

This article is about goals, in the plural. You see it's important to have more than one goal. Not so many as to make it confusing, but enough to keep you going. You need to plant a number of seeds in your goal garden because some of them just won't grow - and if you spend a lifetime waiting for one seed to grow and it doesn't, and you have nothing else to look forward to, you could become pretty disillusioned.

We all need goals, and life is all about goals. Look down any street or open space where children are kicking a ball about. It's not long before either a couple of jumpers are placed on the ground or a goal chalked up on your garden wall, or a couple of sticks are hammered into the ground. Just kicking a ball around isn't much fun without an aim - a goal. Unfortunately for many people life is a bit like kicking a ball around without a goal to aim for and the process is about as satisfying.

Achieving your goals is about realising your potential, yet some people just don't seem to reach their potential. Some of them blame the environment, their parents, the government, or the weather. In reality the answer to goal achievement is looking right at you in the mirror every morning. The first lesson to learn about the achievement of goals is that you are the only one responsible for their achievement, and that's a hard lesson to learn.

We have been brought up to expect that other people are responsible for the way things are and in many ways conditioned to believe that it's not our fault but them - capital **T-H-E-M**. But an important lesson to learn is that there is no such group of people as **THEM**. There's only us. Achieving goals, doing something with your life is your responsibility.

You know, it's a curious thing about planning the course of your life but isn't it amazing how many people spend more time and energy plotting the course of their holidays than in determining the course of their lives? What's more important - the two weeks on the Costa del Sol; the trip to Florida; the world cruise - or the rest of your life? And yet for vast numbers of people the planning and preparation that goes into a) deciding where to go and b) how to get there far outstrips deciding the course of their lives and how to get there. If you don't know where you're going, don't be sorry when you end up somewhere else.

Achievers, goal orientated individuals, people who are realising their goals and achieving success take hold of the rudder. They set their own course and they plan how to get there. But it is important to know where you're going. One way to look at life is like a big open sea. You have the choice either to navigate yourself to wherever it is you want to be, or simply to let the current take you. You could end up somewhere nice; you might end up somewhere horrible; you might even stay where you are. But without taking responsibility - you are not in control and that's an important thing to consider.

Without goals other people are in control of your life. It's bad enough growing up. Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that. Go to school, pass your exams, pay attention, and keep quiet. Eat it all up. Don't drink that, it's bad for you. Take this it's good for you. Rules, laws, regulations, instructions, it's a nightmare. And through all of this life unfortunately teaches us not to be responsible and that there are plenty of people around who are more than willing to tell us what to do, where to go, and how to live our lives.

The first thing to learn about goal achievement is that it is your responsibility and you have to take charge. Anything that stops you from achieving your goal is your problem. It's up to you to solve it and only you are accountable.

There will already be some of you saying "Yes but..." **Stop it.** 'Yes but' is the most obstructive thing you can do and say and you will never achieve your goals unless you get rid of 'Yes but' and replace it with 'Yes how'.

Spending your time working out how to achieve a goal is far more profitable than working out the reasons why you can't achieve a goal. In the process of working out how to achieve a goal you will be surprised how much closer you get to achieving it.

Working out how to achieve a goal means deciding **what** the first step is and once you have done that you can **take** the first step. It is absolutely certain that without taking the first step you will not achieve your goal. If you don't run the first mile there is no chance of winning the marathon. If you don't draft the letter applying for the job you won't get it. If you fail to telephone the customer for the appointment you certainly won't make the sale and your goal of being number one won't happen.

People who are goal achievers don't do it in one go. You can't write a book in one sitting. The chances are strongly against becoming rich and famous in 24 hours and yet some people seem to believe that that is what happens. Goal achievers make it look easy because you only notice the end result. Watching snooker on television makes you think that it looks easy to play. All professionals make things look easy. They don't televise the hours of practice – the steps it takes to become professional. The problem is we only ever see the achievement, and were not around to count the little steps it took. Life has taught us to stand at the winning line to watch winners. Nobody stands at the start line. The winners do though. They know that winning is all about starting. To achieve a goal you have to make a start. Take the first step. Decide what you want to do and take the first step. The only way to find out whether you really want to do it is to take the first step. Setting goals is relatively easy. There is a formula, which says that your goals have to be achievable, measurable and meaningful which is all right as far as it goes. But how do you know whether it's what you really want? Until you start taking the first steps towards your goals it is difficult to decide whether it is what you want and more importantly whether you want to pay the price.

Oh yes, an important thing about goals is that they don't come free. Other people's goals and other peoples achievements look alright and look easy until you realise that there is a price and you might not like the price. Everything looks all right in the window until you see the price tag. Everything in life is on sale. The difference between goal achievers and non-goal achievers is that the achievers decide to pay the price.

Deciding what you want to do and taking the first step will bring you face to face with the price tag. It is at this point where you have to ask yourself "*Is it really what I want to do?*" Put the picture in your mind of having achieved the goal, and of the energy and commitment it took, and ask yourself "*Am I prepared to pay this price for this goal?*"

It is at this stage that 95 people out of every hundred will hum and hah about the price and either decide to think about it or decide against it - in fact they are both the same. If a goal has to be thought about it's not a goal - it is just a whim. A goal should scream out at you "*I am a goal and the price doesn't matter*". You see the price of not achieving a goal may in fact be much greater than the achievement itself.

The price for not setting goals or even attempting to achieve something in your life could be realising it when it is too late. For some goals you might run out of time and there is nothing worse than saying "*If only...*". How many people have you heard say -if only? How many times have you said if only? It's a dreadful thing to hear and it's a worse thing to say. There is no such thing as if only for the people who are achieving their goals and realising their potential. They banish if only and so should you.

Having said that setting out on the journey is almost as good as getting there. There is a saying that success is about the journey and not the destination. Too much focus on the destination can cause you to lose sight of the treasures on the journey.

That's an important lesson. The journey towards a goal can be more exciting than the goal itself. You can learn so much about yourself on the way to achieving a goal that sometimes the goal itself does not matter any more but the activity of goal achievement in itself becomes the goal. Doing something to shape the course of your life will in itself make you a better person and will separate you from the great mass of people whose lives are shaped by others. It has been said that life is the pursuit of happiness whereas I believe that it is about the happiness of pursuit. It is important you understand that and perhaps it is something that you will not learn until it happens to you. Be careful however about being obsessive. You can be passionate about achieving your goals without being obsessive.

Whatever you do however, the single most major thing you should do, if you are serious about becoming a goal achiever is to take a blank piece of paper and write down your goals. Writing down each of your goals gives it some airing of the sort that will help you to decide whether it really is something you want to do or not, and more importantly what you intend to do about it. You may end up with 20 or 30 goals and that is OK but you will have to draw out of these a list on a separate bit of paper of at least three and no more than five primary goals.

These are the things that you will concentrate on. This is the destination.

Do not restrict yourself no matter how silly or outrageous some of the goals sound at this preliminary stage. Write it down. Do not make any judgements about the worth or likelihood of a particular goal, just write them all down until you cannot think of any more. Ask yourself "*What do I want to do with my life?*" - forget the things that you think are stopping you. "*What do I really want to do with my life? Who would I like to be? What sort of person do I want to be? What sort of job do I want? Where do I want to live? How much money do I want to earn?*".

When you have your list of goals check that they are specific, and if some are not then you should make them so. If you've written down a holiday of a lifetime say where it is you want to go, and for how long. Be specific about how you want to get there and what you want to do when you get there. Will somebody be going with you and will you be paying for them. Will they want to go? What's the reason for the goal - is it just something that everybody else does or is it something that you really **want** to do.

This process of focusing on the importance of the goal and the steps of specifying exactly what the parameters are will already give you some ideas about the likelihood of your achieving that goal and how to go about it.

Then ask yourself what the first step would be. The rest could be history.

Goals should be the things that give your life shape and purpose. The mere process of identification and taking the first step will put you in charge of your life. It's the easiest and simplest thing in the world to do, and perhaps that's the problem.

Because the process is so simple it seems to be ignored. However, there is something else. You have to do it. In a world where we have been brought up to expect everything to be done for us, it's the people who **do** things that succeed. Stop thinking about it - do it.

The only thing stopping you from achieving your goals is your inertia.

Put some time-scales on your goals and work out the steps you have to take. Then do it. Take the first step. You'll be amazed how much you can achieve. Do it. Write down your goals. Be specific. Ask yourself why you want a particular goal. Take the first step. Do it now. Well? What are you waiting for?