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SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES

## Overcoming Obstacles with Planning

Perhaps the most difficult problems people encounter in the process of achieving their goals are those that come as a surprise. It is much easier to deal with problems when you know in advance to expect them. Because of the disruptive power of unexpected problems, anticipating them and planning for their solution should be an integral part of the goal-setting process.

Once you have written down your goals and dreams, ask yourself this question: "If this is what I want from life, why do I not already have it?" Consider one goal at a time and list the obstacles that stand between you and its achievement. Some of the obstacles you list might be conditions in the environment over which you have little control. Others will almost certainly include some of your own attitudes and habits that prevent the achievement of your goal.

Suppose you have a goal to become more productive in your work so that you may gain a desired promotion. You may identify obstacles like these:

- I have so many interruptions that there is not enough time left for creative planning and development of new ideas.
- I tend to procrastinate until deadlines are too close to do my best on a project.
- There are two of my colleagues with whom I have difficulty communicating effectively. Sometimes this harms the productivity of the whole group.

For some goals, you will find only one or two obstacles. For others, your list will be considerably longer. It is important to realize that you are not likely to reach a goal until you know everything that stands in the way of its achievement. As you proceed with the development of your plan and take the action steps necessary to reach the goal, you may find that some obstacles are unimportant. You can easily mark them off the list. The real hazard, however, is failure to anticipate some problem that needs to be faced and solved.

Once you know what problems stand between you and your goals, finding the solution is relatively simple. You will probably find multiple solutions for each of the obstacles you list. If, for example, you find that you are interrupted too often, you might list these solutions to overcoming this obstacle:

- Review your delegation practices to discover whether some of your people should be making decisions instead of seeking your approval so often.
- Provide better training for your people so they will be more self-sufficient in doing their work.
- Reserve a block of time for planning and creative work and take steps to protect that time from interruption.

Whatever obstacles or roadblocks you have listed, the solutions come from within. Almost any obstacle can be overcome by the actions that you take – by changing or improving your behavior or attitudes, by acquiring new information and skills, by developing additional talents, by broadening your outlook, or by cultivating new habits of personality or character. When you approach the solution of problems in this manner, you are using personal leadership to shift the emphasis from outside circumstances to your own responsible action in developing your potential. In other words, you quit thinking about things you cannot control and concentrate on those you can.

As you go a step further in the development of your plan for achieving a particular goal, you will have at your fingertips all of the various strategies you can follow to overcome obstacles and bring your goal into reality.

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Not all of the obstacles you list will actually prove important. Some of the anticipated difficulties may never materialize. That means you will reach your goal with greater ease than you had hoped. Use creativity and imagination in devising possible solutions for all of the obstacles you might encounter. The vast untapped potential you possess is available for your use.

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