

GROWTH STRATEGIES

Are You a Goal-Getter?

7 steps to achieving your goals

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I recently overheard someone reply, when asked about her holiday weekend, "It was successful. My New Year's resolution is to overeat on every major holiday. I figure I'm going to do it anyway; why not make it a goal I can actually keep?" I had to laugh. It made me think about the goals we create in our lives and in our businesses.

Many fall into one of two major categories. The first category is goals we set that we have a 95 percent chance of accomplishing--mostly because we have done it before, so the likelihood is high that we'll succeed. (Our overeater above almost didn't pig out because she was feeling poorly. But she pulled herself together and gorged.) The other category is goals where there is a 95 percent degree of uncertainty that we'll accomplish them, and we have never done it before, but we would like to. There are benefits to both kinds of goals.

You might think the first kind of goal is for slackers, but there is some value in setting goals that you're confident you'll achieve. Using that confidence as a springboard for trying new things can be a useful thing--kind of like doing the perfect swan dive as a warm-up for an Olympic-caliber diver. The problem is if you stop at those, you don't get to really compete with the big dogs.

Let's dive into the second kind of goal--the uncertain one.

Goal-setting has been written about every which way. This article is a little bit about setting, but more about accomplishing the goal. The kind of goals you set is certainly important, but for the sake of brevity, I'm going to assume you're setting an uncertain goal that has some reasonable chance of success. The human brain is set up to help you achieve goals that you sincerely believe are achievable. If you want to stretch yourself or your business to new heights, here are my thoughts on goal-setting and goal-getting.

1. **Dream, but be motivated.**

It's OK to dream and have big goals. But if you're actually going to accomplish them, you have to DO something about them, and that takes motivation. The very first thing you need to achieve a goal is a reason and deep desire to achieve it. The path to achieving goals is fraught with boredom, excuses and difficulty. You will have a lot of opportunities to talk yourself out of the goal. But if you can keep going back to the reason and your desire for the goal, those will help you stay on track.

2. **Break it down into 24-hour bites.**

The brain has a built in B.S. monitor that rings out when all you do is set an enormous goal but then don't manage it to 24-hour cycles--daily mini goals. If your goal is to shed 50 pounds, your brain doesn't see you 50 pounds lighter in 24 hours, but it can see you five ounces lighter in that time. Set your goals so that your B.S. alarm doesn't go off. To prevent that alarm bell, the mini goal must be reasonable and sustainable. Losing one pound in a day is doable, but it's not reasonable or sustainable, so the B.S. sentinel will scream its head off, and you'll eventually stop going after your big goal.

3. **Do something daily.**

Nothing replaces repetition and creating momentum like doing something to get you closer to your goal every day. You will naturally take some time off, but if you don't take seriously the first 30 days of

work on the goal and use them to create momentum, it's almost guaranteed you won't get there. The first 30 days are critical to convincing your B.S. monitor that you're serious. Organizationally, it convinces colleagues you're serious.

4. **Adapt and adjust.**

As you work on your daily mini goals and toward the bigger goal, be willing to adapt. Make the mini goals more difficult if they seem too easy. Make them easier if they become too taxing. The main thing is that if your brain deems the mini goal to be too difficult, you'll quit. If it's too easy, you're running in place. Find the middle so you have advancement each day.

5. **Feedback and reward.**

The human brain responds to two things to learn and attain new behaviors and knowledge: feedback and reward. As you go about your goal-getting, be brave enough to request feedback from others, and then reward yourself each day for accomplishing your little goals. Research has shown that even keeping a calendar where you put a little gold star on the days you are successful (a la kindergarten) can be effective positive reinforcement. The visual is enough reward for the brain to know it's doing something right.

6. **Schedule slop time.**

When I was a television news producer, the worst thing you could do going into a newscast is be so tightly scheduled that there was no room for error. Every newscast was filled with anchors reading more slowly than you counted on, reports going longer than they were supposed to and other time-gobblers. The good producers always included "slop time" in their show. They would leave one to two minutes of unscheduled time to be stolen by the gobblers. You should do the same with your goals. Schedule time when you're not focused on your goal, when you get to cheat on it or not do it at all. You're going to do it anyway, so you might

as well allow yourself the room to be human so you don't feel dejected by temporarily ignoring your goal. Just don't make it a habit.

7. **Know you're going to get bored.**

Doing something in small pieces each day can lead to boredom. Do it anyway. Achieving goals isn't always about a daily cork-popping ceremony to celebrate something sensational you did. It's usually about sticking to the daily, boring small stuff. Get that right, make it slightly more difficult each day, and do it again and again. People who achieve their goals usually do it because they kept going when it gets tough and boring.

There is no secret formula to success. Sure, luck comes into play, but it's foolhardy to count on that. Mostly, it's having a direction and place you want to get to and then showing up for the daily grind. Hopefully, it's not about overeating. Go get 'em.