

The anatomy of a goal

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Have you ever set a goal that just seemed to evaporate into thin air? We all have. Our lives run rife with fallen promises. We commit to a diet, but find ourselves wolfing down junk a few days later because “it was there”. We sign up for the gym with the best of intentions, yet never actually show our faces because we’re “too busy” (translate: too lazy).

Then of course, there are the professional goals that I will examine here. We commit to making more sales calls, and then after two days of frenzied business development we burn out and devote ourselves to every menial administrative detail in order to hide from the goal. We aim to participate in training and professional development on a monthly basis, but suddenly it seems like improving our skills would be a tragic waste of precious work time.

I described goals as “fallen promises” earlier. An unfulfilled goal is just that: a promise you have made to yourself that you have broken. Every time we break a promise made to someone else, we are letting that person down, and they lose some trust in us. This is no different. Every time you break a promise to yourself, you lose a measure of trust in your own abilities, which over a sustained period can obviously lead to loss of motivation and confidence, and in severe cases, discouragement and depression.

How do we reverse this epidemic of broken self-promises? How do we set goals that become a product of success rather than discouragement? The answer is simple. We tend to set goals erratically and impulsively. This is a problem, because any successful goal will not be a result of impulsive, scattershot thinking, but of a sustained process of goal-setting which keeps it real, relevant and achievable.

Here are my steps to successful goal-setting, based on my 20 years in the recruitment industry. Each step is set out and includes common “stumbling blocks”, which cause many of us to lose our way and

destroy our own goals. So it goes without saying that awareness of these stumbling blocks is crucial to success.

1. The aspiration – decide what you want to achieve

This is essentially a vision, the original idea of “what I specifically want to achieve”. It is the starting point of a successful goal, but also the end point for many failed goals.

Stumbling block: Many people cling to the notion that the dream is “all you need”. This is simply not the case. So many of our goals are dying at this very first step because we seem to forget that an idea has no power or relevance if it isn’t developed through decisive action.

Your aspiration is a wonderful birthplace of possibility. You can’t achieve without first having a dream of some kind. Hold onto it, but remember there is far more to come...

2. Measure it – form a precise, tangible goal

It isn’t enough to aspire to “make more cold calls”. All this does is throw up more questions: How many more cold calls? What kind of calls are they? How many of these should I convert into meetings? That’s why it is essential to make your goals “measurable”. Obviously many agencies do that for you with KPIs, but the principle applies to any goal that you wish to set personally or professionally.

Stumbling block: Aiming too high. Many people burn out when they make their goals measurable, because they set quantitative goals that demand more than they can realistically give.

So play the numbers game. But remember to make the numbers realistic, and work gradually to reach the ultimate goal if you need to.

3. Visibility – put it in writing, reinforce the goal everyday

This is another crucial means of bringing the dream into reality. I have my goals hanging

in poster form around my office and indeed my bedroom and bathroom. This way my goals are being constantly reinforced in my mind.

Stumbling block: Destroying your goals by losing focus. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that “visibility” is obvious and trivial. I have had friends and family chuckle at the laminated “goal posters” that decorate the house. But I find these visual reminders essential, because in the relentless “noise” of our minds, so many of our goals become drowned out over time as our focus is distracted by other things. Think about it, and you will find numerous examples from your own life. If we don’t reinforce and remind ourselves, our goals are essentially forgotten.

So as pointless as visual reminders may seem, remember that nothing is more pointless than a failed goal!

Three steps, just three. It seems so simple because it is. It is, however, essential to remember these steps and be consistent and intentional about following them. Equally important: remain aware of the “stumbling blocks”. But if you do “stumble”, then simply try again. This may involve changing your aspirations or measurable indicators, but that’s all part of the challenge, not a negative thing at all. I am confident that these simple steps will help bring you success both professionally and personally.

Remember too, that success is about the journey, not the destination! ■



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set up *The Recruitment Training Company* in 2001 to provide specific recruitment skills training to recruiters. It has grown to be the largest

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