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Goal-Setting Toolkit

A guide to achieve ambitious goals & raise your odds of success

Set aspirational goals and acceptable results, so if you fall short of the aspirational goal but hit the acceptable one, you haven't failed. Work backwards and create a process, structure and strategy to achieve it.

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01

Set A Meaningful Goal

What Are Meaningful Goals?

Most of us have no clue how to set a good goal. There are lots of resources out there that are helpful in understanding how to set a good goal, but simple is better.

One way to think about setting and reliably achieving your most important goals is that every goal you set should have:

- **Meaning for you**
- **A system to get you there**
- **A way to navigate your competing commitments**
- **A way to manage the dynamics that happen when these are in conflict**
- **A clearly defined target (how do you know when you achieve it)**
- **A time limit or boundary that is manageable**

Meaningful Goals Are:

Value Driven - The more aligned our goals are to our core values and principles, the more likely the system we build will succeed.

About Reality - Getting real about our strengths and abilities and accepting them is a vital aspect of goal-setting. It makes room for self-inquiry and helps in setting realistic expectations for ourselves. Getting real about our capacity also helps us create goals that are more specific, which is a key to goal-system success.

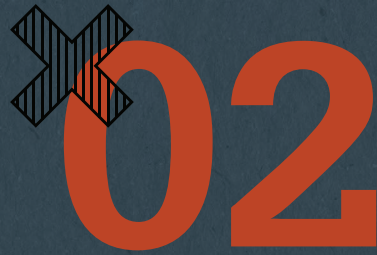
Positively framed - Frame your goals as becoming something rather than stopping something. Your goals will tap into your natural belief system if they are about who you are becoming and not about stopping the bad habits you got yourself into.

Usually Different When You Get There - Accomplishing our goals contributes to our overall success. An ambitious goal means something (and sometimes lots of things) will be different about you when you get there. Plan to renegotiate relationships with yourself and others so that your achievement doesn't get overridden by old patterns of being and relating.



Goals determine direction. Systems determine the nature of your progress in that direction.





Get Absurdly Specific

Technical Goals

One way to think about goals is to think of them as solving a problem. Some problems are technical and some are adaptive.

Technical

A technical problem is usually solved by implementing something someone else already knows how to do. A technical goal requires a change in skillset.

Examples include learning to:



Play guitar



Cook



Fix a car



Do a handstand

Questions for technical goals

- What is the skill that I want to learn?
- Does someone else already know how best to go about it?
Can I learn from them?

Adaptive Goals

Adaptive

An adaptive problem is one that requires a new mindset or capacity. Adaptive goals have to account for a whole system that's designed to resist. An adaptive goal requires deeper shifts in thinking and behaviour patterns. Most adaptive goals require both technical and adaptive approaches.

Examples include learning to:



Find my purpose



Improve my relationships



Develop confidence

Questions for adaptive goals

- What would I need to get better at in order to be more effective?
- What would I need to get better at in order to make a bigger contribution to my family and/or community?
- How can I learn to manage my emotions better?
- What is the journey I need to take to reach my goals?

Summary

What absurdly specific goal are you ready to set?

- What single thing is most important to you?
- What one way of personally improving yourself would make the biggest difference for achieving that?
- Is there some improvement goal you've already tried to accomplish, perhaps many times, but you've never been happy with the result or its staying power?

Start building knowledge by taking expert advice, talking to supervisors at the workplace or participating in self-assessments. Assessing yourself helps you realize the knowledge gaps you might have and can direct you towards knowledge and sub-skills you need to develop.

The first step to successful goal-setting is a brilliant plan. Laying out our goals by our strengths, aspirations, and affinities is an excellent way to build a working program. The plan makes habit formation easier as we know where to focus and how to implement the required actions.

The image features a large, bold, orange number '03' centered on a dark blue background. To the left of the '0', there is a black graphic consisting of several parallel diagonal lines slanted upwards from left to right, partially overlapping the top of the '0'.

Focus On Your System

Focus On Your System

You have a pattern of attention that leads you to care about some types of things more than others. When you are setting a goal, it's often in an area that you don't naturally find yourself drawn to.

You might find that you are:

- **More attuned to elements of health, wellbeing, and resources. Some of us find it easy to work at building our fitness or organizing our finances.**
- **More drawn to building a network of friends and colleagues and establishing a reputation or brand.**
- **Driven towards things that are about influence and getting your agenda met with others.**



Focus On Your System

Your system needs to account for whether your goal is related to an area you naturally pay attention to or an area that's outside your comfort zone.

For example, if you're biased to one area -- let's say network, identity and status -- you may find setting goals in the wellbeing or resource areas more challenging. If you are more naturally attuned to having a really good process and structure in your day, you may find it harder to set a goal that is about getting your message out and asserting it.

Your system needs to account for the ways your patterns could undermine your intentions. Like the late performance expert Anders Ericsson reminds us, becoming great at something “demands effort and planned deliberate practice of increasing difficulty.”

04

Stop Doing Something

Stop Doing Something

Your life is already in motion; the train has left the station. Setting a goal can feel like trying to get a train to hop the track and land on a track that isn't yet built. The track you are currently on was well built to get you somewhere - you probably don't remember where. Now you need a new track.

Even when your brain gives you the green light to go in a new direction, you need to lay new tracks and get rid of the old ones.

You will always follow the path of least resistance. Make a better path.



Take some paper and turn it sideways. Write your goal across the top and divide the page into four columns

Goal			
Fearless Inventory	Competing & Hidden Commitments	Worries List	Assumption Test

Stop Doing Something

Make a Fearless Inventory

In the first column write an honest list of:

- All the things you do that work against your goal.
- All the ways you're working against that goal by what you're not doing.
- If you get regular feedback, consider that input as a potential source of this first column list.
- Be sure that the entries you list are behaviours. The more concrete you can be, the better.

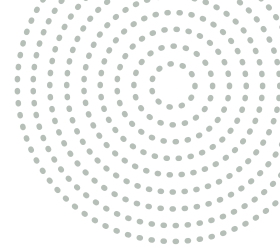
Make a Competing and Hidden Commitments List

In the second column, list your competing and hidden commitments. Most of our behaviours are developed because they served a good purpose at some point in our lives. They may not even be particularly skillful but they have been developed out of the necessity to keep us alive and well.

Some are intentional and are connected to our life's purpose and goals. Some are more subconscious and evolve from the instinctual need to protect ourselves. This helps us secure the sought-after feelings of being in control of our lives and connected to others.

Listing your hidden commitments will help you make sense of behaviours you use that don't always serve you well.

Stop Doing Something



Worry List

In a third column, write a list of what comes to mind when you think about the things you are doing and the commitments you have made that your behaviours are serving. When you think of changing or stopping any of these, what worries you?

This could be as simple as, "If I stop drinking beer to get healthy, I won't be able to have a good time with my friends anymore."

Assumption Test

This brings us to our list of assumptions or beliefs about ourselves and the world. We tend to take beliefs as truths and we don't know whether they are true until we test them. Assumptions are often in the form of if/then statements, so in the last column make a list of what would happen if the things you're trying to prevent from the previous column were to come true.



05

Find Support For Accountability

Find Support

Find support for accountability

We tend to perform better when someone is watching over us. For example, it is much easier to cheat on a diet or skip the gym when we are doing it alone.

However, the moment we pair up with others or have a trainer to guide us through the process, there are increased chances of us sticking to our goals and seeing them through.

Be a goldfish

“You know what the happiest animal in the world is? It's a goldfish. It's got a 10 second memory.” - Ted Lasso

Once you set your goal, focus on the system and not the initial results. Work to build the system and make the necessary tweaks along the way.

Remind yourself of the goal, but focus on the practice. You might even begin to enjoy the work, like psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says: “When we choose a goal and invest ourselves in it to the limits of concentration, whatever we do will be enjoyable.”



Use Smart Rewards

Use Smart Rewards

Rewards can be a powerful tool to encourage us to follow through on accomplishing our goals. They need to be balanced and manageable and not overshadow the goal itself. When we reward ourselves along the way towards a bigger goal, we can become excited in anticipation and this can drive our motivation.

It is important to choose rewards that matter to you or that have some kind of anticipation attached. A reward that doesn't resonate for you also won't encourage you or build motivation. Rewards also need to be only allowed once you actually achieved the deliverable it is attached to. Deciding to indulge in Netflix for a night is not a reward if this is something you already do regularly. Get creative and find cost effective encouragement to build your momentum.

Rewards can also be intrinsic. Learn to pay attention to what drives your behaviour? What motivates you intrinsically? Pay attention to those feelings and impressions and learn to enjoy that as a reward for your efforts.

*References:

Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey's (2009) Immunity to Change | Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). Flow: The psychology of optimal experience. NewYork: Harper & Row. | Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2009). Immunity to Change. Harvard Business Review Press. | Ericsson, A., Pool, R., (2016). Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise.