

A NEW METHOD FOR GOAL SETTING

Most people have heard of the SMART method of goal setting. This is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timeline. It provides a basic formula on how to construct goals and how to go about achieving them.

SMART is a useful tool however I've never been overly fond of it. I feel it limits people in believing what they could achieve; people set so-called "realistic" goals only to be disappointed. The goals they set are too easy to attain or are not very inspiring so they don't have the passion necessary to drive them forward.

I believe you should set goals that initially may intimidate you. They should move you out of your comfort zone. They should stir up feelings within you that make you to look at how you approach life and how you view the world and yourself.

It's been said that if you continue to do what you've always done, you'll continue to get what you've got. So if you desire a different outcome you will need to do things differently. Big goals by their very nature require you to do things differently. Dreaming big stirs up passion within you so you can use this feeling to make the necessary changes in yourself to achieve your goals.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating wishful thinking here. Hoping to achieve something without changing yourself is wishing. Wanting to achieve a goal by opening yourself to the required changes is purposeful goal setting.

In our "instant gratification" culture we seem to have forgotten that some goals will take a certain time to reach, especially when it comes to health and fitness. Our body systems need time to adapt to changes. Peter Drucker, a top business guru, said, "People overestimate what they can accomplish in one year but underestimate what they can accomplish in five years."

It may take some time but EVERYONE is capable of achieving their dreams if we allow ourselves to believe strongly enough and are open to taking the necessary steps. So don't be afraid of setting BIG goals for yourself.

With this in mind, I've come up with what I feel is a more passionate and dynamic method to goal setting. I've called it the INSPIRE Method and I'll outline each of the steps below.

INSPIRE Yourself to Reach Your Goals

I – Identify clearly what you want. A favourite quote of mine is “If you don’t know where it is you’re going, you’ll never get there.” People often don’t achieve goals because they don’t know what they want.

One of the best ways to clearly identify what you want is to write it down. By the very act of writing down your goals you increase your chances of success. Did you know that only 3% of people actually take the time to write out their goals? No wonder a vast majority of people “fail” to achieve success. They have no idea what success looks like for them!

When writing out your goals focus on what you want in the positive. Let’s use weight loss as an example. Don’t say I want to lose five pounds, say I AM 140 lbs. For achieving a good level of fitness and health say I AM fit, healthy and powerful. Don’t worry about the how yet, simply and clearly state what you want to achieve.

N – Nuture your desires. Use your emotions to align yourself with your goals. You can use various techniques to help you capture the energy of your emotions to propel you toward your goals.

One technique is visualization. Spend a few minutes every day sitting in a quite environment where you can picture your goal. Experience the feeling of having reached your goal NOW. Be very vivid with your imagination; the more senses you can involve the better. Sights, smells, sounds, touch – use any or all of these senses to create a real life image of your goal achieved.

Using the example of weight loss again (this seems to be a popular goal for many people in January), picture what your body will feel like at your desired weight. How will your clothes fit? How does it feel to have more energy?

Or perhaps you’ve been living with back pain or knee pain. How does it feel to not have the pain? How does it feel to move easily and without restriction?

Harness these feelings to drive you. Your body doesn’t know the difference from an imagined event to a “real” event. Research on top athletes has shown they activate the same muscles in the same patterns when visualizing as they do when they actually perform their event. Using the power of your mind can set up the right physiology in your body to achieve your fitness goals. By believing first we will then see the results.

S – Support yourself. Ask anyone who has achieved anything and they will tell you they had help along the way. What's the first thing award winners do at award shows? They pull out their thank you list of people who helped them achieve their goal.

Seek friends, family, professionals, books, and groups; whatever it is that can help you. This is one of the main reasons why people hire fitness coaches. We give them advice and support to achieve their fitness and health goals. Marathon runners almost always train in groups. While the event is an individual sport, the group support gets the runners through the weeks and months of tough training they need to finish a marathon.

We all need help and that help is always available if we allow our selves to receive it.

P – Plan. This is where you work on the “how”. Things like scheduling, what tools we'll use, how often we'll workout, deadline for your goal, etc. Using the example of a marathon, you pick a date for your race, you plan how often and when you'll run, what days you'll do your long run, how you'll structure your training period and so on.

Another often used quote is “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” This is so true. Not planning is another key reason people fail to achieve goals. It is during this stage where you can break down a big goal into bite-sized chunks and divide it into smaller goals. Olympic athletes spend four years preparing for an event. During those years they have qualifying events that push them forward to the ultimate event.

Process goals are very important in the planning stage. What I mean by process goal is the purpose of the goal isn't dependent on the outcome but rather the focus is on the “doing”.

Let's say your ultimate goal is to lose 40 lbs. This is an outcome goal, you know where or not you've succeeded by looking at the scale. Success is measured by the outcome.

To achieve this goal you know you need to watch what you eat and exercise. So you devise a plan where you'll exercise four times a week and eat at regular times each day. These are process goals. Success isn't determined by some outcome but rather by the actual “doing” – the process of working out four times per week and eating balanced meals at regular intervals.

I – Initiate action. You've set yourself a big goal, you've harnessed your emotions to drive you and you've come up with a plan. The next step is to take a step each day towards your goal. As the ancient Chinese proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

Do not judge your actions; there are no big or small steps. Only steps. What might seem like a "small" step now could turn out to be huge later on. Some days the action might be to just rewrite your goals or to use your visualization technique to motivate yourself again.

Let's go back to the weight loss example. Action could entail strenuous physical activity as in working out or it could be calling around to find a good fitness coach to help you design the most effective program for you.

R – Release your goal. Set your goal but do not hang onto to it too tightly. If we get too caught up on the goal it can become an anchor.

I know this may sound confusing. Up to this point I've been telling you to focus on your goals, write them out, visualize them, get out of your comfort zone and now I'm apparently telling you to forget them? Well in a way, I am.

Let me explain. Did you ever really want something, I mean really, really want something but no matter how hard you tried you just couldn't get it? And were there times when you tried something you really didn't care much about and you got it right away?

What happened? The pressure we put on ourselves to do something overwhelms us and undermines our success. You need just the right amount of pressure to move you out of your comfort zone but not enough to break you.

Sometimes the pressure of wanting is too much. Besides would you rather want to be fit or just to be fit? Often we need only to allow ourselves to achieve our goal and then get out of our own way.

A great resource for releasing goals is a book called The Sedona Method by Hale Dwoskin (Sedona Press).

E – Evaluate/evolve/enjoy. Check back periodically to see how you're doing. Are you doing all the process goals you need to? Are you still passionate about your goal? You may decide your goal isn't something you really wanted to pursue and choose a more appropriate goal. Or you may achieve it. Either way you'll be happier for it.

Let me give you an example from my own life. I love running and have competed in many races from 5km to over 60km. A few years ago I set myself the goal of running a marathon. I did all the training and finished but I wasn't happy with my result nor did I enjoy myself during the race or the training.

Part of me wanted to do another marathon to improve on my time because I know my body is capable of it. So I set myself another goal of running a faster marathon. I set my goal time, laid out my plan and then let go of the goal.

The result? I haven't run a marathon since my first one. And I'm not disappointed in myself at all. You see I came to realize I just don't get much joy or happiness running on city streets for a long time. I'd rather run twice as long on the mountain trails. Running another marathon was a goal only for my ego.

I'm passionate about trail running and have no problem with discipline when it comes to preparing for a race on the trails. So now I run in the city for shorter runs since its more convenient but all my long runs and races are on the trails.

Remember, the point of all this is to enjoy the ride. Working towards your goals should bring you happiness and fulfillment. Sure there might be some difficult moments during the process but it should not feel like a prison term. Even if its tough work you should feel joy most of the time as you move towards your goal. The more you do, the sooner you will reach your goal.

Make 2007 a Breakthrough Year!

Use the INSPIRE process to set and reach your goals in 2007. Don't wait until January 1st, get a head start on the New Year and start today. Think about some things that you'd truly like to achieve. Don't worry if you don't have it all figured out right now. If your goals scare you a little, that's okay. Go through the steps and see what happens. If you follow each of the steps and take the time to do them correctly I'm certain you'll be pleased with the results.

Have a breakthrough year in 2007!

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"It's a funny thing about life. If you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it." Somerset Maugham