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## Take Deliberate Action to Reach Goals

Goal setting should never be confused with daydreaming or fantasy. Those activities are escapes from reality – devices used to “get away from it all.” You never intend to take action on a daydream or a fantasy. Genuine goal setting, by contrast, is the first step toward positive, deliberate action. Although goals are often imaginative and visionary, they are always a prelude to action, a track to run on, a course to take; they are never a substitute for reality. They are an expression of your noblest qualities; they are an exercise of your desire for personal leadership – the desire to be a bit better today than you were yesterday, and the determination to be even better tomorrow.

To set optimally effective goals, you need standards to follow. It is like playing basketball: you need to know the object of the game and the rules; otherwise, you would not know whether to run with the ball, kick it, throw it, or roll it. For your goals to have the magnetic attraction that draws you toward them and propels you toward success, follow these “rules of the game”:

1. Your goals must be your own personal goals. It is obvious that you are more likely to accomplish goals you choose for yourself than those urged upon you by others. But your goals must also be “personal” in the sense of “private.” If you know that your goals plan will be seen by someone else, you may tend to distort it to impress others instead of to satisfy your real needs. Unless they are based on your own internalized values, your goals will have little or no meaning, no appeal and no value.

2. Your goals must be stated positively. Your mind functions through mental images; you literally “see” through the mind’s eye a picture of each thought. A goal expressed negatively eliminates a mental image, and the mind cannot picture a void or a vacuum. Take a simple illustration. You may say, “I’m going to stop procrastinating when it is time to make my monthly report.” What picture – what mental image – can you see of yourself “not procrastinating”? You will be much more likely to accomplish your goal if you state it positively: “I complete my monthly report the first day of each month.” Now you have a picture to visualize. You can see yourself sitting at the desk making your report. You can make specific plans to support this action. Goals, to be effective, need the motivational force created by a positive mental image of yourself doing what you want to do or being what you want to become.

3. Your goals must be realistic and attainable. To say that goals must be realistic is not saying that they should be low, mediocre, or commonplace. Goals must represent a challenging objective toward which you are both able and willing to work. For example, a recent college graduate with a bachelor’s degree in chemistry might easily find a job as a laboratory technician in a large commercial research laboratory. It would not be realistic to set a goal to be director of that research laboratory within six months. Attaining the mature skills and the wealth of experience necessary would be impossible in that period of time. Because such a goal is unrealistic, it would also have little motivational power. This does not mean a young laboratory technician should give up all plans to attain the position of director. A goal for a first step of advancement within a reasonable length of time coupled with a plan to gain additional skills and experience would be both realistic and attainable and would have strong motivational power. A series of progressive steps would lead to the ultimate goal to become director of the research laboratory. Fulfillment of goals always comes in realistic, attainable steps.

4. Goals must include personality changes. Many young people would like to be head of a company or hold some high position, but know nothing whatever about the traits of character or personality required to become a topflight executive or professional. As a result, they have no goals to develop those character or personality traits. Regardless of the type of work you do or the position you now hold, any goals to advance must include the personality growth necessary to handle the desired position. If you determine, for example, that you need

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to manage your time better, it is not enough merely to say, "I will manage my time effectively." You must study yourself to discover why you practice the habit of procrastination, or of jumping from one activity to another without ever completing anything. When you discover the underlying problem that produces the undesirable behavior, you can make specific plans to develop new habits.

Some people are willing to set goals "to have" but not "to be" or "to become." It is vital to set goals of becoming before you can achieve the more tangible goals of having.

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