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Build the Habits of Success with Goals

Goal setting is the strongest human force for self-motivation. But not all goals have equal power of self-motivation. Some are more important than others. Some are clear and vivid; others are nebulous and difficult to define. Until you bring some kind of order, sequence and priority into the mass of dreams that constitutes your collection of goals, even those close at hand are difficult to achieve.

The Tangibility of Goals

One facet of goal setting frequently misunderstood is the necessity for both tangible and intangible goals. Many people feel guilty about wanting anything with tangible overtones for fear of appearing selfish. An equally large number of people have only tangible goals as though a person's worth were measured exclusively by material wealth. Both views are highly distorted. You cannot give undivided attention to self-fulfillment if you cannot afford a reasonable standard of living; and although you had the world's riches at your fingertips, without a purpose or ideals you would be miserable and frustrated.

Tangible goals are goals for attaining measurable achievement or for acquiring desirable possessions and are based on both needs and desires. A tangible need is expressed as an immediate or short-range goal. It includes material items that enhance your ability to reach other goals, develop new habits and attitudes, or attain a higher plateau.

Suppose, for example, your goal is to reduce turnover in your department by 20 percent next year. You find you need to read constantly to keep up, not only with new ideas about management of people that will help you reduce turnover, but also with the new technology directly related to your department's work. Routine duties take all your time. You decide that speed-reading skill would enhance your ability to reach your goal. When you include the development of this skill in your goals program, you find a solution for the time obstacle and enroll in the next available speed-reading course. Success of a goals program lies in the conscious choices you make almost daily that build the habits and attitudes of success.

In addition to tangible needs, you also experience many tangible desires: a vacation trip, a new home, a swimming pool, a recreational vehicle. Do not worry about whether you can afford these possessions nor how you can get them. Your list of tangible wants is merely a horizon expander. As you follow this pattern – without limiting your belief in yourself – what now seems far away eventually becomes near, not because the goal shrinks, but because you grow and expand to match it.

Intangible goals are usually the internal changes required to reach other, more tangible goals. They are personality characteristics that must be developed on the road to becoming successful in your field or profession. Suppose you have a long-range goal to be the general sales manager for your company. You know that before you can achieve this tangible goal, you must develop greater decision-making ability, be able to overcome procrastination, and know how to motivate others. These behavior patterns – the internal changes necessary to reach your long-range goal – are your "intangible goals." They are goals of "becoming" – of developing personality characteristics you do not already have or strengthening areas that are weak.

Sometimes tangible and intangible goals are inseparable. Most self-fulfillment needs fall into the category of intangible goals although the measuring stick may sometimes be tangible. Think, for example, of the work of Dr. Jonas Salk in developing the polio vaccine. Although he obviously had a goal to discover an effective polio vaccine, he was probably also motivated by a higher self-fulfillment drive to be of service, to contribute something of value to society. The majority of great discoveries probably find their most significant motivation deep within the value system and self-fulfillment needs of their discoverers.

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It may be difficult to reduce your intangible goals to writing, especially if they are also long-range and if you have had little previous goal-setting experience. But remember that your "Plan of Action" need never be seen by anyone else – not by your friends, or your boss, and parts, at least, not even by your family. So list your intangible goals with complete honesty. Crystallize your thinking to the best of your ability and describe the intangible accomplishments that inspire you, including the personality traits or habits of character you wish to develop. A vivid image will gradually emerge of the goal itself and of the solution to any problem that stands in the way of its achievement.

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