mission statement, and written goals with a plan to achieve them. You know where you are going and how to get there. The dreams of the world are now yours.



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