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[Browse > Home / Small Business Resources / Business Articles / Growth / The Meaning of Success](#)

The Meaning of Success

Ask five people to define success, and you'll likely get five different answers. Strange, isn't it? The one thing most of us seek cannot be defined by a clear, generally accepted standard...until now.

Paul J. Meyer was the man who took the confusion out of success and developed the first systematic approach to personal and organizational achievement. Meyer, who founded Leadership Management, ® Inc. in 1966, defined success as the "progressive realization of worthwhile, predetermined personal goals."

Success at any level doesn't come by accident. You cannot buy success, marry into it, inherit it, or stumble upon it. Success, according to Meyer, depends on the process of progressive realization. Goal setting is the most powerful force available to improve personal productivity. And personal productivity, in turn, actually triggers success.

Meyer believed that productivity and success are a direct result of a conscious and deliberate goal setting practice, coupled with appropriate planning and action. "Without planning and goal setting," Meyer pointed out, "all the desire that can be aroused in the limitless potential of the human spirit is wasted like the random lightning of a summer storm."

The message is simple enough: Human desire and individual potential go unharnessed and unused; their potential power is wasted without the direction provided by goal setting and careful planning.

Meyer believed goal setting – supported by careful planning – provides a sense of direction to keep individuals focused on their most important activities – tasks Meyer calls "high payoff activities." "Goals serve as a filter to eliminate extraneous demands," Meyer said, adding, "Goals bring order to life, and meaning and purpose which sustain motivation over a long period of time."

If success can be defined by goals, and goals achieved through a process of personal management and goal setting, why are not more people uniformly successful?

Paul Meyer said many individuals avoid the goal setting process because they don't understand it. "The steps in the process are simple but not simplistic," he maintained, "and the process is comprehensive but not complex. Many people lack the patience and open-mindedness required to watch an overall activity pattern unfold."

Although many worthwhile achievements come about as side effects of some other activity or purpose, they are, nevertheless, a direct consequence of the pursuit of predetermined goals. The full, ultimate effect of goal achievement is not always clearly visible when the achievement plan is set in motion, but achievement and increased personal productivity invariably rise as a direct consequence of striving toward predetermined goals.

"Individual pace can vary," Meyer believed, "but the sequential process of goal setting and personal achievement does not. When you internalize the goal setting process, your goals create a magnetic attraction that draws you toward their achievement."

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