

# BIG GOALS

*How to Overcome Boundaries at Life and Work*



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# ***Part 1: Goal Setting***

# What Is A Goal?

A goal is any objective that a person wants to achieve in their life.

The basic structure behind every goal is: **Present State** → **Desired Future State**. Your “Present State” is where you are right now, and your “Future State” is where you want to be after you accomplish your goal.

For example, a common goal may be to lose 10lbs of weight. So your current weight would be your “Present State” and your weight subtracted by 10lbs is your “Desired Future State.”

Every goal should be able to be conceptualized into these two main parts in some way.

Trying to achieve our goals is always a *process* of moving from one state in life to another state. This applies to all different types of goals, whether they are related to health, career, relationships, education, sports, hobbies, or just happiness in general.

The first part of this guide will cover key things to consider when setting a goal. The second part will cover how to actually achieve your goal in the real world.

# Know Your Values

We all have certain things that we value in life, whether they be our relationships, health, job, hobbies, material possessions, spirituality, or whatever.

Our values play an important role in guiding our actions, choices, and goals. They are the things in life that we strive for on a daily basis and keep us going. They are what we live for. And the fulfillment of these values and goals is ultimately what brings us our happiness and success.

However, what we value in life can greatly depend on the individual person. We don't all live for all the same things, so knowing what you value most in your life is important in building a lifestyle that works for *you*.

One of the first, most essential steps to improving your life is discovering the things in life that are your most important values. Only when you identify what you desire in your life can you really take action to begin making it a reality.

Here is a quick 5 minute exercise to help you discover your most important values.

- Open up a word document or grab yourself a pen and paper. Write down “My Most Important Values” at the top of your document.
- Ask yourself, “What matters to me most? What do I live for? What drives me to get up every morning?” and take 60 seconds to write down every single thing that pops into your head (however big or small).
- Rank each value based on its importance to you (starting with “1” next to your most important value). It’s fine if it’s not completely accurate, just give yourself a rough idea.
- Now grade yourself on each value. Are you fulfilling it or do you need to work on it more? Give yourself an A-F grade for each value on your list depending on your current situation in life.
- Based on this evaluation, identify just one value which is the most important one that you need to work on right now.
- Save this document in a folder titled “Self Improvement”.

This exercise is very simple, but by doing it you can gain a better awareness into what you really value in life, as well as what you need to focus on right now.

It would be helpful to re-visit an exercise like this once every few months. Our values and goals can often change over time, so it's important to step back and reevaluate where we want to go in life every now and then.

Psychology research is clear that the more goals align with our personal values, the more motivated and inspired we are to achieve them. So knowing your values is absolutely essential to proper goal-setting.

# Be Specific About Your Goals

The way you set your goals is going to make a big difference in how successful you are when pursuing those goals. One big factor that contributes to the success of goals is how specific vs. abstract we are when we set them.

For example, one recent [study](#) published in *PLOS One* found that depressed individuals describe their goals in more general and abstract terms, which psychologists believe contributes to their lack of motivation and goal attainment.

Individuals are more likely to be happier and achieve their goals when they have specific goals in mind rather than goals that are very general and vague.

This is because if you can describe your goals in more specific terms, then often you'll have a better idea of the kinds of actions you need to take to actually get to those goals.

For example, a very vague and unhelpful goal would be:

- *"I want to be happy."*
- *"I want to be successful."*
- *"I want to be nicer."*

On the surface, there is nothing wrong with these goals – however the biggest issue with them is that they don't give you any clear idea on what actions you need to take to actually achieve them.

If your goal is just "I want to be happy" then you need to dig deeper.

First, what does "happiness" mean to you? What does a "happy person" look like in your mind? What kinds of things would a "happy person" be doing on a daily basis? Be as specific as possible and you'll often find a much clearer picture of what you need to do in your life.

For example, more specific and helpful goals would include:

- *"I want to beat my time running the local 10km race."*
- *"I want to practice piano for one hour every morning."*
- *"I want to donate \$100 to the Red Cross once a month."*

These goals are much more useful because they describe a specific action we can do. The more specific your goals are, the better. Try to include a "Who? What? When? Where? Why" approach to your goals to help improve their specificity.

You don't have to limit your goals to one sentence either, an even better idea would be to write a step-by-step plan on how



you will accomplish your goals. This simple act of writing them out in detail will automatically minimize a lot of the stress and disappointment of having vague (and unreachable) goals.

At the end of the day, you can't travel in a new direction in your life if you don't have a clearer idea of where you want to go.

# Find Ways to Keep Track of Your Progress

It's important to find a way to keep track of your progress so you know if you're actually working toward your goal or not. There are two main ways to do this:

## 1. Use numbers and measurements

This is progress that you can measure and reduce to a number.

For example, maybe in January you could run a mile in 9 minutes, and by April you could run a mile in 7 minutes and 30 seconds. That's hard evidence that you improved your speed and stamina over the course of those few months.

Another example may be a business using sales or revenue to measure whether or not they are improving the state of their business.

By using measurements like this, you can find out what works for you and what doesn't work for you. If you aren't noticing improvements, then you can change your course of action until you start seeing results in whatever it is you are doing.

## 2. Recording thoughts and feelings in a journal

This is progress which you can't easily define with a number, but you can report on it based on how your thoughts or feelings have changed.

For example, it can be hard to measure the health of a relationship or marriage, but you can try to keep progress by writing entries in a journal about what you think and feel about the relationship.

Are you happier? Do you feel more satisfied? Have you enjoyed each other's company more? These are the types of things which may be better to keep track of without trying to quantify into a number.

For most goals, you can probably keep track of your progress using a mixture of both.

At the very least, you can always measure how much *time* you spend working toward a specific goal. Which is at least a valuable measurement of how much work you're putting in.

For example, if your goal is to learn how to meditate, then you can keep track of how many hours a week you spend practicing. Or, if you want to improve your relationship, one thing you may

want to keep track of is how much one-on-one time you spend together with your partner.

Finding reliable ways to quantify your progress can be incredibly useful. And keeping a journal no matter what is just a great way to keep your mental state focused and organized.

# The Role of Deadlines

For many people, setting deadlines can be a great way to stay committed to a goal.

When we set a specific date to have our goal accomplished, we become more motivated to get our work done so that we meet that date. Deadlines are especially effective if not meeting them leads to certain consequences, like getting a lower grade in a class, or getting fired from your job.

A deadline can be like a “beacon of light” into the future, motivating you to continue on until you get to the end. Many people work better when they are pressured to meet a goal by a specific date.

However, it’s also important to know that some deadlines can backfire on us.

For example, let’s say you make the goal to lose 10 pounds in a month, but then the month comes around and you didn’t achieve your goal? Some people can find this really disappointing and therefore give up instead of being more patient with themselves.

It’s important when setting deadlines to be aware of the *planning fallacy* - our tendency to underestimate how much time is needed to complete a goal.

Or, what happens if you achieve your goal by a certain deadline, but then you become content with your progress and you snap back to your old ways? Next thing you know, you gain that 10 pounds right back.

The problem with some deadlines is that many focus on the short-term, and therefore don't always cultivate the attitude needed for long-term change.

Deadlines are great for some people in some situations, but not everyone. If you're someone who doesn't respond very well to external motivators, then a deadline may not do anything for you.

And if you make a deadline but are unable to meet it, don't be too hard on yourself.

Try to keep deadlines realistic, but beware that you may undershoot your goals simply because no one is perfect, and it can often be difficult to forecast how much time is needed to achieve something (especially something we've never done before).

# Keep Goals Challenging but Achievable

Goals work best when they are met with an equal balance of challenging but achievable.

If your goals are too challenging, but not realistic, then you'll often become frustrated and disappointed in yourself. You need to manage your expectations and not set them too high.

For example, one of the major symptoms of *perfectionism* is setting goals that are way too high and unachievable.

Real limitations exist in your life, and it's important to be honest about them and accept them. You aren't infinitely powerful and intelligent - so you can't expect yourself to be perfect or change the entire world overnight.

At the same time, if your goals are too easy and not challenging enough, then you're never testing your limits and seeing what you're truly capable of.

You need to accept where you are, but at the same time try to find ways to push beyond your limits. Step outside of your immediate comfort zone and you'll discover new plateaus in your life.

Ask yourself:

- Am I expecting too little or too much from myself at once?
- How can I adjust these goals to make them more practical, but still be pushing myself forward?

Your goals can be thought of like a dog on a leash. Let them direct you forward, but when they start running away too freely, it may be time to rein them back in.



# Take a Multiple Goals Perspective

When you try to see the “bigger picture” behind your goals it can give you extra meaning and purpose behind the work you do on a daily basis.

One way to do this is to take a *multiple goals perspective*. This is the idea of taking a specific goal and identifying multiple ways it fulfills different values in your life.

For example, the goal of “going to the gym” can be thought of from multiple perspectives:

- Value 1: Improving health and physical well-being.
- Value 2: Building confidence and self-esteem.
- Value 3: Longer lifespan and more time and energy to spend with family and friends.

This is just one way you can take a specific goal and see the “bigger picture” behind it. The more purposes you can discover behind a particular goal, the more motivated and inspired you will be to achieve it.

So, instead of thinking of each goal as only one-dimensional, try to identify the ways your goals fulfill multiple dimensions in your life at once.

Another way to see the “bigger picture” behind your goals is to think of the long-term rewards behind small changes in your life.

The smallest of goals can add up over long periods of time. So while you may start small, it can be the beginning of something much larger.

Seeing the “bigger picture” behind your goals is all about looking beyond your immediate circumstances and taking a long-term view of the future.

# Focus On One Big Goal at a Time

Most of us have many goals in life that we want to achieve, but it's important to only focus on one big goal at a time.

If you spread yourself too thin, or try to change too much at once, you'll likely fail at your goals. So sometimes it's better to be super focused in one area of your life before you're ready to start expanding to others areas of your life.

Research in psychology shows that our willpower and self-discipline is a limited resource. Once we use it to achieve one goal, it becomes increasingly difficult to use it to achieve another goal immediately afterwards.

In other words, you only have so much energy you can use in a day before you experience burnout and fatigue.

Try to focus on setting just one big goal at a time, and then you can shift your physical and mental resources to something else once you've achieved it.

## ***Part 2: Goal Striving***

# Make a Commitment to Yourself

When making a decision to change your life, you need to make a commitment to yourself that you will put in the time, work, and dedication to make your goal a reality.

The very first step you can take in achieving your goal is spending 5-10 minutes writing down a commitment to yourself - this is called your "mission statement."

Your mission statement is a short 1-2 sentences describing what your intentions are and why you are working toward this goal.

For example, if my goal is to find a girlfriend, I might write a mission statement that goes something like:

*"My mission is to go out more, socialize, and meet new people, so that I can find a nice and fun girlfriend."*

Just writing down your commitment already gives you the feeling that you are working toward your goal. It immediately makes it feel more real and *tangible* to you, which is a good boost in motivation to start taking more action.

Your “mission statement” preps your mind to beginning thinking more about your goal and finding ways to achieve it. Take just a minute to create a “mission statement” until you find something that resonates with you.

Once you’re done, save it somewhere where you’ll be reminded of it often.

# Write a Plan on How to Accomplish Your Goal

Writing about your goals is a great way to prepare your mind to begin thinking about ways to actually take action and achieve them.

Make a step-by-step rough outline of what you think you need to do to get from your **Present State** → **Desired Future State**.

Follow these guidelines to get started:

1. Open up a Word document on your computer.
2. Title it "Plan to Accomplish \_\_\_\_" (fill in the blank with your desired goal)
3. Name one section "Current Situation" - write 3-5 sentences describing your current situation in respect to your goal.
4. Name a second section "Future Situation" - write 3-5 sentences describing your future situation after you've achieved your goal.
5. Name a third section "Milestones" - write down a broad list of 5-7 "milestones" you would need to achieve on your way toward your final goal.

6. Name a fourth section "Action" - write down 3 small but specific actions you could do on a daily basis to work toward these milestones.
7. Save this document in your "Self Improvement" folder.

Just doing this exercise begins to give you a clearer idea of what it takes to get to your goal - and the specific actions you can begin to take today to begin working toward them.

One [study](#) published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* shows that even just writing down a plan on how to accomplish our goals eliminates a lot of the stress we may have due to "unfulfilled goals."

This is sometimes called the *Zeigarnik Effect*, which is our tendency to excessively ruminate over goals that we haven't yet accomplished.

It can therefore be very helpful to take 15-20 minutes to write up a plan for future goals as well. These are goals that you may not be pursuing right now, but you can always go back and revisit these plans once you're ready to finally pursue them.

*There are many goals I haven't yet pursued in my life, but I have documents saved of how I will go about pursuing them once I'm ready to focus on them. This can be a very useful tool for keeping track of long-term ideas.*



# Take the Smallest Step in the Right Direction

It takes more force to get an object moving than it does to keep it moving - and our motivation and goals work the same way.

The most difficult part of making a change is to first get started. Once we do that, the momentum begins to build naturally, and it becomes more about time and patience.

You don't need to dedicate a lot of time to start working toward a goal. Sometimes 5-10 minutes is the only amount of time you need to get things moving in a new and positive direction.

- Choose one of the small "Actions" from the previous exercise.
- Do that today.
- Pat yourself on the back for your small victory.
- Take that motivation and good feelings into tomorrow.

Too simple? Yes, that's the point. You need to take action to get the wheels turning. Don't overthink it. Don't challenge yourself too much. Just identify what you are capable of right now and do it.

## Focus on Gradual Progress

Once you've taken that first small action toward your goals, it's all about consistency and gradual progress.

You're probably not going to start out doing amazing right away, but we all have to start *somewhere* and just keep going.

Success in anything isn't a linear process, it's dynamic - with many small ups and downs. Some days are going to be better than others, but you have to keep the long-term in mind.

Try to find the "small wins" in each and everyday. For example, even if you fail at something or do worse at it a certain day, try to see it as a learning experience. View that failure as a necessary part of your growth.

In the end, failure makes you a better person - it's proof that you are pushing yourself to new limits.

I sometimes encourage people to push themselves to extremes where they *know* they will fail, just so they can start getting more familiar with failure - and also realize it's not that bad most of the time. Purposely failing in small and safe ways can be healthy.

There will be times when you feel temporary pain, frustration, or even anger - you may even want to quit. But if you can keep a

long-term mindset it will be much easier to manage through this temporary discomfort.

Everyone that achieves something great finds themselves in those moments of doubt where they want to give it all up. The difference is the people who crumble in the face of that doubt vs. the people who see it as just one part of a much bigger process.

# Find Role Models to Learn From

Often times there are people out in the world who have already achieved something similar to what you want to achieve. These people can be an amazing resource in helping you reach your own goals.

Take the time to find just 2-3 people who are a good role model for the type of goal you are trying to achieve.

Learn as much as you can about them. Read about them. Watch interviews. Talk to them (if you can). Find out what struggles they went through and how you can better prepare for them in your own journey.

It's a lot easier to learn from others than to have to learn everything through your own experience. Don't feel like you have to reinvent the wheel - find things that have already proven to work based on other people's experiences, and model that in your own life.

## **Do this:**

1. Open up a Word document on your computer.
2. Title it "Role Models for \_\_\_\_\_"

3. Make a section for each role model.
4. Do research on each role model.
5. Collect anything interesting you find: an inspiring story, quote, interview, image, or whatever.
6. Feel free to make any of your own notes (any patterns you see in their thoughts or behaviors that may contribute to their success).
7. Save the document in your "Self Improvement" folder.

This is a great resource to visit and revisit whenever you need an extra boost in motivation or inspiration. Make sure you continue to build on it over time as you discover new role models.

## **Be Open to New Opportunities**

People who are most successful at their goals often times are very flexible and adaptable in the face of change.

This is because no matter how much planning you put into a specific goal, it rarely works out *exactly* the way you imagine. You can never completely predict what the future is going to bring.

However, if you're too stubborn and fixed in how you plan to achieve your goals, then you're probably not going to be able to respond very effectively to those unforeseen obstacles and opportunities.

You may find yourself trying the same things over and over again, and you keep getting the same result, when it may be better to experiment with something completely new and different.

There are many different paths to success - don't be so narrowly focused that you only think there's only one solution to every problem. Never stop learning. Never stop trying new things.

Keep your mind open to new paths and new solutions, and be willing to be flexible when you learn new information or find yourself in new circumstances.

# Try These Motivational Tools

As you work toward your goals, your motivation is going to fluctuate. That's something you have to prepare for on a daily basis. Here are some motivational tools you can use on those days when you need a little more drive.

1. Create a motivational playlist that gets you in the right mood.
2. Spend time with loyal and supportive friends who you can talk about your goals with.
3. Decorate your workspace with motivational quotes and images.
4. Repeat positive affirmations before you start something stressful or difficult.
5. Take the time to reflect on the things you've already accomplished.
6. Know when you need to take a break to refuel yourself.
7. Watch a favorite movie or TV show (it replenishes willpower).
8. Change your environment - go somewhere new to keep your mind stimulated.

9. Exercise and eat healthy. Keep your body in as good of shape as possible.
10. Minimize depressing news, celebrity gossip, and mindless arguing - it's draining.

These are just simple but effective things you can do to increase your daily motivation and willpower as you pursue your goals.



# Keep Building on What Works

The ultimate key to success in any goal is to keep building on what works and ditch what doesn't.

It's simple in *theory* - but it takes time, patience, and dedication. You need to continuously experiment with new things, pay attention to the results you get, and make small adjustments on a daily basis.

As days, weeks, months, and years pass by, your progress becomes more and more significant and noticeable.

That's just common sense: someone who spends 10 years at something is going to be much more advanced than someone who just started yesterday. They have much more knowledge, experience, failure, and growth under their belt.

In the end, the time and effort you dedicate to a single goal is the biggest factor in the results you will get. Never underestimate hard work.

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