

Chapter 5

Setting Goals: Coming a Step Closer to Your Dreams

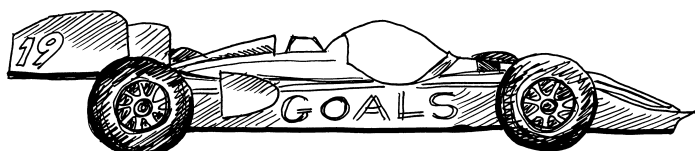
Can you imagine what would happen if a builder began to build a house with no blueprint? Or an Olympic athlete dropped out of the race of her life because she ate too much cake the night before? Would you believe it if a Noble Prize-winning scientist announced that he had never studied his subject seriously, he just happened to get lucky? What if a new president stood in front of the people during his inaugural speech and said:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is truly amazing that I am here today in front of you now as your president, because although I always dreamed about being the president I never thought I could do it. The only reason I'm here now is because of all of the people who ran my campaign for me. Anyhow, here we are, so we'll just have to do the best we can.

What Are Goals?

Goals are the same things as dreams—almost. There is one main difference. What do you think that difference is? Think of your goals as the car. You have to get into the car and drive it to where you want to go or else you will never get there. Your dreams are like the final destination—since that is where you want to end up.

You can have the best car in the world but you are not going to get



anywhere without a destination. That is to say, your dreams give you the motivation and direction and your goals are the vehicle through which you achieve your dreams. Without dreams, your goals will simply be meaningless tasks to get done. Without goals, the noblest dream in the world will never be accomplished.

Goals: A Blueprint for Your Dreams

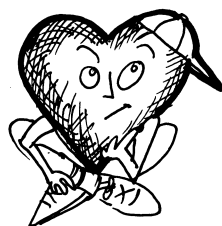
Everyone has dreams. If you ask some people what their dreams are, they may say something like this: to win the lottery! Or, to suddenly meet the person of my dreams and sail away to a beautiful island together. These are not goals; they are wishy-washy and far-out fantasies. Wishes like these will usually not come true because there is no clear way to make them happen.

A dream with goals, on the other hand, is a different story. For instance, you dream about becoming a pilot one day. That could be a dream that you can make happen. You won't wake up one morning and just be handed a pilot's license. You have to work for that license, and earn it. To fulfill your dream of becoming a pilot (or any other dream), you have to start with reasonable goals.

Your goals may look something like this:

- ☉ *To talk to someone who is in the Air Force or the Navy now so I'll know what it's really like.*
- ☉ *To get A's and B's in high school so I can get into the Air Force Academy or the Naval Academy.*
- ☉ *To get involved in other activities, like joining the tennis team, and the rocketry club, because these things are fun and they'll help me get into those colleges.*

Of course, this is a very long-term plan, especially if you are in sixth or seventh grade. But even if your dream will not be something you can achieve in the near future, you can make short-term goals that will help you to reach your ultimate goal. Short-term goals may be to study for a test, or to get help with a project or a writing assignment. The most important point is that you really want what you are working for. Otherwise, it will be hard to keep going over the long term.



Imagine that you suddenly decide, as a senior in high school, that you want to be a pilot and go to the Air Force Academy. If you are an excellent student and have been involved in your school's activities, you may have a chance. But if you have not taken your schoolwork seriously up to that point, you definitely won't make it. By turning your dreams into goals, you can open up opportunities for yourself that may not have been there otherwise.

The “I Can’t Do It!” Syndrome

Have you ever been around someone with the I can’t do it syndrome? That person sounds like this: *That’s impossible! I’ll never be able to do that! Did you see the other people who are trying out, they’re all so much better than I am! I’m not smart enough! That kind of job is for someone else, not me!* All of us know that person, and some of us have even lived with that person for a while in our own skin.

If you decide in your mind before even trying that you are not capable of doing something, you will probably fail. Your mind tells your body, *I can’t do this!* and your body, being a great listener, says, *Oh, okay, I guess I can’t.* This is called a self-fulfilling prophecy. That means that you program yourself to fail before you ever try. We are not ignoring the fact that people have talents in different areas. We don’t expect that Albert Einstein could have pitched a winning game in the World Series, or that Sandy Koufax could have come up with the theory of relativity. What we are talking about is a positive mental attitude.

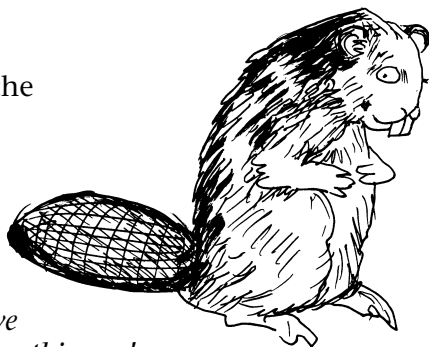
It is often easier to convince yourself that you will not be able to achieve your dreams than it is to actually pursue them. Working toward a goal is hard—you have to take one step at a time. You need patience and determination—not to mention enthusiasm.

Sometimes you are going to fail. It happens to everyone. Some of the most famous people failed the most frequently. Albert Einstein said that out of every 100 tries, he was successful only once. Sounds funny, doesn’t it? To be successful, to reach your dreams, and to fulfill your goals, you have to be willing to try, and to risk the possibility of failure. You can only succeed if you think you can. The difference between failing and being a failure is simple: when you fail and *don’t* give up, you can still be successful. You are only a failure if you allow your failures to keep you down.

Hard Work

Do you shake and tremble at the thought of doing hard work?

When your teacher announces, *Class you have a project due in three weeks. By doing this project you are going to learn exciting new things. However, in order to do well, you are going to have to work really hard! No easy grades on this one!*



Do you moan and groan? Most people do, including adults.

Most people fret at the thought of working hard. But hard work is one of the most basic ingredients for a happy life. Without hard work, you will never come close to reaching any worthwhile dream. When you put your heart into your work, when you do your absolute best, you feel good about yourself. When you do something halfway, somewhere inside you know that you are cheating yourself. Your work doesn't show what you are capable of accomplishing and you don't feel good about it.

One of the most common complaints that we hear from our students is: *I tried, but I couldn't do it.* It doesn't take an Oxford scholar to figure out, by looking at their papers, that they didn't try very hard. At the beginning of the year, when asked to do a writing assignment, many students will write as fast as they can without checking their work. So we say, *edit your work!* And they say, *it takes too much time. You can understand what I am trying to say!* We say, *your writing shows something about you, what do you want people to think about you when they read your writing?*

Hmm, pause, cough—maybe they're right! Actually, when we do anything, we leave behind little traces of what kind of people we are. So hard work should become a habit. Although your parents and your teachers may try to help you to get into the habit of working hard, in the end the only person who is rewarded by learning to work hard is—you!

Quick and Easy?

You may ask, *If hard work helps you realize your dreams and makes you feel good about yourself, then why are so few people working hard?*

We live in a society of quick results. Want to talk to someone? Pick up the phone, fax, e-mail. Want something to eat? Drive through the fast food chain of your choice or use a microwave oven. Want a new pair of jeans or a shirt? Go down to the mall, or order from a catalogue—express delivery. Want to forget about your problems? Turn on the TV for a while. Want to play a game? You have dozens to choose from, and you don't even have to leave your home.

We have microwaves, remote controls, cell phones, cordless phones, caller ID, and a trillion other gadgets invented to make life easier. It's not a big mystery if you are having a hard time putting all of your energy into your work. You are surrounded by a fast-paced, easy access society, where you can get results without necessarily working for them. Because of this, some people have forgotten the value of hard work.

One day a graduate student asked his physics professor, Dr. Kolomeisky (Dorothy's husband), why Dr. Kolomeisky only gave partial credit for correct answers on an exam. It is important to note that the student had the correct answers, but that he had made some serious mistakes in his calculations in coming to the right answers. He urged his professor to change his grade. The student argued that it didn't matter that his work was incorrect as long as the final answer was right. After a moment of thought, Dr. Kolomeisky replied to the student:

You are a physics major. Imagine that you design a bridge in the future. The bridge looks wonderful. Everyone is happy with the bridge. No one notices the small mistakes and slight miscalculations. The bridge is used for several years. Nothing bad happens. One day the bridge collapses. Your work wasn't perfect, but pretty good. People are injured. Someone is even crushed to death. Do you think you should receive partial credit?

This graduate student was a civil engineer. He dreamed about building bridges that would be used by thousands, maybe even millions, of people. He was on his way to fulfilling his dream by getting the education he needed. In his case, how hard he worked in college, and how determined he was to do his work correctly, could make a huge difference to other people.

No one wants to be on a bridge that collapses. Hard work always pays off in the long run. When you do your best, you feel good about yourself, and you may be able to touch other peoples' lives in ways you never imagined before.

What Are Your Dreams?

We interviewed Jonathan over the Internet two weeks before he graduated from high school. He had become clearer about what he wanted to accomplish. He told us that his bad grades for his first two years hurt him, but he could still catch up. While reading over his interview, ask yourself what it is that you would really like to achieve.

Dorothy: *Jonathan, here you are about to graduate from high school. You must have thought about some of your dreams for the future.*

Jonathan: *I have a lot of dreams. My first two years in high school I was out of it and didn't do much, but now I'm totally different.*

Dorothy: *What do you dream about?*

Jonathan: *I dream about finishing college and becoming a news journalist. I have to go to community college first, though, and then I'll transfer. I want to be a foreign correspondent because I love to travel and be in the middle of everything as it is happening.*

Dorothy: *That's a tough job to get and to keep. What are your goals?*

Jonathan: *You mean, how am I going to get to be able to do what I want to do?*

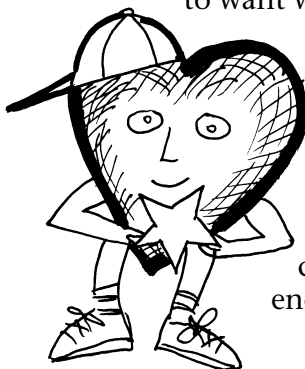
Dorothy: *Right. What's your plan?*

Jonathan: *First I'll go to community college and do really well. Then I'll transfer. I'll finish a program in journalism. I also want to travel and study Spanish. I want to learn another language and it all goes together.*

You Can Do It!

No matter what your circumstances are, you can achieve your dreams. The formula for reaching your dreams is simple: you have to want whatever it is you are striving for badly enough to work very hard for it.

Make a list of your own dreams. After you have written out your dreams, write out how you plan to reach each one. Be as specific as possible. Set a date and make a clear plan. Remember, you can start to reach for long-term dreams by fulfilling smaller goals now. No matter what it is that you have in mind, you can do it if you think you can, if you want it badly enough, and if you are willing to work very hard.



Making a Plan

If you are serious about fulfilling your dreams you might want to make a plan. Here is a model for you to take a look at.

My dream is to: be a professional singer.

Goal one: *Join chorus at school and learn to read music.*

Goal two: *Talk to people who know about the singing profession and ask them for advice.*

Goal three: *Save money and sign up for voice lessons.*

Goal four: *Compete in singing competitions.*

Being a professional singer is a big dream! But by breaking your dream down into smaller goals, you make it become more realistic. Obviously this is a long-term dream—chances are that you will not start your singing career tomorrow. By going after a big dream little by little, and with a lot of hard work, you can be successful!

Journal

Every famous or well-known person started with a dream. If that dream was to swim the English Channel, write a classic novel, or become the best basketball player in the world, they all began the same way. They all had a goal, a solid, reachable goal. Imagine that you could do anything you dreamed of and not fail. What would you do?



To Do

1. After reading over Jonathan's dreams, as a class write out specific goals to help him achieve each dream. Remember, some of his goals will be long-term. Does everyone in your class agree on how Jonathan should go about fulfilling his goals? How do long-term and short-term goals differ? How will his achieving short-term goals now help him with his long-term goals in the future?

Variation: If you have a closely-knit class and would like to bypass discussing Jonathan's dreams discuss your own instead. That's much more interesting for everyone. Have each class member write down one dream together and come up with short-term and long-term goals to fulfill that dream.



2. Write out your own dreams. First just write your dreams, as many as you can think of. After you have written out your dreams, go back to the beginning of the list and write out goals for each dream one by one. Goals should be clear and specific and help you to achieve your bigger dream. If you have a hard time deciding what your dreams are, give yourself some time to think. Be creative. You are in the process of making your own future!

Note: If you did the variation in #1, don't get lazy! You probably have more than one dream! Write them all out, with goals, and discuss your ideas with someone you are close to!



Key Ideas

- ⊗ Without goals, dreams are more like wishes—they will only come true in your imagination.
- ⊗ The best way to reach your dreams is to clarify your goals for reaching each dream.
- ⊗ In order to reach your dreams you must be willing to work very hard!

**Even the longest journey begins
with a single step.**

Anonymous