

Focus Determines Reality: A Warrior's Guide to Goal-Setting

#WellbeingWarriors

Compiled by Nonhlanhla Moleleki
(Student Counselling & Development)

In the words of Mark Twain: "Without dreams and goals, there is no living, only merely existing, and that is not why we are here."

You might be feeling like you have a lot of dreams, leading you to feel too overwhelmed to pursue them. You may also have many goals, but you do not know how to get there. Have you ever considered how to set goals that you will follow or how to pursue your dreams? This article is aimed at helping you to set goals that will keep you motivated and help you stay on track with your academic tasks. Goals will further motivate you to do your work, to attend classes, and study for tests and exams.

Quote by Greg B. Reid: "A dream written down with a **date** becomes a goal. A goal broken down into **steps** becomes a plan. A plan backed up by **action** makes your dreams come true."

WHAT IS GOAL-SETTING?

Goal-setting is identifying something you want to achieve and determining a process and time frame for accomplishing it. All of us have been setting goals since a very young age, although we were probably not aware of it. Think about a kid whose goal it was to learn to ride a bicycle; even though the bicycle was too big, they worked out a plan to master it. Goal-setting is helpful in all areas of your life. Once you start to set goals in one area of your life, it makes it easier with other areas too. Setting progressive goals that allow small wins helps you move on to more significant achievements. These small goals lead to progress, help to build momentum and make you feel fulfilled and happy.

SETTING GOALS THAT YOU WILL ACCOMPLISH

Goal Competition

Setting multiple goals at once could lead to your goals competing for your time and energy, making it difficult to achieve your objectives. In other words, you need to dedicate the same amount of time and energy to completing different goals, to avoid goal competition. Rather, [breakdown your goals](#). It is essential to organize your priorities; by doing so, you see progress much faster as you are focused on one target at a time.

Think about trying to grow multiple seeds in one pot. When the seeds sprout, it is difficult for them to share one space, and it then requires you to separate them into different containers. A similar process is needed for goals as they may compete for our time, and we need to allocate enough time to each goal. Breaking down your goals will help you with full growth and optimal achievement.

Set SMART goals

Setting SMART goals means your goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. It is easy to set a goal, but it is challenging to be precise or give a detailed plan for reaching your goal. Research shows that the probability of accomplishing your goals relies on how accurate you are when planning.

Specific: When developing a specific plan for achieving your goal, you need to be able to answer when, where and how you will accomplish your goal. For example, I want to finish the first draft of my essay by 5pm today. Another way of planning involves habit stacking, which is linking your new goals with something you are already doing daily. For example, after drinking my morning coffee, I will start with draft one of my essay. You can learn more about stacking habits in the guide, [transform your habits](#).

Measurable: You must measure your goals. Do not just say you are going to study for psychology for an hour, but also state which chapter or how many pages you will complete in that hour. For example, I am going to study psychology, chapter one, from 1pm to 2pm.

Achievable: When setting goals, consider your abilities and strengths. It is better to initially have moderately challenging goals than to set your targets too high to come by. For example, you are doing psychology for the first time at university so it might not be wise to aim for 90% rather aim for 65% to 80%.

Realistic: Your goal should be something that is within your reach and should be related to your present and future.

Timely: Provide a realistic time frame for achieving your goal. For instance, to complete my BSc degree by the end of 2022, with distinctions in my two major subjects, is a well-formulated and time-framed goal.

Include an upper bound

Have you ever heard of lower- and upper bound when setting goals? Let me explain and give an example. An upper bound is a maximum limit or threshold to achieve a goal, and the lower bound is the minimum. Your goal might be "I want to finish the introduction for my essay by 10am". If you were to add an upper bound, you would say, "I want to finish my introduction by 10am (upper bound), but no later than noon (lower bound)". Another example is, "I want to write at least 2 pages (lower bound) of my assignment today, but not more than 4 pages (upper bound)". When we set goals, we always aim for a lower bound, which is what we want to achieve.

The truth is, what can make you complete your lower bound is your upper bound. If you have a maximum limit, you start thinking that if you can achieve the acceptable minimum (lower bound), then you can reach more. The most important thing is reaching your lower bound, so setting the acceptable upper limit gives you the strength to reach it and makes it easier for you to keep reaching your goals. Sustain your habits and set an upper bound when goal-setting.

Take note that your goals may change as time goes on, therefore be flexible and open to new inspirations. Keep challenging yourself with new and revised goals. Use [goal exploration](#) to keep yourself on track with your targets.

Quote by Andrew Carnegie: "If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy and inspires your hopes."