

Kim Seeling Smith

Goal Setting that Works!

You're feeling fresh and new, buoyant with energy from the New Year, New Decade! This year is going to be different! This year you're going to follow through and make the changes in your life you've been talking about for ages. You're going to get that new job, shed those extra kilos, find a new relationship, start that novel, take some classes, go on that dream holiday (oh, wait...is this last one a goal or is it a reward? More on this later).

But how many of us have set goals or made New Year's resolutions only to find ourselves quickly going back to old habits, renegeing on our promises to ourselves or just plain giving up? I know I have! Until I came up with this process that really worked for me.

Most people have heard of that Harvard MBA study about the small percentage of a graduating class that wrote down their goals. Many of the graduates never even looked at their goals again, yet that small percentage achieved much more than the considerably larger percentage of graduates that leaped perilously into their future without direction. Whether truth or urban legend, the message of the story is a good one: you can achieve more if you have well-defined goals. However there is something missing! A structure that helps you not only choose goals that are worth working or playing for and but also gives you an action plan to help you make them become real.

That's why this process works while others typically fail.

Brainstorm, Evaluate, Define

A robust goal setting process should start with brain storming. This is your chance to really be creative and crazy, think and dream big! Write down everything that comes to mind (don't worry, you can and will cross many of these ideas out later). The point is to get everything down on paper and have this be a fun process.

Great. Now that you have a gazillion goals on paper, how do you know which ones to choose, to really work on? Which ones can you make real? This is where the evaluation process comes in. And the first step in this process is to decide which items on your list are goals and which are rewards. A goal should stretch you or change you in some way. A reward is just that...a present to yourself. So, while one of your goals for this year might be to take a dream holiday, perhaps that's better used a reward for having accomplished one or more of your goals. So start a separate list of rewards.

The next step in the evaluation process should not be an intellectual exercise, but rather an emotional one. Why? Because people may take initial action based on a good idea, but they will only sustain that action based on a good feeling. So rate each goal that you've written down 1 - 5 based on how excited you feel about this goal. Completely subjective. Would accomplishing this really, truly make you happy? If it doesn't light you up enough for you to assign it at least a 3 cross it off. Then go back and re-evaluate the 3's. Are they 3's because you couldn't make up your mind how excited you were? What's missing? Does it need to be restated, does the time frame need to change? If you can't get it to truly move to a 4 cross it off.

So, now you're left with only those goals that really, truly excite you! Now it's time to wrap more emotion around them by thinking of a higher purpose for the goal. The what is not nearly as important as the why. Here's a hint...the why will almost always be something that helps you grow or helps you to contribute to others. If you can't come up with a big enough why you might want to re-evaluate whether it should be a reward, be on your list at all or perhaps be saved for another time in your life.



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Once you've pared your goals down to those that really excite you and give you a higher purpose it's time to define them. Now, I'm sure you've all heard about smart goals so I won't spend a lot of time on this. But suffice to say that goals really should be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time bound (have a time frame attached to it).

How will you know you've achieved your goal unless it's defined in this way?

Reward

Now it's time to bring your rewards back in. Make achieving your goals fun by attaching rewards to them. They can be big rewards (like your dream holiday) or small ones (like going to dinner with a friend). They can cost money or be completely free. It's up to you. Whatever will make it fun, make it worth working or playing for and help to keep you on track daily. After all, as one of my mentor's Keith Cunningham says, it's not the first, big decision you make that creates change. Rather it's the myriad of small, daily decisions that you make to keep yourself on track and moving towards your goals.

Structure

And now it's time to set up a structure. A plan for daily action to achieve your goals. At the very least do what Keith Cunningham suggests...start each day by re-writing your goals. That keeps them truly fresh and alive. Remind yourself why you're going after them and what the rewards are for attaining them. Get excited every day about pursuing them to keep yourself on track.

Once you're excited about them, plan them into your day. Schedule some daily action (or at the very least weekly) to keep you moving forward. You can even assign mini rewards to these daily tasks.

Celebrate

And then celebrate! Big and small steps. Take advantage of those rewards and be sure to remind yourself why you're giving your self that reward: because you've achieved your goals! You'll become addicted to achieving big steps and small if you really take time to celebrate. This will then condition the behaviour until it becomes habit.

Gratitude

And finally, I believe that every goal setting process should end with gratitude. Write down all of the things that you are grateful for now. All the things you have, are and do that make you happy. And don't forget all the people whom you love and who love you. You might do this only once, or better yet every night before you sleep.

Because gratitude begets more things to be grateful for.

Happy Goal Setting!



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