

John Sifferman's Goal-Setting Simplified

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Introduction

Make everything as simple as possible, but no simpler. Albert Einstein

You have it within yourself to fully realize your life dreams if they meet two distinct criteria. First, they must be physically or otherwise materially achievable. Second, and more importantly, you must believe that you can achieve those things. If you believe it's possible, and it actually is physically possible, then you can get exactly what you want in life again and again.

Goal-setting and other success-related programs usually involve complicated and time-consuming protocols for a process as simple as identifying exactly what you want. Goal-setting doesn't need to be a complicated subject, and the truth is that the simpler your goals are, the better off you'll be in achieving them. Of course, it's important to understand not only how to create effective goals, but also why we need them. If you take the time to consider why you're creating a goal in the first place, and make it a point to create a suitable goal based on your needs, then you'll have mastered a significant skill for the pursuit of success.

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. – Leonardo Da Vinci

Here are the most basic components of any effective goal:

1. The goal must identify exactly WHAT outcome you're trying to accomplish
2. The goal must identify exactly WHEN that outcome must be accomplished

If you burn away everything that is unnecessary, and boil practically any goal setting program to its most basic form, those two elements are what you'll have left: WHAT and WHEN. So, it makes me think twice when I see what appears to be an encyclopedia-like volume of information about goal setting when it's really quite a simple process – one that you're going to internalize very soon.

How to Set Clear and Compelling Goals That Will Drive You Towards Your Desires Through Diligent and Consistent Action

The most important thing you could possibly do to get started on a rigorous goal-setting program is to establish precisely what you want. This is also the same exact thing that so many unsuccessful people never do. It's the success step that almost everyone skips. If you clearly define what it is you are seeking, then you'll provide direction for every single decision to get there. If you fail to provide yourself with direction, then you probably won't reach your goals, whatever they are.

Most of us have a general idea about what we would like to achieve, but a vague idea isn't going to be definitive enough to serve as a true goal. It's not enough to set goals like "I want to lose weight," or "I want to make more money."

Those goals are vague and generic and most importantly, they lack *feeling*. Would you be happy if you lost one pound or were given one dollar? With those goals, losing one pound and being given one dollar would be a complete success because you "lost weight" and "made more money." However, it's probably not exactly what you were hoping to achieve.

You need to know what you're trying to achieve so that you'll know when you've reached that goal. All success is dependent on this crucial first step.

A note on writing goals down on paper – Thinking about your goals is one thing, and the more you think about them, the more likely you are to achieve them. However, you'll be much better off if you take the time to write your goals down on paper. Hand-written is best, but printing a typewritten document is fine, too.

Studies have shown that those people whom write down their goals on paper have a much higher chance of actually achieving them. This is not just a coincidence. No doubt, this is because goals that are written down are more easily remembered, internalized, and seen throughout your daily life. Writing down your goals has a way of solidifying them in your mind. It's a self-assuring method of telling yourself that these things are important – they stand apart from the rest of the things we want.

If you haven't already, take out a pen and paper to work through this report step-by-step. By the end, you should have your goal(s) clearly identified.

How to Set Goals

Your initial goals should have a few qualities. They should be specific, measurable, and each one should have a deadline.

Goals Must Be Specific: This is the most important quality of any goal. Your goals must identify EXACTLY what it is that you're trying to achieve.

So, if we're using a weight loss goal as an example: instead of writing "I want to lose weight," you should write something like "I want to lose body fat with no loss in lean muscle tissue."

Do you see the difference? Weight loss could mean losing fat, muscle, or even water weight. Of course, most people want to specifically target body fat when they desire weight loss, but it's important to distinguish this when establishing a specific goal.

Goals Must Be Measurable: This is another essential quality of every goal. If it can't be measured, then you won't know if you're making progress or not. Make sure that your goal can be measured so that your progress can be tracked.

Now, to be even more specific and to provide a frame of reference to measure progress, you could write "I want to lose 20 lbs and 8% body fat with no loss in lean muscle tissue."

Progress towards this goal can be measured and tracked using a scale and body fat testing.

Goals Must Have Deadlines: Having a deadline gives you an incentive to take action. There's something about knowing exactly how much time you have left to complete a task that gets us into gear. In all your goals, set a well-thought out deadline. Give yourself just enough time to complete the task, and not too much time.

So, now our goal would look something like this: "I want to lose 20 lbs and 8% bodyfat with no loss in lean muscle tissue by June 1."

Note: Something my friend, Tom Venuto, is fond of saying is "Write your goals in ink, but write your deadline in pencil." What he means is that you should never give up on your goals – they should be a definite and permanent pursuit in your life. In the same breath, write your deadline in pencil to be flexible for if you don't achieve it in time. It's better to keep working towards a goal that you're running late on, rather than giving up entirely.

Summary

Believe it or not, those three elements form the foundation of any effective goal. Each time you come up with a goal, ask yourself the following three questions:

Is it specific, and could it be more specific?

Is it measurable to enable the tracking of progress?

Is there a deadline that establishes a realistic time-frame for accomplishment?

If you factor in all three of the above criteria, then you have successfully created an effective goal. This is the most basic form of goal-setting that ensures you receive the utmost in clarity of your intentions.

People with goals succeed because they know where they are going. It's as simple as that. - Earl Nightingale

Beyond the Basics

It's true that you could apply the above strategy all by itself and be completely prepared for achieving your goals again and again. But of course, there's a lot more we can do to make our goals more effective. Volumes have been written on the subject, and I've only included what I believe to be the most valuable and relevant points to consider.

The Best Goals Are Believable: I touched on this in the introduction. Your goals should be realistically attainable, but most importantly, your goals must be believable. You must believe that you can achieve them. If you set a goal that you don't think you can achieve, then you'll struggle to get motivated to pursue it. This is why the SMART goals formula indicates that goals must be Attainable and Realistic.

It would be unwise to set a goal like "I want to lose 15 lbs of pure bodyfat and gain 5 lbs of muscle by next Sunday."

Instead, set a goal that challenges your perception of what is possible, but not too much to make you believe it's impossible. A good goal should have you feeling empowered, but also a little uncomfortable with how much time you have to achieve it.

So, your goal could be written like this: "I want to lose 2 lbs of scale weight, and ½-1% bodyfat every week for 12 weeks."

This is a much more attainable and realistic goal, and consequently, it's much more believable. A well-written goal should leave you feeling confident that you can succeed.

The Best Goals Are Reverse-Engineered to Include Checkpoints: One of the best things you can do is reverse-engineer your goals to ensure that your daily action steps will result in a timely accomplishment. Having a deadline is crucial to achieving your goals, but checkpoints provide perspective concerning how much progress you've made. There are many ways to do this, and here's one example:

- Annual Goals – Think of these like your ultimate long-term goals, or perhaps significant stepping stones to your ultimate goals. Dream big, but be realistic for your 1 year goals.
- Quarterly goals – With most goals, you can experience major results in as little as 12 weeks. This is a goal that should provide some perspective about whether you're on track for your 1 year goal.
- Monthly checkpoints – These are more of a milestone used to ensure you stay on track for your quarterly goals.
- Weekly checkpoints – Doing a weekly check-up to ensure that your daily actions are in line and producing the desired results from week-to-week is one of the best ways to stay on track.
- Daily goals – These are action steps that you must perform in order to successfully achieve your long-term goal. These are not outcome based goals (such as losing X amount of pounds), but process centered goals (such as going to the gym, preparing meals, etc.). Daily action steps are where the rubber meets the road, and will make or break your progress.

It is not enough to take steps which may some day lead to a goal; each step must be itself a goal and a step likewise. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Best Goals Are Definite in Intention, Yet Flexible in Scope or Timing: At first, this may sound like a contradiction, but it's important to allow flexibility in your goal setting. Sometimes, we set goals that are perfectly reasonable, but the time frame we establish isn't perfect. Maybe you end up having more or less time than you need to achieve your goal. This is absolutely fine – the important thing is not that you have a perfectly planned deadline, but that you follow through towards your goal, regardless of when the deadline is.

If you achieve your goal early, then congratulate yourself for the success and move on to your next goal. If you fall short and don't meet your goal by the deadline, just establish a new deadline that is based on your real time progress (instead of your perceived/guessed rate of progress).

A good tip is to allow for some flexibility within your written goal itself. Including a phrase such as "...this, or something better," is a great idea to make your goal even more specific.

Here are some examples of the “this, or something better strategy” – note the italics:

I want to lose *at least* 20 pounds of scale weight and 8% bodyfat by June 1.

I want to run the local Spring 5k road race in 20 minutes *or less*.

I want to make *more than* \$1000/month above my current salary by the end of next year.

I want to own a 1000cc Honda motorcycle by June 1st - *this, or something better*.

The Best Goals Are Emotionally-Driven: An effective goal gives you laser-focused direction for exactly what you’re trying to achieve, but even the most specific goal can be uninspiring or even downright boring. An emotionally-driven goal, on the other hand, will produce the inspiration that drives you to take action on it each day. When writing your goals down, try to include some personal reasons why you absolutely must achieve them, and make sure that your goals are completely aligned with your values.

It can help to ask yourself some questions about your goal in order to tap into the emotional reasons why you truly want to achieve them. Try asking yourself:

Why is this goal important to me?

How will I feel after I’ve accomplished this goal?

What will my life be like once I’ve achieved this goal?

What will my life be like if I do NOT achieve this goal?

Tapping into your positive and negative emotions will help propel you towards your goals even faster. Make sure you’re harnessing this power.

The Best Goals Are Reviewed Often: The number one reason why most people don’t achieve their goals is because they forget about them. We tend to get very excited about pursuing some goals because some life event sparked a reminder about them. So, we go to the trouble to write all our goals out, and sooner or later, we forget to keep pursuing them.

There are a lot of ways to ensure that you review your goals often. One of the best is to write your goals down on a 3x5 card that you can carry with you everywhere you go. Even better, put it in your wallet, so that every time you pay for something, you see that little reminder about what’s truly important to you.

Some other ways to keep your goals at the front of your mind are:

- Write them down on your mirror
- Post sticky-notes around your home or office
- Setup a goals board where you’ll see it every day – on the refrigerator or behind your desk, etc.

Goals that are written down once are sometimes forgotten. Be pro-active about reminding yourself about your goals until it becomes a daily habit. Even better, establish a morning or night-time habit of reviewing all of your goals at once – even if it only takes a minute or two.

“If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else.”
- Yogi Berra

Final Thoughts

Goal-setting is an essential component in any successful endeavor, but it is only the first step. You need to follow that goal setting with a plan of action that will lead to the results you seek, and then you actually need to do the work. Good luck and know that you are now equipped with the knowledge to create the clarity necessary to successfully pursue your goals and dreams.

[Click Here to Read More About Goal Achievement in John's Article "Success is a Skill."](#)

About The Author: John Sifferman is a health-first fitness coach based out of New England. He's the creator of <http://PhysicalLiving.com>, where he teaches about health, fitness, success, and physical culture to his readers around the world.