

Success Through Goal Setting

By: Brian Tracy

The ability to set goals and make plans for their accomplishment is the “master skill” of success. It is the single most important skill that you can learn and perfect. Goal-setting will do more to help you achieve the things you want in life than will anything else you’ve been exposed to. Becoming an expert at goal-setting and goal-achieving is something that you absolutely must do if you wish to fulfill your potential as a human being. Goals enable you to do the work you want to do, to live where you want to live, to be with the people you enjoy, and to become the kind of person you want to become. And there is no limit to the financial rewards you can obtain. All you have to do is to set a goal for financial success, make a plan, and then work the plan until you succeed in that area.

The payoff for setting goals and making plans is being able to choose the kind of life you want to live. So why do so few people set goals? According to the best research, less than 3 percent of Americans have written goals, and less than 1 percent review and rewrite their goals on a daily basis. So the reasons why people don’t set goals have been of considerable interest to me. I think that there are five basic reasons why people don’t set goals.

The first reason is that they are simply not serious. Whenever I speak with a man or woman who has achieved something remarkable, I learn that the achievement occurred after that person decided to “get serious.” Until you become completely serious and totally determined about your goals, nothing really happens.

The second reason why people don’t set goals is that they don’t understand the importance of goals. We find that young men and women who begin setting goals very early in life invariably come from families in which the importance of goals is emphasized. The discussion that takes place around your family dinner table is one of the most powerful formative influences in your life. If your parents didn’t have goals, didn’t talk about goals, didn’t encourage you to set goals, and didn’t talk about people outside the family circle who had goals and were moving toward a higher level of achievement, then you very likely grew up with the idea that goals are not even a part of normal existence. This is the case for most people. And for many years, it was the case for me.

The third reason why people don’t set goals is because they don’t know how to do it. One of the greatest tragedies of our educational system is that you can receive 15 to 18 years of education in our schools and never once receive a single hour of instruction on how to set goals. Yet we find that in

certain schools where goal-setting programs have been introduced since first grade, young people become excited about goal-setting — even if the goal is only to increase the scores by 5 or 10 percent over the course of the semester, or to be on time every day in the course of a month. Children become so excited about achieving goals that by the third or fourth grade, they love to go to school. They get the best grades. They are seldom absent. They are excited about themselves and about their lives. So encourage your children to set worthwhile and realistic goals from an early age.

The fourth reason why people don't set goals is fear of rejection. The fear of rejection is caused by destructive criticism in early childhood and is manifested, in adulthood, in the fear of criticism by others. Many people hold back from setting worthwhile goals because they have found that every time they do set a goal, somebody steps up and tells them that they can't achieve it, or that they will lose their money or waste their time.

Because each of us is strongly influenced by the opinions of those around us, one of the first things that you must learn when you begin setting goals is to keep your goals confidential. Don't tell anyone about them. Often, it's the fear of criticism that, more than any other single factor, stops you from goal-setting in the first place. So keep your goals to yourself, with one exception. Share your goals only with others who are committed to achieving goals of

their own and who really want you to be successful and achieve your goals as well. Other than that, don't tell anybody about your goals, so no one is in a position to criticize you, or to discourage you from setting your goals.

The fifth reason why people don't set goals — and perhaps the most important reason of all — is the fear of failure. People don't set goals because they are afraid that they might fail. In fact, the fear of failure is probably the greatest single obstacle to success in adult life. It can hold you back more than any other psychological problem.

The primary reason why you fear failure is simply this: You probably do not understand the role that failure plays in achievement. The fact is that it is impossible to succeed without failing. Failure is an indispensable prerequisite for success. All great success is preceded by great failure. If you wish to fulfill your potential, you have to be willing to risk failure over and over and over, because there is no way that you can ever accomplish worthwhile goals until you have fallen on your face so many times that you have eventually learned the lessons that you need for great achievement.

In doing research for his classic book *The Law of Success*, Napoleon Hill interviewed more than 500 of the most successful men and women in America. All of them admitted to him that they had achieved their greatest

successes just one step beyond the point where they had experienced their greatest failures.

A key to succeeding through goal-setting is expecting temporary setbacks and obstacles as inevitable parts of the goal-achieving process.

Now, in order to be successful, you need to focus your mental and physical energy in a single direction toward a predetermined objective. People who are especially energetic or talented have a hard time with this. They are the ones who try to do several things at once and end up doing nothing well.

Setting well-defined goals enables you to channel your efforts and focus your energy toward something that's important to you. Goal-setting gives you a target to aim at and enables you to develop the self-discipline to continue working toward your target rather than becoming distracted and going off in other directions.

Let me share with you five keys that will help you to reach your goals more effectively. Each of these keys starts with one of the letters in the word *goals*. Whenever you find yourself getting off the track, simply repeat the word *goals*, and think about how each letter stands for a key that just might apply to your current situation.

The first letter is *G*, and it stands for *get to it*. Sometimes, the only difference between a successful person and a failure is that the successful person has the courage to get started, to do something, to begin moving toward the accomplishment of a specific goal.

For example, when I was younger, I realized that because of my limited education, I was stuck in a low-paying job. I began reading the want ads and decided that I wanted to work in advertising, especially as a copywriter. I went to an advertising agency and applied for the job of writing advertisements. The head of the agency was very polite, but he told me that I was unskilled and totally unsuited for the position. He thanked me for coming in and wished me luck.

Now I was back on the street, but I had a goal. I wanted to be an advertising copywriter. I immediately took the first step, which was to learn more about how to write copy, so that I would not be turned down in the future because of a lack of ability. I went to the local library and checked out books on the subject of advertising and copywriting. Over the next 12 months, I checked out and read every single book in the library on the subject. Meanwhile, I read magazines and newspapers and thought about how I could improve their advertising. I wrote sample advertisements and began taking them to advertising agencies.

To make a long story short, at the end of the 12 months, two of the largest advertising agencies in the country offered me a job as a copywriter, and I accepted one of those offers. My income doubled. I had worked at other jobs in the meantime. But I had never lost sight of my goal, and I had kept on doing the things that I needed to do to put myself in a position to eventually achieve my goal.

You, too, may have a long-range goal. In order to achieve it, you need to sit down and make a list of all the steps that you will have to take to get from where you are to where you want to be. Then begin with the first and most obvious thing that you can do on that list. Complete it, and then start on number two. Don't worry about the long term. Just concentrate on the obvious first step that you can take. Surprisingly enough, everything else will take care of itself. The Confucian saying, "A journey of a thousand leagues begins with a single step," is so popular in so many languages because it is so true.

The second letter, *O*, stands for *opportunity*. Successful people do not wait for opportunities to turn their goals into reality; rather, they make their opportunities, because they are perfectly clear about the kind of life they wish to create. Once you have taken the time to decide exactly what you

want, you will experience an endless flow of opportunities that will help move you in that direction.

For example, a young woman worked for me as an executive secretary. At the same time, she had a goal to be a successful real-estate agent and investor. So while she worked for me, she regularly took night courses to get her real-estate-agent's license and also to learn how to buy and sell real estate profitably. Over the course of a year, she and her husband bought, fixed up and sold three houses. They made more money from their real-estate transactions than they did from their jobs. At the end of the year, she passed the test and got her real-estate-agent's license.

Within a few days of getting her license, she and her husband were sitting in a small restaurant, and they got into a conversation with a woman at the next table. It turned out that this woman was a very successful real-estate agent who needed an executive assistant to work with her and learn the real-estate profession. They got along so well that my executive secretary was offered the job, where she would be earning double what she could earn as a secretary and have an unlimited upside potential.

My secretary did not wait for an opportunity to come to her. She set a goal, made a plan and went to work to prepare herself for the opportunity when it arose.

The letter *A* stands for *ability*. Many people hesitate to set high, challenging goals because they lack the ability necessary to turn those goals into reality. But remember that we all lacked knowledge and experience when we started out in our careers or fields of expertise.

Do you remember when you started your first job? You probably felt a little clumsy, inadequate and unsure about how to do it well. As you progressed and got more experience, you became more and more confident, and in many cases, you did an excellent job without even thinking much about it.

Since you gain the ability necessary for high achievement through knowledge and experience, if you increase the speed at which you acquire both of those, you increase the speed at which you move ahead.

The letter *L* stands for *leadership*. Leadership is simply the ability to get results. And you begin to get results when you accept full responsibility for yourself, for your job and for the outputs required in your position.

You demonstrate leadership when you refuse to make excuses or blame anyone or anything for the problems you are having. The acceptance of the responsibility of leadership enables you to move ahead and take action.

When you are not satisfied with your job or income, and you sit down and make a written plan to change it, and then take action on that plan, without waiting for anyone's approval or permission, you are behaving like a leader.

The final letter, *S*, stands for *stay with it* — the resolution to persist in the face of adversity until you succeed. Between you and every goal that you wish to achieve, there is a series of obstacles, and the bigger the goal, the bigger the obstacles. Your decision to be, have and do something out of the ordinary entails facing difficulties and challenges that are out of the ordinary as well. Sometimes your greatest asset is simply your ability to stay with it longer than anyone else.

When you look around you, you will see that all achievement is the triumph of persistence. You will see men and women everywhere who are struggling with and overcoming adversities in order to accomplish something that is important to them. And so can you.

So these are the words and phrases to remember in setting and achieving goals: The first is *get to it!* Get started; take the first action at hand. The second is *opportunity*. Begin to prepare yourself now so that you will be ready for the opportunities that will inevitably arise. The third is *ability*. Resolve to learn what you need to know to live the kind of life you want to live. The fourth word is *leadership*. Take charge of your time and your life,

and accept responsibility for your results. And, finally, *stay with it*. If you stay with it long enough, nothing can stop you from finally winning through.