

CHAPTER

02

TAKE CONTROL OF
YOUR LIFE: SET YOUR
OWN GOALS (WHOSE
LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?)

02

‘A person’s reach should exceed their grasp’

Anon

Simply writing your goals down on paper is merely the first step in what may prove a long and arduous journey to make them become a reality, but it is the vital first step. An essential ingredient is personal belief that you will achieve your goals. So you need to convince yourself, and marshal the tangible evidence, that you can and will achieve your goals. Constantly reminding yourself of your goals and thinking about them, encourages your subconscious mind to take over and accelerate your achievement. Mental rehearsal of success is important as well. Picture in your mind’s eye, over and over again, what it will feel like when you have achieved your goals.

Is there any evidence that these techniques work, or is it merely hocus pocus? Yes, they work! Some years ago behavioural scientists took 30 volunteers, divided them into two groups randomly. Each group was asked to play darts and the average scores were recorded. One group was asked to practise each day for three weeks. The other group was asked not to practise at all, but to mentally rehearse the darts landing where they aimed, and three weeks later they completely outperformed the people who practised. This is merely one of countless controlled experiments.

Goals come with a price tag attached. Part of the price tag may involve incurring some expenses, such as tuition costs to gain an extra qualification. Usually, however, the onerous part of the price tag is the time, effort and single mindedness required to achieve the goal. This means that you need to recognise the price tag attached to a goal, and be totally prepared to pay it in full, before you decide to set yourself that goal.

Goals need to be measurable, not subjective or elastic. If your weight loss goal is to lose three kilos within the next three months, then whether or not you have achieved it, or how nearly so, is measurable. If your goal is merely to lose some weight over the next few months, then it comes complete with ample scope to make excuses or to rationalise that your performance wasn't too bad in the circumstances.

Timescales are important for successfully achieving goals. If you have a goal to accumulate a share portfolio worth more than £1 million within a ten year period, it is vitally important to have sub-goals for what progress you will have achieved in, say, three months, and in one, three and five years. So, the statement of your goals which you are asked to fill in at the end of this chapter is classified both by individual goals and by timescales.

When setting goals for yourself, comprehensiveness has no merit. Whilst the questionnaire is comprehensive, you are urged only to set goals for the things you really want and are committed to achieve, believe you will achieve and are determined to do so. It is much more productive to set only one or two short-term goals, and to achieve them, and be inspired to set new goals, than to set numerous goals only to give up in despair.

Work and career

Your goal may be as immediate as to ask the boss for a pay rise. Alternatively, it could be to gain promotion within your own department or elsewhere in the company. Equally, your goal could be to be trained within the company to change your career from, say, customer support engineer to technical sales. Other possibilities may be to be relocated at home or overseas either to improve the overall quality of your life or to gain international experience. The

stress, pressures, internal politics or culture of your employer may be such that you should leave as soon as possible either to find similar work elsewhere or to find completely different work even though it may be less well paid.

Starting your own business

Perhaps your dream is to start your own company, to be self-employed or to turn a hobby into an income. Dreams can and do become a reality, but serendipity or sitting back and waiting for it to happen are not recommended. A sensible short-term goal would be to identify an opportunity, research the marketplace and to develop a sound business plan in your spare time before deciding to leave your present job.

Health

It is so easy and commonplace to take health for granted, and only realise the fundamental importance of good health when faced with serious illness. All the success and wealth in the world count for very little without good health. So health improvement should be a series of continuing goals for everyone throughout life, starting now.

There is so much scope for health improvement, that everyone should set at least one goal. Pick the single thing which could be most beneficial for your health and set yourself an achievable goal for the next three months, but a measurable one so that you cannot deceive yourself or make excuses. Refer back to the Health questionnaire which you completed earlier, to help you decide which goal(s) to set. Apps on your phone can prove useful.

Relevant goals you could set include:

- to limit your weekly alcohol intake to a particular number of units, and to record how much you drink to avoid deceiving yourself
- to join a gym club or an exercise class and attend twice a week
- use an exercise DVD or an online 'course' twice a week
- to take a brisk 30 minute walk every lunchtime
- to stop eating biscuits, cake and crisps for three months
- to eat some fruit and salad every day

Appearance and image

Improved grooming and eliminating irritating personal habits do not require you to spend more than a little money. It boils down to developing routines which work for you, not against you (eg washing your hair regularly, shoes kept well repaired and cleaned, nails should be tidily cut and impeccably clean). Irritating habits identified in your Appearance and Image questionnaire (completed earlier) should be eliminated. Decide what your objectives are to be, and write them down.

Dress matters. You should consider clothes and appearance as an investment and not an expense. Style, taste, colour combinations and accessories are important. Decide how much you can afford to invest and set yourself priorities. Visit up-market clothes stores or search the web for ideas and advice, even if you don't buy there, and read style magazines. Consider using a personal shopper to help you choose clothes. Some departmental stores offer this service free. A carefully chosen and good quality accessory can enhance cheaper clothes, but a visibly cheap accessory or a well-worn one will detract from good clothes. At work a cheap ballpoint pen, a tattered briefcase or bag and a silly 'fun' watch can create a negative effect.

Self development – qualifications, skills and personal development

Obtaining qualifications, learning new skills and pursuing personal development takes time and energy, which probably means less time available for family, friends and leisure pursuits. Before deciding what goals to set yourself, find out what support is available from your employer. Some employers offer day release, internal and external short courses and some pay for attending evening classes or distance learning on completion of the course. Even if your employer does not appear to offer much, why not ask? What have you got to lose? If your goal is to complete an MBA from Harvard Business School, why not ask your employer if they would consider providing some financial support.

If the opportunities you want are not available during working hours and provided by your employer, think carefully before setting your goals. Ask yourself do you have the time, energy and determination to complete the course? What else will suffer in your life? Why are you thinking of pursuing this course? If it is for career advancement and increased earning power, what tangible evidence is available to demonstrate that it will be worthwhile?

Relationships

Spectacular success and substantial financial wealth may bring little happiness or comfort by themselves. Meaningful relationships with your partner, children, parents, friends and work colleagues will bring enjoyment and happiness. There is a snag, however. Meaningful relationships require investing time, not just to build in the first place, but to sustain as well. Inevitably relationships

suffer or fail because people have insufficient time, or more accurately because they do not make enough time. So, it may be necessary to choose a single type of relationship on which to devote more time.

Networking

Networking might seem an irrelevant goal to focus on, but networking can dramatically enhance and accelerate achieving your other goals. If you wish, you can simply dismiss networking as using the old school tie or exploiting the people you know. Effective networking is entirely different. It is not simply about exchanging contact details with people whom you happen to meet and compiling a database.

Effective networking should commence by deciding which networks could best help you achieve your goals. For example, most companies are members of their trade or industry association. You could visit the association's website to find out about conferences, seminars, discussion forums, regional and national dinners. Try an event and assess the networking potential. If you have a professional qualification, find out about industry sector groups and working parties which could provide networking opportunities. Business school alumni groups, software users clubs and suchlike organisations provide countless opportunities if you think about it. Search and use online networking sites like LinkedIn.

Effective networking requires more than meeting people who may help you to achieve your goals, it requires building and maintaining contact and developing a constructive rapport and relationship with interesting and worthwhile people.

Personal reinvention

Personal reinvention is achievable, but you may ask what does it mean? Generally speaking, personal reinvention means achieving a dramatic change in your lifestyle. By its very nature it may have to be a medium or long-term goal because of everything that has to be put in place to make it possible, but there is no way that reinvention should be dismissed as impossible or even relegated to a distant pipe dream.

Before you conclude that personal reinvention is definitely not for you, please consider some examples. Whether or not these particular examples strike any chord with you is irrelevant, but they may just inspire you to decide that some other form of personal reinvention would suit you down to the ground:

- transform a hobby into a full-time occupation which provides an acceptable income, e.g. woodcarving
- make a major career change in midlife, e.g. qualify as a solicitor or a modern languages teacher
- exchange urban living for a simple rural lifestyle or escape to a remote island
- set a target date, even if it's 10 or 15 years away, to have retired from traditional employment (there is plenty of time to decide what you will do instead)
- give up your career and become a 'househusband' or 'housewife' while your partner concentrates on a full-time career
- take a one year sabbatical from your career to write your first novel

These examples are not hypothetical, each one was pursued by an acquaintance of the authors.

Leisure

If you thoroughly enjoy spending all of your spare time as a couch potato watching television or playing computer games (even though you are 35 and married), so be it. The whole point about setting goals, however, is that you have an opportunity to make choices which could enhance your career, earning power, relationships, health or personal fulfillment and development. Consider some of the choices open to you:

- learn a language
- return to a sport or take up a new one
- join a special interest club
- develop a new skill
- start a business part-time which you would really enjoy

PERSONAL GOALS

Date _____

	3 months	12 months
Work and career		
Health		
Appearance and image		
Personal development		
Relationships		
Networking		
Personal reinvention		
Leisure		

3 years	5 years	Long-term