

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

Why Set Goals and Create an Action Plan To Achieve Them?

Napoleon Hill wrote in the 1930s after 25 years of researching successful people: “There is one quality which one must possess to win, and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants, and a burning desire to possess it.” To be successful in your career, you need a major definite purpose, a thorough understanding of why it is important to you, and action plans to achieve it.

Brian Tracy is one of the leading experts on goals and success. He identifies the reason for success as: “The primary reason for great success is clear, specific, measurable goals and plans, written down and accompanied by a burning desire to accomplish them.” Tracy further states: “The clearer you are about what you want, the more rapidly you will attain it. When you are absolutely clear about your goals, you activate all powers of your mind to help you achieve them.” Tracy explains: “When you are working toward a goal of your own choosing, your superconscious mind will generate a continuous flow of ideas and energy to help move you onward.”



Research on Goal Setting

Studies done over many years and throughout the world have shown that people who know what they want and set goals to achieve those goals are generally happier and certainly more likely to achieve success. Those who have written goals are way more likely to achieve them than those who do not write their goals down and those who share their written goals with others are most likely to achieve them.

Reportedly a study was done of the Yale class of 1953. Only three percent of that graduating class had written goals. Twenty years later researchers reportedly interviewed the 1953 class and found that the three percent who had written goals twenty years earlier were happier with their life than the other ninety seven percent and reportedly had more net worth than the other ninety seven percent added together. I personally do not believe this story, but it has been told repeatedly over the last thirty years.

More scholarly research was done by Professors Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham. In a paper

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they wrote, they summarized thirty five years of empirical research. They described core findings that are the same principles as the Yale graduating class story, although not as dramatic. Locke and Latham found a positive linear function in that the highest and most difficult goals produced the highest levels of performance, until the limits of ability are reached. Specific difficult goals consistently led to higher performance than just deciding to do your best.

Professor Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced 'Me-hi Chicksent-me-hiee') introduced the concept of flow in the 1970s and wrote many books on the subject including a book titled: *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Dr. Csikszentmihalyi sought to explain what makes some experiences enjoyable and others not, and what makes some people enjoy activities and others not. He defined "flow" as: "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost for the sheer sake of doing it." Csikszentmihalyi believes that for a "flow" experience to occur the personality of the person must be flow-conducive and the activity must be a flow-type of activity.

I have read the book and found it really helped explain what caused me to have optimal experiences in my career and life and how to help others create those experiences. Csikszentmihalyi interviewed more than 100,000 people over many years and came up with several key states or elements that enable people to experience "flow."

Those elements include:

1. Clear goals with immediate feedback.
2. Balance between challenges and skills. If it is too easy it is boring. If it is too difficult it is frustrating.
3. Action and awareness merge. When there is a balance between the challenges of the activity and our skills, we must focus on the activity and then there is little distinction between ourselves and the activity.
4. Concentration on task without being distracted.
5. Sense of control.
6. Loss of self-consciousness. Focus is on the activity not on anyone's evaluation of our performance.
7. Altered sense of time. In large part because doing the activity is so enjoyable people lose track of time.
8. Autotelic experience (auto (self), telic (goal)). Motivation is from the self rather than from external sources administered as rewards and punishment.

Why You Must Create Action Plans To Achieve Your Goals

Setting goals without detailed action plans to achieve them is like making New Year's resolutions. You will start with great enthusiasm, but you will quit as soon as you get busy with billable work.

I know a lawyer whose goal was to start a blog. That was his goal eighteen months ago and the blog has still not gone live. He even has draft blog posts to put into the blog, if it ever goes live.

On the other hand, I know a lawyer whose goal is to post a blog once a week. That lawyer has a plan that during the week he will spend thirty minutes a day researching potential topics and that on Wednesdays he will get to work early and spend two hours writing and posting his blog.

I know from my own experience, and working with other lawyers, that if you set goals and create detailed action plans, you will be more successful and focused.