

Myths about goal setting can make efforts seem doomed

Here's a way to succeed: Get specific and realistic

By: RICK CONLOW

Q: Why doesn't goal setting work?

A: The practice of goal setting has generated mixed reviews. On the one hand, there are glowing success stories paraded by seminar speakers and authors of numerous goal setting books. On the other hand, there are people's real experiences, in which they've fallen far short of their expectations. They haven't fulfilled childhood dreams and have failed to reach other goals they've set throughout life.

What's actually happening to people who think goal setting doesn't work? They have bought into some myths. These myths have erected formidable barriers and prevented them from using goal setting properly.

- Myth No. 1: If I fail to reach a goal, that's proof that goal setting doesn't work.

The book *Goal Setting, the Motivational Technique that Works* summarizes more than 100 studies that prove goal setting does increase people's performance in over 90 percent of the cases.

- Myth No. 2: Goal setting takes too much time.

How much time is too much time? Everything worth doing takes time. If you calculate the potential return on your investment, a few hours spent setting goals at the end or beginning of every year and a few minutes refining them each week thereafter is a very small price to pay.

- Myth No. 3: Everybody doesn't need goals.

To test if this statement fits you, ask yourself, "Am I satisfied with my life?" If you are satisfied, try accepting the hypothesis that goal setting does work. If you begin now to set goals, you'll guarantee that you remain satisfied by maintaining or increasing your success. If you're like the majority of people, however, and you'd like things in your life to be different, take a chance on goal setting. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

- Myth No. 4: Everyone knows how to set goals: it just takes common sense.

While people are goal-achieving by nature, they'll make more headway if they know specifically how to set goals. Zig Ziglar, who has made a career out of motivating people, succinctly characterizes the difference between one who does not know how to set goals and one who does: "One is a wandering generality; the other is a meaningful specific."

- Myth No. 5: You should set really big goals.

This is the myth that trips up more people than all the rest. They think that something magical kicks in if they set sky-high goals for themselves. It's easy to get swept up in an emotional presentation and make goals that are unrealistic. A consultant, for example, recommended to seminar participants that they set an income goal for themselves. They all wrote one down. "Now add a zero." The consultant said. It sounded great at the time, moving from an income goal of \$50,000 to \$500,000 but unfortunately, when reality kicked in, the goal was simply unrealistic and set most participants up for failure.

TAKING ACTION

Q: How, then, can I make goal setting work?

A: Two friends walked into a locker room. One said to the other, "I've had it. I really tried. I'm giving up on that New Year's resolution, and I don't care what anyone says." The other chuckled quietly; it was January 19.

Real goal setting involves more than making a half-hearted New Year's resolution. Real goal setting doesn't set you up for a lottery income – where you buy a ticket expecting to get lucky without doing anything more about it.

Goal setting will be a powerful tool for you if you follow some simple laws. Think of your life as a movie. You're the star.

You write the script. And only you can determine if you have a box office hit or not. Here are the laws:

- Know yourself. Take a personal inventory and honestly identify your strengths and weaknesses.
- Determine what you want. Clearly write three to five specific and realistic goals.
- Take action. Make short plans to get you started. Add to them as you gain momentum. But do something.
- Review your progress. Regularly review what's working or what's not working. Refine your goals as you go along. Get help when needed and reward yourself for success.
- Make a commitment. There's power in commitment. It seems the universe rallies behind a person who takes one step with purpose and determination.

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