

# Setting Goals: The Most Important Step in Success

## by Del Suggs

There is one sure-fire way to be successful: that is to start off with an action plan. We all want to be successful. Often, we just don't know how to be successful. That's why goal setting is so important.

Achievement at both the personal and organizational level is keenly linked to goal setting. Until you've set a goal, you don't know where you or your organization wants to go. In some ways, goals are maps that lead us to success.

But what are goals, really? And how do you set them?

Let me share with you some insights into goals and goal setting that I've learned and applied to my own career. You'll find that your personal goals, and those of your organization can both benefit from these ideas.

### The Written Word

What's the difference between a dream and a goal?

*Ink.*

That's right-- goals must be written down. It may not sound logical, but think of it this way: your dreams are just thoughts, basically chemicals and electrical impulses dancing in your head. You can't see them or touch them.

But when you write a goal down on paper, it becomes

real. You can see it. You can hold it. It's a real, genuine, physical object.

It's that reality that makes dreams into achievable goals.

The concept of writing your goals draws, in one sense, on the work of Dr. Edward Banifield at Harvard University. He spent a lifetime studying people and behaviors, and reached many startling and controversial conclusions. Generally considered a conservative thinker, he is really beyond the realm of conservative and liberal ideologies.

One of Dr. Banifield's most important and profound studies dealt with financial success of individuals. In an effort to learn the root cause of poverty, he sought to determine the factors that related to the acquisition of wealth. He studied the impact of family background, education, intelligence, influential contacts, or some other concrete factor that might influence financial success.

His conclusion was what he called "long term perspective." Successful people set future goals, and then work to achieve those goals. It turns out that if you set a goal, and then pursue that goal, you are very likely to be successful. Who knew success was that simple?

### Organizational Goals

Take the idea of written goals, and apply it to your organization. Gather together for a special meeting, a workshop, a charette, or whatever you want to call it. Focus that time strictly on developing goals for the coming year.

Set different kinds of goals, too. Don't be afraid to set those big goals. You might have heard them referred to as "BHAGs"-- big, hairy, audacious goals! Major goals are very important, because they have to power to motivate. Don't be afraid to think big. Be unreasonable, and set an outrageous goal for your organization.

What would you consider an audacious goal for your organization? To double your membership? To sellout a concert? Write it down and go for it! If you don't try, you'll never succeed.

### Toss in a Ringer

It feels good to succeed. And success generates more success. So always have some immediate, attainable short term goals. These goals should be an important step toward achieving your long-term, bigger goals. Achieving a goal-- and quickly-- shows you and your organization that you can succeed.

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Here's an example: your club has 15 members, and your long-term goal is to more than triple that membership to 50 active members. That may be a real challenge at your school. So set a short-term goal of adding five new members this month. If just a few of your members recruit their room mates, then you'll have reached that simple goal.

How about this goal: add fifty quality friends to your organization's Facebook page this month. You can do that simply by having your members post to their Facebook pages and make friend requests.

Achieving a goal, even if it's simple or small, encourages you to take the next step and pursue the bigger goals. So develop your goals as a hierarchy, so that you can complete the smaller, easier goals that will contribute to achieving your larger goals.

### Lighten Up

You've got to be positive about yourself and your organization to achieve your goals. It's not always as easy as it sounds. As I say, "Be Positive" is not just a blood type. It's the real key to success.

If you or your members have the "Eeyore" tendency (remember your Pooh), then the first step towards being positive is to stop being

negative. Stop beating up on yourself. Self criticism and criticism toward your organization serves no useful purpose. It only makes it less likely that you will achieve your goals.

If your organization is full of Eeyores, then you might want to make one of your immediate goals to "accentuate the positive" and "eliminate the negative" as the old song says.

Here is a simple way to emphasize success. At each meeting, have your members list five positive things that they have done today. They can, and should, be simple: "went to the gym," or "studied for two hours," or "cleaned up my room." Anything that is a positive success. Even the most negative personalities will be amazed at how many positive things they accomplish on a daily basis.

### Hang 'Em High

Take those goals and make a poster or banner. Hang it in the office, and at every meeting. Have your members look at it. Read it. Focus on it.

As you achieve the smaller goals, make a big deal about marking them off the list. Celebrate your victories! Every small success makes the next big success possible.

But remember this: they are **your** goals. You created

them. That means you can change them. During the year, you might decide that one or more of your goals isn't appropriate or worth the effort to achieve. Perhaps it was achieved by another means, so your organization doesn't have to accomplish it. Whatever the reason, understand that it's permissible to modify, change, or delete your goals.

They are your goals, after all. And they aren't carved in stone. They are ink on paper.

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