

10 steps to Achieving Your Life Dreams

Using Goal Setting Theory and Task Motivation

It's that time of year again, where all of us start to think of setting goals for next year. We are looking at what we want to do with our business as well as our personal life. If you are like most people, you may have had the best intentions, but once you take stock in where you are today versus one year ago, your life probably did not change measurably in any direction. You might have a little more or a little less money, you may have gained a little more or lost a little weight, but all in all – even with visions of grandeur, you stayed relatively about the same. If you take the past year results and multiply it by 50, there is a good chance that is pretty much where you are going to end up.

Don't feel bad. Most people are in the same boat. The reason? Most do not understand the true commitment and the process required to make life impacting changes and attaining goals. So how do people really make massive changes in their lives to insure they reach their desired state of business, living and life? Lets look at what the research says on how people attain goals.

In "*Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goals Setting and Task Motivation*"¹, Gary Latham from the University of Toronto and Edwin Locke from the University of Maryland summarize a 35 year study of empirical research on goal setting theory. Much of their research has been focused on goal setting in business in hopes of finding out what works and what doesn't. Here is what they found:

- The highest level of success was with moderate to difficult goals
- The most difficult goals produced the most effort, but did not equate to highest level of attainment
- Self Efficacy was critical in goal attainment (Believing they could achieve it)
- Feedback on progress was critical to success (How am I doing)
- The more specific the goal – the higher level of achievement
- The level of importance of the goal effected the outcome

What this means to us, is that based on this historical data, goal attainment has several key components that can be clearly defined and used to form a process that will increase our chances of achieving our goals.

Word of Caution: Change is hard. If it were simple, everyone would be living the life of their dreams. Success takes personal sacrifice. It takes the ability to overcome adversity. It takes an enormous amount of REAL discipline. That's right... discipline. Success doesn't care if you were not hugged enough as a child or if you grew up on the right street. Success and goal attainment are about taking full responsibility for where you are in life and your ability to do whatever it takes to make the desired change. If you are willing to put your personal baggage and self doubt on the back burner, read on, you may have an opportunity for REAL change and the true potential of living your dream....

Step 1. First things first

Before jumping in and setting goals to change your life for good, it is necessary to evaluate where you are and what is most important to you. Here are four key questions to ask yourself and to answer honestly in order to make sure you have the best chance to achieve your goals. Take some time to really reflect and think about these.

1. What were my Successes in 2010 – *personal and professional*?
2. What were some of my Shortcomings in 2010?
3. What three things could I change professionally and personally that would have a significant impact on 2011?
4. What am I truly grateful for?

Step 2. Set Smart Goals

Once we fully understand where we are, where we have been and what is most important to us, we can then focus on setting the right goals. In setting each goal, keep in mind they have to be SMART, Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Be sure to put each goal through the SMART test. For example.. Let's say you want to bill \$500K in revenue. Your goals should look like this:

“ I, Joe Recruiter, am committed to bill \$500K in 2011”. I will do this by billing \$100K in Q1, \$125K in Q2, \$125K in Q3 and \$150K in Q4. In order to do this I am committed to 5 First Time Sendouts per week, 4 plus hours of phone time per day, 2 New accounts per month and improving my Major account development skills. “

Pay particular close attention to the language. Joe is not going to try, or attempt or even work hard to achieve \$500K in billings. Joe is “Committed”. Also Joe is very specific on how he will achieve this \$500K in billings per year and the activities he needs to focus on DAILY to achieve them. Not only do you need to set Smart Goals, but you need to use the right language and back it up with how.

Step 3 . Define the obstacles and how you get past them

There are always obstacles in the way of achieving goals. Life happens fast. Kids need to go to soccer practice, the house needs to be cleaned, dinner needs to be made, etc... There will always be things that vie for your time and detract you from the activities needed to attain your goal. Make sure you take the time to identify the obstacles in business and in life that will hinder your goal achievement. Once they are defined, determine how you will overcome them. Kids can not miss practice and we all need to eat, you can't stop doing the things that are important to you and need to be done. However what you can do is adjust schedules and plan to get up earlier if needed – whatever can be done to do what you need to do to address the obstacles.

Step 4. Develop the Action plan

Without a plan to make your goal happen it is all but a wish or a dream - that most likely will never materialize. An action plan is the detailed outline of the steps needed to achieve the desired outcome. The more detailed the plan with time, dates and specific actions steps needed, the better. Your action plan is your road map from where you are now, to where you want to go.

Step 5. What are the Critical Mile Stones

Milestones are like measuring points to compare your progress to. If I need to go visit my parents in Corunna, Michigan from Cincinnati, Ohio – the important milestones are getting through Lima in about an hour, Toledo in about 2.5 hours and finally hitting the Cabelas store in Dundee Michigan in about 3 hours. If really it was only that simple.

Milestones are critical as they measure your progress and tell you if you are ahead of plan, which is always good, or behind which may require changes to the action plan to get back on track in order to attain any time frame goals. In recruiting setting yearly goals is very important. But backing them up with quarterly, monthly, weekly and daily targets are even more essential. If you don't ever hit your daily goals, nothing else will matter.

Step 6. Get an Accountability Partner

It is extremely difficult to do this stuff alone. While you doing your best to be as disciplined as possible and facing the adversity that the world has thrown at you, it can seem insurmountable. Having someone there to keep you on track and give you encouragement along the way can make all the difference in the world. Find someone who knows you, who will be honest with you if get off track, but also someone who can inspire you when the chips are down.

Step 7. Believe

In Claude Bristol book, "The Magic of Believing"², he spells out the power of belief. In studying miracles all over the world that have occurred in different religions, the findings were staggering. It didn't matter what the religion was that affected the outcome. It was the strength of the "Belief" that was the major factor in the miracle actually happening. Your personal belief that you can achieve your goals is critical to your success in goal attainment.

On a personal note, I had my third left knee surgery at toward the end of 2008. As some of you may know I compete nationally in the Masters Track & Field series every year in the field event Pole Vaulting. It gives individuals over 30 the chance to remain in competition. Three times a charm right? After work had been done on my knee, my orthopedic surgeon strongly suggested I never run on it regularly again. That's right.. Never. For those of you who don't know the sport of Pole Vaulting, running is an integral part. Needless to say I was devastated by this news. Not exactly what you want to hear if you have a passion for something. After feeling sorry myself for several days, I started doing research on exercises to strengthen my knee. I began an intense workout program filled with plyometrics, strength training and speed exercises. Progress was slow at first, but I kept the faith. I had to believe I could do it. In

2010 I won the Pole Vault Indoor National Championships in Boston and took third at the Outdoor National Championships in Sacramento in July. My sights are firmly set on winning the World Outdoor Championships set for July 2011. Your belief in yourself and your passion for your goal can help you overcome any obstacle.

Step 8. Define your Why?

If there is one thing that you could do to insure you reach any goal you set, it's developing a powerful why. Your "WHY" is the reason you do what you do. It's what will motivate you to climb any mountain or even walk through a brick wall in the face of adversity. It could be a person or an event that happened in your life. It could be an experience that you never want to experience again, or something that you feel so much for, you will never ever let them down. By defining your why, and truly letting it become part of your soul, you can become unstoppable in achieving anything you put your mind to.

One of my whys in life was a time when I couldn't afford my little baby girls 6 month shots. I was 23 years old at the time and had just started a new job, two car payments and a mortgage that was bigger than I thought. The thought today, 24 years later of not being able to afford care for my daughter still strikes a chord of anger and a rush of adrenalin to my heart. This was one of the things that helped me with the ability to overcome any type of adversity that has come my way for years.

Step 9. Dream Big and Set the Bar High

In the information on goal setting, Locke and Latham say to not make the goals too big. We as humans however are capable of achieving great things. Every year, world records are broken for speed, strength, intellect and how many hot dogs someone can devour. We have no idea still of the potential of any human being. The only thing we do know is - we are far from reaching it. You really have no idea of what your true potential is – in recruiting, in business, in sports or in life. I don't claim to know why we were put on earth, but I do know that it wasn't to be average. We are not sheep, born to follow. We were given life to excel and do the extraordinary. I encourage you to set the bar high and see what unlimited potential can be achieved in your life.

Step 10: Reward yourself... Celebrate

A reward system works wonders to keep you passionate and motivated. When you reach a milestone, you need to celebrate. When you overcome an obstacle - celebrate. You need to develop a habit of rewarding yourself for a job well done. When you hit your metrics for recruiting – you need to celebrate and reward yourself. Achieving a goal is like climbing a mountain. At each new altitude you reach, stop for a second and celebrate your progress. On the other hand, if you come up short, ask yourself why it happened, make the corrections needed and go forward. Don't get too down on yourself, be disappointed, but believe. In the end, it's not about the individual game, it's about being on top at the end of the season. Your success will spur you on to achieve even greater things in going forward.

My inspiration in writing this article is to help anyone who is now struggling to reach what they want in life. If you are like most people – there are many things you would like changed in business and other areas. Change is not easy. Like many things in life, the secret to goal achievement is in understanding the process and the key elements involved. Take time to ask the relevant questions to evaluate where you are before you goal set. Set SMART goals, establish Milestones, identify your obstacles and determine a plan to over come them. If you develop a good action plan and back it up with a strong why, you will be 99% of the way to achieving what you want. I look forward to celebrating your success with you in 2011.

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