



Goal Setting

A comprehensive guide to Goal setting: tips and answers to frequently asked questions related to getting the best results possible from your goal-setting.

Summary of contents

1. Setting Good Goals
2. Staying on Track
3. Getting the Most from using Goals
4. Other tips

george james knowledge base

During the course of our business we have produced and continue to produce tip sheets and training notes which we make freely available for download and distribution from the **george james knowledge base**. These documents cover all areas of our services; Recruitment, Sales Training, Corporate Development, Performance Coaching, HR Services, and Interim Management & Non-Exec Directorships. In addition guest articles are added providing useful tips and ideas on areas not covered by george james ltd. For a full listing please go to www.georgejamesltd.co.uk

We hope that you find this document interesting and are able to put it to good use. If you wish to discuss any of the points raised please contact us. Should you wish to reproduce part or all of this download in your own material please contact us for permission.

Document ref: GJKB0016

Goal Setting

Whether you are new to goal-setting or you have been writing goals for years here are some tips and answers to frequently asked questions related to getting the best results possible from your goal-setting.

1. Setting Good Goals:

- What makes a good goal?
- Should my goals be short-term or long-term?
- Should my goals be lofty or practical?
- How do I know if a goal is realistic?
- How many goals should I have at the same time?
- What if my goals conflict with each other?
- How should I prioritise my goals?
- In how many categories should I set goals?
- I have an idea for a goal, but I'm not sure where to begin.
- When should I adopt a pre-made Goal Plan versus create my own?
- What if I can't find a pre-made Goal Plan that suits me?
- Do I need a reason for having a goal?

2. Staying on Track:

- What else can I do to accomplish my goal?
- What if I get discouraged?
- What if I can't complete a goal?
- What if my goals change?
- How do I deal with fear of failure?
- How do I deal with actual failure?
- What if a new obstacle comes up?
- What if my goals depend on other people or things out of my control?
- How do I stay focused and on track?
- How do I avoid procrastination?
- What if I miss a deadline?
- What if I get stuck on a task?

3. Getting the Most from using goals:

- I was taught goals must always have a due date; what is an "on-going" goal?
- What do I do when I accomplish a goal?
- Why do I have to list a goal's obstacles?
- How frequently should I opt to receive reminders?
- What are "random" reminders used for?
- When is a task a "milestone"?
- How should I use the "notes" fields in a Goal Plan?
- When should I use a "recurring" task?

4. Other Tips:

- Should I keep my goals private?
- What if there is an unsupportive person in my life?
- How do I get others (family and friends, etc.) to set goals?
- "Obstacles" sounds negative. Can't I use a different term like "challenges" or "opportunities"?

1. Setting Good Goals

Whether this is your first experience with setting goals or you've been setting them all of your life, here are some helpful suggestions and ideas.

What makes a good goal?

Traditional goal-setting wisdom has taught us that a good goal must be a) written, b) challenging, c) believable, d) specific, e) measurable, and f) have a specific deadline. Unfortunately, it's not too difficult to think of an example that directly challenges any of the above goal-setting criteria. For instance, the goal "to live a more spiritual life" may be a valuable, meaningful goal for many, but it's hardly measurable and assigning a deadline makes little sense for a permanent alteration of lifestyle.

This traditional checklist of things that "make a good goal" is largely a product of old technology: pen and paper. The old-school of goal-setting suggested that people write down goals on a small slip of paper and keep it in their wallet or purse. Suffice to say that slips of paper rapidly dissolve into lint. Today we have email.

So what makes a good goal? All of the above criteria are still good components of most goals. A good goal is one that is worthy of individual pursuit. And that is so highly subjective.

A different question is, "What makes a good Goal Plan?" On this, our position is precise: A good Goal Plan is one that when followed, offers a reasonably high probability of success, given sufficient time.

Let's take each of the traditional points one-at-a-time:

Must all goals be written?

It's important to record your goals, whether you enter them into a spreadsheet or physically write them down on paper. The problem with the paper method is that hand-written goals are difficult to update and manage and, of course, hand-written goals provide none of the additional features that are made possible by the Web.

Must all goals be believable?

You must believe that it is at least possible for you to achieve the goal or you will not be motivated to try. More importantly, it is you who must believe, not others (see what to do about "negative people"). Also, just because you should believe that the goal is possible does not mean that you must expect it to be easy or even probable. Indeed, some argue that completion of only the most difficult goals will have enduring value to you. Similarly, some of history's greatest moments were the result of people attempting the "impossible," such as flying or putting a man on the moon. See more about setting "realistic" goals.

Must all goals be challenging?

No. We recommend setting at least one easy goal and at least one challenging goal. You could have several of each but you should limit the number of challenging goals or tasks coming due at any one time to avoid becoming overwhelmed or frustrated. The easy goals build good habits of follow-through and reward you with quick gratification. The challenging goals force you to grow. A mix of the two is ideal.

Must all goals be measurable and specific?

Your goals should be measurable and specific enough for you to know unambiguously whether they have been completed yet or not. However, to save space on the computer screen, abbreviated goal titles such as "to reduce my stress" might be more convenient than titles such as "to reduce my stress by practicing yoga three nights a week and lowering my blood pressure by 10 points." Instead, make individual tasks measurable and specific as much as possible, even if the details must be written in the task's "notes" area.

Must all goals have deadlines?

Here's the big shocker: Goals no longer have to have a deadline! Technology has allowed us to expand the definition of what a goal can be to include a direction, commitment, or lifestyle enhancement as opposed to a mere end-point. Why, for instance, would you want to end a goal, "to keep myself in excellent physical condition" or "to be an honest and trustworthy person"? Such goals should have no end-date, and now they don't have to. This concept may sound revolutionary to long-time power goal-setters. It is revolutionary. Try it.

Should my goals be short-term or long-term?

We recommend that you always have at least one short-term and one long-term goal at any given time. Short-term goals are usually simpler and easier than long-term. Setting them helps assure that you'll have frequent victories, building a strong track record and momentum with each one you complete.

Long-term goals (two years or longer) keep you headed in the right direction and can provide a sense of greater purpose, not to mention something exciting to work toward. It's okay to change goals as you go.

With long-term goals, it's important not to focus on the goal so much that you lose sight of the underlying reason you set the goal in the first place. The world changes and so can you. While follow-through and persistence are among the most important traits related to long-term accomplishment, so is the ability to re-assess along the way. So long as you are honest with yourself, it's okay to change your mind, change goals mid-stream, shelve one for a later day, or cancel one altogether. Again, the trick is to be honest with yourself and not change your mind so frequently that you never accomplish anything. (See also "What if my goals change?")

Should my goals be lofty or practical?

Only you can decide what is "lofty" or "practical" and how many goals of either flavour you'd like to set. Indeed, one person's lofty might be another's practical, and vice-versa. This service is here to help you accomplish anything you set out to do, from painting the house to reforming public education. Success stories that are newsworthy and inspiring are excellent but these can't be done without also taking care of the simpler items on life's to-do list.

But assuming you've covered your bases and been mindful of the balanced whole, and if you've got the energy and passion to apply to something beyond the ordinary, then—by all means—reach for the stars!

Along these same lines, be sure to also see:

- Must all goals be challenging?
- Must all goals be believable?
- How do I know if a goal is realistic?

With lofty goals, pay extra attention to with whom you're willing to discuss your goals, particularly when you first begin and have no demonstrable milestones achieved. The old adage, "show, don't tell," exists because "negative people" are quick to label lofty goal-setters as fools or dreamers, and deeds shut them up faster than promises. Your personal support group of family and friends (at least, those whom you trust to be supportive) is an exception. Use them as a resource whenever appropriate.

For more on dealing with "negative people" refer to "Should I keep my goals private?"

How do I know if a goal is realistic?

A goal is realistic if you stand reasonably good odds of accomplishing it, given enough time and effort—and indeed, mountains can be moved if given enough time and effort. "Good odds" is a subjective measure, but one that you have most control over when success or failure depends on what you do, as opposed to what other people do or random events (such as goals "to become an astronaut" or "to win the lottery").

The majority of the goals you set should be very realistic or you risk becoming frustrated if you do not accomplish any of them. However, there is nothing wrong with attempting things that defy the odds or that you expect to be extremely difficult. Such goals require courage, defined here as "attempting something even though you might not succeed."

Almost any goal, no matter how difficult, can be made easier by breaking it down into several smaller goals to be tackled one at a time. The completion of so-called "baby steps" is one of the best ways to build confidence, momentum and a track record of performance.

And finally, when you create or update a Goal Plan, ask yourself, "Will completing these steps lead to completion of the goal?" If not, then modify the obstacles, tasks, or due dates until a viable plan exists.

How many goals should I have at the same time?

You can set many goals without worrying about spreading yourself too thinly because we make a distinction between "setting" a goal and "working on" a goal. These are not necessarily the same thing because you can set goals that do not begin until some future date, even years from now. The idea is that you should be thinking of goals you'd like to shoot for in the future even if you are focused on other things going on in your life right now. How many goals can I set?

A goal is "set" when you create a Goal Plan, even if you only create a partial plan with the intention of filling in the details later. In fact, you might just write down the name of the goal, for no other reason than to remind you that's it's something you'd like to do later. (You can always edit any of your Goal Plans at any later date.)

How many goals can I "work on" at the same time?

Here, "working on" refers to goals that have begun—meaning the start date you entered has passed. For instance, you might have a goal to run a marathon next year but you might not intend to begin working on this goal (training, etc.) until six months from now. So you would set the start date to occur in six months. So for six months, nothing happens but you'll see the goal every time you visit, thereby being reminded that this goal exists on the horizon. Only after the start date elapses would the Goal Plan become active, sending you task reminders related to that goal.

While there is no technical limit to how many goals you can be working on simultaneously it

would be easy to overload yourself with too many goals-in-progress. You only have so many hours in a day and so many things you can adequately address at a given time.

The recommendation is that you limit the number of goals you're working on to some manageable number, which for most people will be somewhere between 5 and 10 goals, depending on a few common-sense factors:

How focused can you be?

If you've got a lot going on in your life right now, little spare time, or if you really need to focus intently on a small number of important things, then don't attempt to take on too many goals at once. It's better to keep your number of goals down to a manageable amount so that you can actually accomplish a few of them now and then (which is much more fun than having many goals that rarely ever get accomplished).

With that said, also be mindful of the importance of balance. Even if you are very focused on one important goal, don't forget the other important things such as your health or personal relationships.

See also:

What if my goals conflict with each other?
How should I prioritise my goals?
How difficult are your goals?

Some goals are as simple as "To clean my desk." Others more complex like "To sell my company." (We suggest you use it for both challenging and easy goals, at least one of each.) The simpler your goals are, the more goals you can be working on simultaneously without causing problems. You might be able to handle twenty "clean my desk"-type goals simultaneously but only one or two "sell my company"-type goals.

Are your goals short-term or long-term?

It is recommended set both short-term and long-term goals (at least one of each). Keep in mind however, that the more short-term goals you have, the more tasks you're likely to have coming due soon. To avoid having too many tasks come due at the same time, you might want to have fewer goals if they are mostly short-term goals.

What if my goals conflict with each other?

Almost all goals require some of your resources: time, money, effort, attention, and so on. Because these resources are limited, goals can often appear to be at odds with one another—working on one can mean slipping on the other.

Good management of your goals as a group is important for avoiding frustration:

Stay focused. Don't set too many goals to come due at the same time. A large number of goals (7+) is okay if the goals are small or simple (such as a goal to shampoo the carpet) but be realistic and don't expect to build a business while studying for a law degree, while training for a triathlon, while raising a family.

Always have at least one simple goal and one difficult goal at any given time. The simple goals motivate you as you accomplish them rapidly. The difficult goals keep you challenged and growing.

Always have at least one short-term and one long-term goal at any given time. As with simple goals, short-term goals help assure that you'll have frequent victories. Long-term goals (two years or longer) keep you headed in the right direction.

Prioritise but be flexible. Decide which of your goals (and tasks) are most important and assign your due dates accordingly. Be willing to change due dates or even put a goal on hold for a while if necessary.

Spread out your due dates. Avoid setting a large number of difficult goals with tasks due at the same time.

Look for ways to combine goals and tasks. For instance, if you have a goal to take a vacation and a goal to become a better photographer, consider taking a travel photography class that spends a week in the wilderness snapping pictures.

Most of all, strive for balance. Make sure to set goals (whether easy or hard) across different areas of your life: health, finance, family, relations, learning, experiencing, career, etc. For instance, don't set ten career goals but then neglect your health, friends, and family.

How should I prioritise my goals?

Don't ask "What's more important?"

Instead, ask "What am I going to focus on right now?"

Prioritising goals can be confusing if you think in terms of "which is more important?" The reason is that, over the long term, all of your goals are probably important, or they wouldn't be goals. So asking which is more important is like asking whether it's more important to breathe or eat—at this moment breathing is more important. But eventually, all the air in the world won't matter if you don't get some food.

We therefore suggest you abandon the notion of prioritising by "importance." Instead, we think in terms of timing: "which will I focus on more right now?" Even when one goal is clearly more important than another, timing will sometimes dictate that the less important goal takes precedence at this time. For example, just because health and family might be one person's most important priorities in life, that doesn't mean that working late might not occasionally be the most intelligent use of an evening, even if it precludes being home for dinner or going to the gym.

So assume that all the Goal Plans you've created or adopted are essentially of equal importance, over the long run at least. Don't worry if, in fact, one goal is truly more important. The point is not to prioritise the goal, but to prioritise what you're going to do right now.

On any given day, or week, you can choose to focus on some goals more than others. The goal that receives the most attention probably will change frequently. This flexible approach is very workable if you don't set too many goals or tasks to come due at the same time.

Someone might ask which goal is more important:

"To strengthen my relationship with my spouse"
or
"To earn a promotion at work"

Both of these may be very important but, clearly, one may need more attention at any given time. This flexibility allows you to have fun and set many diverse goals (travel, savings,

relationships, and health, for instance), keep track of them, focusing on certain ones now and shifting focus to others as needed—without having to make an artificial decision about their order of importance. You can even set a very long range goal with a start date that doesn't even begin for several years but at least it will be there to look at whenever you are reviewing your goals and thinking about the future.

Some people definitely prefer to work on their goals one-at-a-time, which is fine. Most, however, opt to adjust the date settings of each goal (and its associated tasks) to manage multiple goals simultaneously, directing attention and efforts as changing circumstances dictate.

In how many categories should I set goals?

The number of categories in which you should set goals depends on your particular situation. How well-balanced is your life right now? What are your priorities? How busy are you? Are you already strong in some areas but weak in others? Answers to questions like these will give you a sense of where to focus your efforts.

In general, expect to focus on a few goals in more than one category at a time, as opposed to 10 goals in one category or 1 goal in each of 10 categories. It's okay to set lots of goals in multiple categories—especially long-term goals that you may not begin working on right now. Be realistic about how many you can effectively pursue in a given time frame. (See also "How should I prioritise my goals?".)

I have an idea for a goal, but I'm not sure where to begin.

First, be sure to read "What makes a good goal?" The next step is to create your own Goal Plan from scratch or adopt a pre-made Goal Plan that is similar to the goal you have in mind.

You'll find that creating a Goal Plan from scratch is very easy. Consider reading one of the pre-made Goal Plans to get an idea of how they are structured and then begin building your own. You'll be walked through the process step-by-step. Don't worry about making it perfect.

If you choose to adopt a pre-made Goal Plan, all you have to do is modify it to suit your circumstances by adding, deleting, and changing obstacles and tasks, and by setting dates. Our pre-made Goal Plans also provide helpful details and recommended resources to assist you.

When should I adopt a pre-made Goal Plan versus create my own?

The pre-made Goal Plans are designed to give you a template from which to start. Look at some of them to see examples of typical obstacles and tasks. If you adopt a pre-made plan, expect to edit it to suit your situation by adding, deleting, and changing obstacles, tasks and due dates. A pre-made Goal Plan also provides helpful details and recommended resources to assist you in your goal pursuit.

Pre-made Goal Plans do not exist for every category, nor can they be written for many uniquely personal goals. You'll create more personalised Goal Plans yourself by significantly modifying a related pre-made Goal Plan or creating your own Goal Plan from scratch using our simple step-by-step process.

Whether you modify a pre-made Goal Plan or create one from scratch, the more you tailor it to your situation, the more effective it will be for you. Spend time thinking through the obstacles and tasks that apply to you. You will learn about yourself in the process and dramatically increase your ability to accomplish the goal.

What if I can't find a pre-made Goal Plan that suits me?

You have two options if you can't find the pre-made Goal Plan you're looking for.

First, if you find a pre-made Goal Plan that is similar, then you can use that as a starting point. Once you've adopted a pre-made Goal Plan you can normally edit it, including re-naming, adding, and removing any element. So, for instance, if you have a goal to pay off your student loans, you might begin with our pre-made Goal Plan titled "To Pay Off My Debt" and then modify it to apply only to "student loans".

If you can't find a similar pre-made Goal Plan, then you should create your own Goal Plan from scratch using our step-by-step process. It's a very simple and fun process for creating a comprehensive plan for accomplishing your goal.

If you set a lot of goals, most of them will be made from scratch.

Do I need a reason for having a goal?

You are likely to have a reason (or multiple reasons) for every goal you set, whether you realise it or not. It's worth knowing for certain what the reasons are, in order to clarify that you're pursuing the right goal for the right reason.

For example, suppose somebody has the goal, "to buy a bigger boat than my brother's."

Asking the question "why a bigger boat?" could shed light on the fact that this person is compelled to compete with and out-do his brother. If so, perhaps there are other issues to be addressed such as self-esteem and respect that owning a larger boat will not solve. Perhaps a more appropriate goal would be "to earn my brother's respect." Clearly, identifying the root obstacles and tasks required to accomplish such a goal could have a profound impact on this person's life that could not be achieved with a boat of any size.

On the other hand, perhaps the reason for a bigger boat is that our goal-setter always felt cramped on his brother's boat, and that it would be too small to live aboard for a week. If the goal is really to be able to take extended trips in a boat, then that might suggest yet a different type of goal.

In each case, honest evaluation of why you want to achieve the goal can lead to insights and personal discovery. Know what you are doing and know why you are doing it.

The more fully you understand why you want something, the more motivated you will be to keep working at it until you have accomplished it.

2. Staying on Track

What else can I do to accomplish my goal?

The most important step is to create a Goal Plan that can work:

- Break big pieces of the goal down into small steps.
- Be sure you've listed all the relevant obstacles and the tasks needed to overcome them.
- Assign dates realistically. Adjust them as necessary.
- Set your reminders to keep you on track. Reminders are defaulted to weekly emails but you can make them more or less frequent, or program them to notify you at specific times.
- Think of the Goal Plan as dynamic, intended to be changed as necessary. Add, rename, or delete obstacles and tasks as the situation warrants.
- Read the "notes" included in pre-made Goal Plans as they include many useful tips. Add your own notes as you work on any goal.

Some other tips:

- Solicit the encouragement of supportive family members and friends.
- Avoid the discussion of your goals with "negative people".
- Pre-made Goal Plans include expert content and recommended solutions for completing your tasks. Links to other resources are also provided to help you get there.
- Don't stop, even if you get side-tracked or discouraged. Just get back on track and keep plodding forward. The best way to ensure your success is simply to keep on going. The accumulation of many small steps equals significant progress and the further you go, the easier it gets.

What if I get discouraged?

If you feel discouraged, it's probably the result of not meeting one of your own expectations. Ask yourself, "Was the expectation realistic in the first place?" If not, you have no reason to feel discouraged. Simply create a new goal (or tasks) that you feel are realistic and keep on going.

But if you believe your expectations are realistic and you're just not making progress, you need to figure out why. Review your Goal Plan and ask yourself, "What obstacles are hindering my progress?" Have you identified all the obstacles? Have you listed appropriate tasks to overcome those obstacles? Are the dates assigned to those tasks realistic? Are you utilising the recommended resources and solutions? Are you just procrastinating? If so, why? Assess the circumstances and modify your Goal Plan—and actions—as necessary.

For more, see "What if I can't complete a goal?"

What if I can't complete a goal?

There are a number of good approaches to take if you find that you are having difficulty in completing one of your goals, particularly if you begin to doubt fundamentally whether the goal is achievable or worth the effort.

First, don't get discouraged.

It's worth noting that many of life's most difficult accomplishments are also some of the most worthwhile. And the most noteworthy accomplishments are, by definition, not common. That's because if something were easy, then everyone would be doing it and it would no longer be very noteworthy. Not only is there nothing wrong with taking on tough challenges, many believe there is something wrong with only taking on easy goals that require no real effort or growth.

Recognise partial accomplishment.

Partial accomplishment is still accomplishment. Suppose you're living a sedentary lifestyle and you set a goal to start running 10 miles every week. If you only manage to run eight miles most weeks, then it's important to recognise that this is a huge improvement over running none at all and that you have been much more successful than if you had never set the goal in the first place. Acknowledging partial success is very important if you intend to set challenging or lofty goals.

Break large, difficult goals into smaller, manageable goals.

Large, difficult, or complex goals can be both overwhelming and discouraging if progress does not come quickly. The solution to both of these is to break the big goal into smaller goals, actually creating a separate Goal Plan for each part. By shelving some of the pieces until a later date, you can avoid feeling overwhelmed or discouraged.

Use your personal support group.

When appropriate, call on trusted family and friends to help if they can, even if it just means lending encouragement (though be careful to avoid "negative people", who sometimes reside in the same house). Try to find people who've got first-hand experience doing what you're trying to do. Many people will give time and advice when they meet somebody else who's curious or passionate about whatever it is they're passionate about. Internalise the lesson of perseverance.

It is usually true that something, no matter how difficult, can be done if someone spends enough time trying to do it. If you think of any goal as requiring a finite number of steps (tasks), then each task completed is one step closer toward completion of the goal. Again, the key is often to break the steps down into what may seem to be absurdly simple tasks, but ones that you know you can complete, thereby making measurable progress and establishing forward momentum. Is it ever time to give up? You are the only one who can decide when enough is enough and that it's time to move on to something different. Unfortunately, many people give up too soon, and some even establish a tradition of completing 50% of many things but 100% of nothing. The power of perseverance is important.

However, we understand that goals change, as well as the underlying motivations for individual goals. And more importantly, we advocate and encourage balance (over the long-term, at least), meaning that an obsessive focus on one goal could eventually lead to unhealthy or destructive negligence of other aspects of one's life, such as the classic case in which career obsession leads to one's neglect of health or family obligations.

So in the interest of promoting healthy balance, we suggest that you frequently take stock of all of your goals, with an eye toward the balanced whole. If, at such a time, you decide that your emphasis needs to be shifted elsewhere for the time being, then consider rescheduling some of your goals (or tasks) for a later date. There is nothing wrong with such rescheduling.

What if my goals change?

The reality is, most people's goals do change over time. In fact, goals usually should change, at least slightly, in response to things that change around you or new life events. Think back to what was important to you five years ago, or even one year ago. Are the same goals still important to you today? Chances are, some of your short- and medium-term goals either have already been achieved, are no longer desirable, or need to be modified slightly. The Goal Plans you manage in are a direct reflection of where you are and where you're going in life. Change is part of the process, so accept it, and welcome it. (Just remember to update your Goal Plans!)

But be honest with yourself. Don't pretend to no longer care about a thing if, in fact, you've just been procrastinating and you really still do care. Remember, it is okay to put off working on a goal if you make a wilful, determined decision to do so for good reason, such as opting to focus on a different goal for the time-being, which allows you to change start and end dates of any of your goals, at any time.

How do I deal with fear of failure?

Fear of failure is a genuinely scary thing for many people, and often the reason that individuals do not attempt the things they would like to accomplish. But the only true failure is failure to make the attempt. If you don't try, you gain nothing, and life is too short a thing to waste.

On the other hand, if you do try but don't succeed, then it's a learning experience from which you are probably a better person, with more knowledge and skill than before—all the better equipped for the next attempt.

If you try and only partially succeed, you still had more success than you had before. For example, a man once had a goal to save \$1,000 by a certain date. On that date, he had only saved \$850. His friend told him he had failed but the friend was wrong because the man had \$850 more than he would have had if he hadn't set the goal in the first place. The world is not always black-and-white. Shades of gray often do exist and partial success is still success.

How do I deal with actual failure?

This is important: "Failure" only occurs when you fail to try in the first place or when you give up on a goal you want to achieve without having first given it your all. Missed deadlines are not failures. Setbacks are not failures. Unexpected challenges or changing priorities are not failures (in fact, they're quite normal). Feeling discouraged doesn't mean you failed. You can only fail if you quit, and there's an easy solution to that:

Keep going or start again.

So long as you are working toward your goal and following a plan, you haven't failed. If you stop, just start back up again. And remember, every step forward, every single task you check off as completed is a small accomplishment unto itself. Focus on just taking that next baby step, then the next, then the next. If the tasks are too difficult, then break them down into absurdly simple tasks, ones that you're guaranteed to complete. It may seem ridiculous to break down something as simple as cleaning a garage into forty individual tasks, but in doing so, you can build momentum with each task checked off. It's a bit like playing a game with yourself but it really works.

See also, "What if I can't complete a goal?"

What if a new obstacle comes up?

Expect unexpected obstacles to come up; when they do, add them to your Goal Plan and create a list of tasks to overcome that obstacle. Part of the skill in achieving goals is learning to deal with adversity, setbacks, and surprises. Be flexible and take them in your stride. Be willing to change your plan or change your timeline. Just don't abandon your goal if it's something you truly want.

What if my goals depend on other people or things out of my control?

If you choose to set a goal in which the outcome is dependent on the actions of somebody else, acknowledge now that, through no fault of your own, you may not reach that goal. For example, the goal "To toilet train my daughter by the end of the week" is largely dependent on your daughter's cooperation. That doesn't mean it's not a good or worthy goal, it simply requires a more flexible frame of mind—you can't force someone else to adhere to your plan.

Matters of chance or competition are similar. Winning a game, a pageant, or admission to a particularly selective school may be worthy of your efforts and a good goal. But again, accept that the outcome, though influenced by your actions, is not entirely in your control.

If you pursue one or more goals like this, be sure to set and pursue several other goals in which you are entirely in control of the outcome. Your life shouldn't be left too much to chance—take control of as much as you possibly can. Wherever possible, aim to accomplish tasks that tilt the odds in your favour.

How do I stay focused and on track?

First, accept personal responsibility for staying on track. It's not up to anyone else, just you. You alone decide what you want to accomplish, and when. Life has a way of distracting us from what we'd like to be doing much of the time, so use the reminders to help keep part of your attention on your short- and long-term goals.

Most importantly, don't ignore your Goal Plan reminders. If you fall behind, refocus your efforts, update your Goal Plan, change any deadlines that need to be changed, and keep at it. Take short and easy baby-steps if necessary, but keep on going. You'll keep getting closer and eventually you will get there.

How do I avoid procrastination?

As for procrastinating with respect to actually sitting down and setting your goals, the answer is simple, do it now. That's it; just do it now. Take some step, no matter how small. Do something right this moment while you are sitting at the computer, such as setting a goal (or even just starting a Goal Plan which you'll complete later) or setting a task. Simply stating your intentions in this way is a powerful first step. If you don't know what your goals are then set the following goal right now:

"To identify my goals and enter them into my plan within one week."

Don't worry if the goals you set aren't perfect. You can always change them later. The point is to do something right now. To avoid procrastination when working on tasks for a goal, make sure to schedule the time and place to get the tasks done. Then protect that appointment so nothing else interferes. Most people procrastinate as a result of not planning when to do the task. Use task reminders to keep you on track. Always read the reminders you receive and either complete the task at that time or reschedule for some time that makes more sense.

What if I miss a deadline?

First of all, don't worry. Life is complex and things beyond your control will come up. This includes not only unexpected problems, but unexpected opportunities as well. No matter how well you plan, you must remain flexible and able to adapt to your environment. It's okay to change dates as you go.

Recognise that most deadlines are self-imposed and act as a tool to empower and motivate yourself. They exist to help you complete a task, not to cause you stress or feelings of failure if you miss them. As you pursue a goal, task deadlines can be re-set as circumstances warrant. When a task is past-due, either:

- a) Complete the task and check it off, or
- b) Immediately reset the deadline to a new, realistic date and keep working on the task.

Don't let date slippage discourage your goal-setting outlook. If you miss a date for a task or a goal, simply re-assign it with a new realistic date. Don't sweat it, just keep moving forward.

What if I get stuck on a task?

First ask yourself whether the task is necessary. It is okay to delete a task if you do not feel it propels you forward to the completion of your goal.

Then ask "Is it realistic?" Can you do it? If not, consider modifying the task or seeking assistance. Don't assume you have to do it alone. Help exists in many forms. Consider speaking to subject matter experts such as instructors, advisors, coaches, tutors, supervisors, or anyone who has successfully dealt with a similar task before. Knowledge can be found in online resources, books, audiocassette programs, publications, CD-ROM software and distance learning programs. Encouragement can be found in your friends and family, co-workers, and other people who share the same goal.

If a task seems too big to handle, ask yourself what obstacles are preventing you from completing the task. Consider breaking the task into smaller, more manageable pieces—even to the point where they seem absurdly simple. You might even consider converting the task into an entire Goal Plan of its own. For instance, if your goal is to sell your home and if doing so requires landscaping the yard first, then create a new Goal Plan, "to landscape the yard," rather than merely trying to complete it as a task in your Goal Plan titled "to sell my house."

Next, consider whether the obstacle can ultimately be overcome some other way, using an entirely different strategy that would require completely different tasks.

Finally, be persistent. There is little that can't be done when a person continues trying.

3. Getting the Most from Using Goals

I was taught that goals must always have a due date; what is an "on-going" goal?

See above: "Must All Goals Have Deadlines?"

What do I do when I accomplish a goal?

First, congratulate yourself! The achievement of any goal, large or small, is a noteworthy accomplishment. Share the news with your family and friends, especially those who have been supporting your efforts. Include them in your success, and be sure to acknowledge their contributions, no matter how small. If you've attached a reward (such as buying something for yourself if you reach the goal on time), this is the time to enjoy.

Some people use the excitement and momentum of the moment to immediately set a new goal.

Why do I have to list a goal's obstacles?

You should not refer to obstacles as "challenges," "opportunities," or other feel-good euphemisms. The word "obstacle" is not negative, it's neutral. It is simply something that stands between where you are and where you want to be. Once you remove the obstacles, there's nothing left to do but cross the finish line.

How frequently should I opt to receive reminders?

For any given task, you can elect to receive one or more reminders for that task, at any interval you like. You can have reminders sent to you:

- One time only (on a specific date)
- Any selection of days each week (such as Tuesdays and Thursdays of every week)
- Any selection of dates each month (such as the 1st and 15th of each month)
- Some number of days prior to the task's due date
- Randomly (see details below)
- No reminder

The interesting thing is that, other than the "prior to due date" option, these reminders need not necessarily coincide with when your tasks are due. That is, the settings are designed to allow you to be reminded at any time about a particular task, such as when you plan to be working on the task.

You might also use reminders just to keep the task or goal in mind even if you don't intend to focus on that task or goal until much later. So for instance, you may have a long-term goal to do something several years from now. And even though you may not be able to focus on that goal right now (perhaps you're still in school or busy raising a family), you can use the reminders to keep that goal ever-present in your thoughts and plans, such as by opting to receive a random reminder—say, several times per year—to read a related book or browse the Web for the latest trends or information related to that long-term goal.

What are "random" reminders used for?

As the old joke goes, "spontaneity has its time and place." It turns out that the joke is completely true. There are certain things—life's important moments akin to stopping to smell

the roses—that can and should be done periodically, but not necessarily according to any specific calendar event.

You may set task reminders to intervals of:

- Randomly sent a few times per week
- Randomly sent a few times per month
- Randomly sent a few times per year

These are particularly helpful in reminding you to perform a recurring task "spontaneously," such as:

- Task: "Compliment my assistant on something done well"
- Task: "Call my parents"
- Task: "Take my kids out for ice cream"
- Task: "Take the afternoon off and play a round of golf"

When is a task a "milestone"?

Completion of certain tasks represents significant progress toward achieving a goal. These important tasks, called "milestones," are noteworthy or perhaps even newsworthy to your family and friends.

Each milestone you reach is a major, tangible step closer to your goal. It has special meaning as a measure of success, even though the complete goal has not yet been fully realised.

How should I use the "notes" fields in a Goal Plan?

The "notes" fields in a pre-made Goal Plan are often filled with helpful explanations, recommended resources, tips and suggestions regarding the task. In Goal Plans you create yourself, use the notes field in a similar way, inserting links to other web pages, phone numbers, research notes, or anything you think of that is related to that particular task that you might want to recall later.

When should I use a "recurring" task?

Most tasks are completed once, checked-off, and done-forever. A recurring task, however, is a different kind of task that you intend to repeat over and over. For example:

Recurring Task	Reminder
Go to the gym	Mon, Wed, Fri
Pay bills	1st and 15th of each month
Change oil in car	Every 90 days
Buy spouse flowers for no reason	Randomly, a few times per year

The use of recurring tasks and their associated reminder schedules is a very powerful tool for helping you keep on track with various goals. Keep in mind that some recurring tasks will have a start and end date, such as a task to run every day for two months leading up to a marathon.

But a perhaps even more powerful aspect of recurring tasks is that they can help you establish permanent lifestyle changes that might otherwise be difficult to adopt. As such, some recurring tasks may relate to things that you plan to do for the foreseeable future and therefore require no end-date, such as a recurring task to read to your children every night before bed.

4. Other Tips

Should I keep my goals private?

Obviously, some goals are so personal that you would keep them private or only disclose to your closest confidants. That said it is a well-known tenant of goal-setting that you are more likely to achieve your goals if you tell your family and friends about them. Not only will you want to avoid looking inconsistent for abandoning a goal, but their support and assistance can be invaluable. Remember to share your goals with those who are in a position to encourage you.

Avoid discussing your goals with "negative people". It's unfortunate, but many people who see others striving to improve themselves are reminded that they themselves could use some improvement. Rather than setting goals of their own, they find it easier to belittle or ridicule the goals of others. While some goal-setters derive motivation from "negative people" ("I'll show them!"), most find it best to avoid such topics with negative people.

What if there is an unsupportive person in my life?

Either tune out the negativity or simply distance yourself. Don't let their negativity pull you down. If that person is your spouse or lives in the same household, then you may have a more complicated problem. Try to understand whether the other person is critical of a particular goal of yours or of goals in general. Also try to understand whether the person has his or her own goals and demonstrate your encouragement for the things he or she would like to accomplish. You might also look for ways to work together by coming up with goals you both agree on and can pursue together.

In many cases, it's simply easiest to keep your goals to yourself or share them only with supportive people. (See also "Should I keep my goals private?")

How do I get others (family and friends, etc.) to set goals?

Even if somebody you care for doesn't routinely set goals, everyone has something they want—some place they want to visit or something they want to learn or do or buy. What they may not have is the knowledge, tools, discipline, or belief to accomplish or even begin pursuit of that goal.

While this document can help them with the knowledge, tools, and discipline parts...belief is internal. If fear of failure (or fear of success) is the problem keeping the person from pursuing their goal, then the solution is to start small. Accomplishing small, simple tasks, then small goals, followed by larger goals, builds the habit of progress that breeds confidence. You can't make someone pursue a goal but you can offer encouragement and support. You can help them and you can set an example.

"Obstacles" sounds negative. Can't I use a different term like "challenges" or "opportunities"?

This goal-setting process is designed specifically to target and eliminate your obstacles. But you can't eliminate something if you don't call attention to it. Obstacles are not inherently negative; they are simply things that stand between you and your objective. Consider this example: The door stands between you and entering the room. Is a door inherently negative? No, it's simply something that you have to deal with before you can enter. Some doors are harder to open than others (and some are locked), just as obstacles may be simple or hard. But before you overcome them, you must identify them. Once you have, you can systematically work at overcoming or going around them. There's nothing negative about tackling something head on. Indeed, it would be detrimental to pretend it's not there or to ignore it.



Specialists in **Recruitment, Sales Training, Corporate Development, Performance Coaching, HR Services, and Interim Management & Non-Exec Directorships**

Serving the **Scientific and Technology Markets**

Pan European coverage with **United States** capability for major projects

About You

If in order to meet your personal and business objectives you need to recruit the best people, train and develop your existing team, develop the knowledge and skills of a key manager, raise additional funding or make an acquisition or divestiture we would like to speak with you.

If you are interested in developing your own knowledge and skill set to achieve further success and make the most of your talents with proven coaches we would like to talk.

If you are looking for your next career move or wish to have some impartial and experienced career advice we would like to hear from you

Our Customers

US companies looking to establish themselves in Europe needing to recruit and/or wanting assistance with the associated logistics.

European start up companies looking for additional funding, the recruitment of key staff or assistance with their HR processes.

Established small businesses to the largest international corporations looking to recruit train and develop their existing staff, review their HR processes or make an acquisition or divestiture.

European Distributors looking to recruit and/or train and develop their existing staff.

Venture Capitalists looking to recruit early stage commercial people into companies they have invested in.

Recruitment
Sales Training
Corporate Development
Performance Coaching
HR Services
Interim Management & Non-Exec Directorships

