

Make Goals Count

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***Abstract:** Goals are deliberate decisions to pursue and create specific outcomes for individuals, teams and organisations. Effectively establishing goals requires understanding of the components of goals and their requirement for creating and managing change. This article discusses the role of values, change and the influence of pleasure and pain as we plan for and create results. It offers suggestions on how to set ourselves up for success.*

Goals are important to planned success but are often half-heartedly approached or considered prepared when the end state is thought of in the mind. Few individuals truly set goals in a manner that works. Even among the leadership of organisations and projects there is limited personal skill and success in goal setting. I assert that personal experience in goal setting and goal achievement leads to more effective project and strategic management. The better we are able to manage ourselves in inner leadership the better we can influence and affect positive change and results with others.

To set and achieve goals we need:

- a sense of purpose that the goals support
- commitment, discipline and focus; stay with the process through thick and thin
- empathy and understanding; recognise and acknowledge cause for failures and setback and move forward without being over critical
- willingness to change attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and our level of comfort
- resilience; getting up as many times as we fall over
- the ability to celebrate triumphs and grieve failures
- to celebrate successes (milestone and final completion)

Goal Achieving Framework

To set and achieve goals it is essential we understand what we value. Energy, passion and commitment are accessible insofar as we align our goals with what really matters to us. Primary motivators in life include affiliation, power and achievement. These can have a significant impact on what we do. They are neutral regarding how we act. They are not at all

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inspiring. Inspiration comes from our values. They determine why we do things. They also affect the 'how' since they set limits on what we consider appropriate behaviour.

Values

Core Values are overarching operating philosophies we maintain regardless of how difficult circumstances may become. We typically have 3 to 5 such values. How clear are you on your core values? Do you know what you are not prepared to give up or relinquish in your quest for success in life? By clarifying our core values, some decisions are much easier to make. When we breach a core value we experience a loss of integrity, associated feelings of shame or guilt, regardless of whether we have identified the value or not.

General Values identify the relative significance of circumstances, states and 'things' to us at the moment. There are two forms of general value:

- **Pursuit Values:** states (e.g. success) or feelings (e.g. happiness) we seek
- **Avoidance Values:** states (e.g. depression) or feelings (e.g. anger) we avoid.

General Values are associated with two fundamental drivers behind all human action: seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. If an action may result in pleasure and pain of comparable magnitudes, we tend to avoid the pain by not taking action. They may also hold the key for personal conflicts we experience. I remember identifying personal growth and peace as two values I sought. I wanted peace in my life but I never achieved it. When I examined the rules for each 'value' my rule for personal growth excluded the possibility of peace as I had defined it. I realised I had to change my rules or my expected state. I did both and now have peace and growth concurrently.

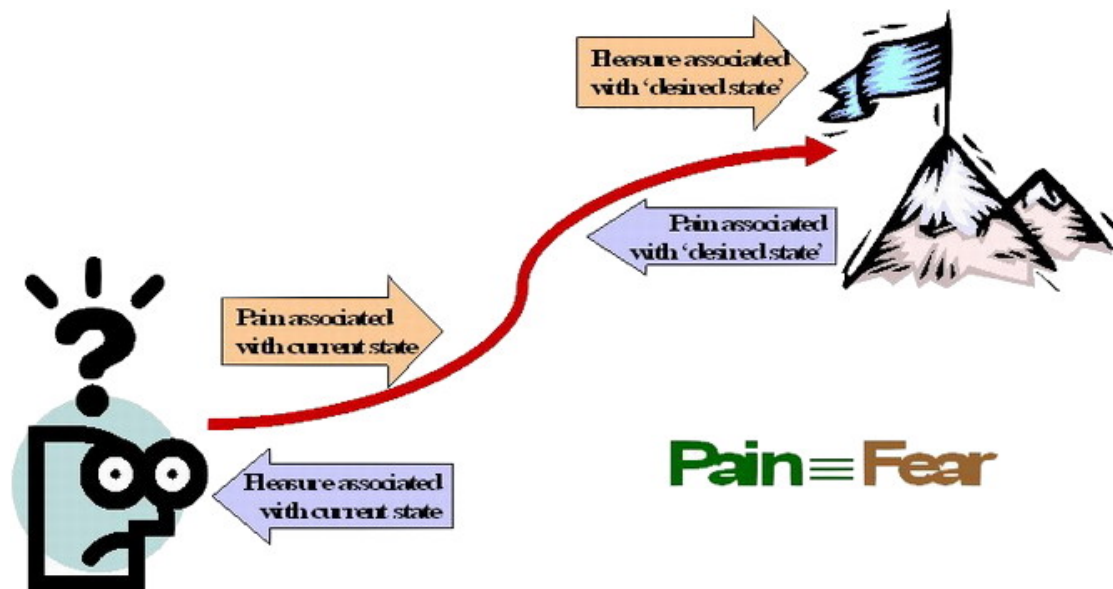
Managing Personal Change

Our goals require us to take action, and action necessitates change. Change unsettles. It has to! It requires us to shift established patterns, beliefs, values, and cultural and behavioural norms. The degree of change determines the impact experienced. Change impacts on us via three sources of pain: *breaking attachments, breaching protections and dashing expectations*.

Attachments (past) are our connections with established behaviours and relationships. Grief is pain experienced when we lose a family member. The pain associated with breaking a habit can keep us locked in. In a work environment, people have preferred patterns of work, ways they use systems, associates they enjoy working with, and some certainty in the results they can expect. They know what works, what does not, and have comfort through familiarity with where they are. Change these attachments at your peril!

Protections (present) are established to bring us security and certainty. Whether performing routines with known outcomes, acting in habitual ways (even negative behaviours) because we want specific responses from others, or being in a physical environment that is familiar, our 'protections' provide security for us. Our belief system can be a special form of protective mechanism. To achieve meaningful goals we often must change self-limiting beliefs. Anything that disrupts our protections becomes a source of discomfort.

Expectations (future) are aspirations that we have for the future. Examples include what our ideal partner is like, financial goals, the outcome of our next performance review, and who will be on our project team. Anything that causes our vision of the future to diminish causes pain. Expectations are attachments to the future.



Pain is a real turn off from taking action. We have a natural (and reasonable) aversion to pain. Gaining pleasure is the reason we do take action. To be successful we must associate much more pleasure than pain with taking action. We must reduce the pleasure and increase the pain of maintaining the status quo, and increase the pleasure and reduce the pain associated with the desired state. The greater the positive difference between where we want to be and where we are, the better our leverage will be. The leverage we have determines how strongly we take action.

Goal Setting Principles

General principles to apply to increase the chances of success include:

- **Get clear about 'Why'**. Before starting work, get clear and specific about why you want to take action. Establish why it is vital that you succeed, what the change will create for you, and what you will miss out if you do not succeed.

- ***Specify what you will do and when.*** Plan the change. If this is a single step goal then this will include how, otherwise you need to map out milestones and timeframes so you can monitor and assess progress. This enables you to work on achievable chunks while maintaining a bigger picture perspective.
- ***Identify who will take action or be otherwise involved.*** This had better have your name next to it. You are responsible for your results. However, it is also important to identify those you need to consult and involve.
- ***Define 'how' each step will be accomplished.*** Get specific. The more clearly you define the tasks/steps, the better you are able to identify problems up front and ensure things are happening during execution.
- ***Assess pleasure and pain of taking action.*** This equates to risk management at a personal level. Identify the forces operating for and against change. Consider approaches that enhance the pleasure and reduce the pain associated with achieving the goal.

Write down the goals and the plan for achieving them. This ensures the goals are not whimsical. The planning process helps internalise goals. Passion, energy and creativity is then accessible. Overwhelm the pain that prevents action with the pleasure associated with successfully accomplishing your goals.

If you are working on relationship goals the process of working with your partner and getting specific about what you seek and how you will accomplish it brings the energy and commitment of two people more clearly to bear, with fewer assumptions and miscommunications causing havoc and upsetting the process. Getting clear about what pain and pleasure is associated with the change will place you in a better position to support each other through the individual struggles you will experience.

When working with others to achieve goals (e.g. on projects) remember you need:

- clarity about intent, purpose and process
- vigilance to uncover sources of resistance
- creativity and empathy to find workable solutions to assist people (your own self when pursuing individual goals) past the resistance
- communication (2-way) so that understanding and clarity can be developed and maintained
- celebration to applaud success

Conclusion

The concepts are easy. The practice is not so easy. If you associate pleasure with planning and goals setting, it may become a powerful ally in your life. Overcome the resistance that impedes change. Decide to make your time on this planet count. These principles apply to relationships,

projects and organisations so any success at the personal level supports you in other environments.

I challenge you to:

- Get clear about what you want to achieve and why
- Create leverage around the reasons for change
- Get on with it.