

Is Goal-Setting a Waste of Time?

By Charlotte Hicks

By now, most of your friends who made New Year's resolutions have already abandoned them. Unfortunately, that happens with business and personal goals, too. You set a goal, something happens that pulls you off course, and you abandon the goal. Until the next goal-setting event. It's a vicious cycle.

After a while you start to wonder if it's even worthwhile to set goals. After all, aren't they limiting? What if a better opportunity comes up? Aren't most goals just wishes, anyway? Is it just a waste of time?

There are some successful people, like copywriter Bob Bly, who don't go through a formal goal-setting exercise every year. And yet, they're able to achieve great things.

Marketer Matt Furey explained the mindset of people who don't set goals during a recent online discussion about the value of goal-setting:



Charlotte Hicks

A close-up of a hand holding a blue marker, writing the words 'TARGET', 'WORK', 'PLAN', 'REALISTIC', and 'SUCCESS' in a vertical list on a whiteboard. The letters 'G', 'O', 'A', 'L', and 'S' in each word are highlighted in red.

"There are those who are on auto-pilot for success, and they stay on course — defying all the studies. They have 'goals,' but not written goals or formalized plans. They're seeing what they want, and it immediately goes into motion and action."

People who don't need to set goals have a steel self-will that drives them to successful actions, and away from distractions that draw most people off track.

It would be great to be that type of person. I know I'm not. In fact, few people are. The vast majority of people need goals to keep them motivated and on course.

Without a clear goal, you run the risk of falling into what I call "employee mode," where you show up and wait for someone to tell you what to do.

Okay, so we need to set goals. The more the better, right? I can tell you from personal experience — absolutely not! I remember presenting my annual goals to my mastermind group several years ago. I had business goals (for several businesses), personal goals, fitness goals, financial goals, and on and on.

One of the guys looked at me and asked, "Are these your goals or an audition for Overachievers Anonymous?" Point made.

Over the years, I've whittled down my goal list to just one big goal today — building a high-income business using my copywriting and marketing skills. Every action I take is evaluated by determining if it will take me closer to my one big goal or pull me away from it.

And, you know what? I've made more progress toward that one goal than I ever did when I had a long list. It's a big goal ... really more of a life goal than an annual one. Which makes sense — most big goals take more than a year to accomplish.

Have you set goals for this year? Can you summarize them in one big goal? Whether you've set goals or not, take a few minutes to identify your big goal. It should be one that addresses *your* deepest desires.

Test your goal by asking the question, "If I accomplished this goal, would I be fulfilled?" If the answer isn't a big YES, keep working.

Keep your goal handy ... we'll take a hard look at it over the next few days. By the end of the week, you'll be confident that your goal is truly yours.

Then, with a solid goal, identifying the most important daily activities becomes simple — every task either moves you toward your goal, or away from it.

How many goals do you usually set each year? Have you found them helpful? Let me know in the comments!

Tomorrow, we'll talk about one of the top reasons people fail to accomplish their goals and how to determine if the goal you've set is what you really want.

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7 Responses to "Is Goal-Setting a Waste of Time?"

Hey Charlotte

My big goal is to utilize the power of my words to encourage and empower late-bloomers to believe in a bright future.

My problem is that there are many ways I can satisfy this goal: through client-work (which I enjoy because it teaches me something new every day, although I haven't tried copywriting yet), through my own site (that needs to be launched), by joining a company and heading a magazine...

...oh, I am rambling, but I am trying to figure out my priority!

Thanks Kitto

Guest (Kitto) – over a year ago

I've been guilty of going ages without setting any goals, and I've been guilty of setting way too many goals. What resonated with me was the question, "If I accomplished this goal, would I be fulfilled?" That question is the gem of the article. I'm going to apply it to all future goals. If the answer is not a resounding, "yes," then I'll regard it simply as a "to-do," not a goal.

Guest (Tom Owen M) – over a year ago

Over achiever? I am the original over achiever but am retiring and want to under achieve to enjoy those special moments in traveling (or whatever) with "Senior Moments".

Money was never as important as experiences and education or service to others. But, yeah, I would not be a lawyer and barrister, naturopath or all the other stuff I research.

So, my goal is really to be a bon vivant gadfly dilleante! with naps..... ;-)

BelleDroid – over a year ago

I can't imagine a life without goals, but I never set more than four at a time. Usually growth or improvement in areas of Health, Business/income, Family/relationship and/or mental/emotional/spiritual Life. When I find I'm pursuing too many, I let one or more go - for now. It's worked fairly well.

Not to say I achieve all of them, but I don't postpone them without a good reason. It seems to me that timelines are not necessarily deadlines, and some flexibility improves quality of life.

Bob Cohn – over a year ago

Hi Charlotte, Goals setting isn't a waste of time, only if the setter adhere self to achieving the final end result, which is why, the goal got set. But, sticking to it, till the end result, is the most difficult task very few of us are too lazy to bear. And as you said, one big goal is better, in order not to get too confused, that will lead one to given up on all other goals at the end of the day.

Every step I take on daily basis, is towards arriving at my final set big goal, of becoming a renewed Web writer, and by the time I arrive, then I can diversify either to the left or to the right. Best wishes to all.

SALIHU DIKKO – over a year ago

True experience is best teacher

Guest (Ayoola Rasaq) – over a year ago

Goal setting is essential as it provides the direction one is to take. Apart from that it brings a sense of responsibility without which one may not effectively utilize resources available.

Mwana Chuma – over a year ago

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