

SUPERVISORY MANAGEMENT

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Supporting Your Life's Priorities

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A goal is a statement of what you intend to accomplish and when. Meeting one's goals can be very satisfying provided the goals reflect carefully chosen priorities. Priorities are the handful of things in your life or career that are important to you. Goals support priorities. Your goals can change as old ones are accomplished and, of course, as the priorities in your life change.

Here are some well constructed goal statements:

- To work out for 45 minutes, three sessions weekly, starting today. (Underlying priority: staying healthy.)
- To increase my department's annual income to \$500,000 next year. (Underlying priority: increasing reputation as manager.)
- To eliminate all nuclear weapon stockpiles by January 1, 1997. (Underlying priority: having peace on earth.)

You can use the same procedure for choosing priorities as choosing goals, but each goal has to support a priority, and each priority must be supported by at least one goal.

Here are some poorly stated goals:

- To sell as much as I can in the next six months.
- To complete the sale of my vacation property.

These are poor statements of a person's goals because they lack specifics and target dates. Imprecision in goal-setting leads to missed goals. Especially in our over-information era, where distractions grow on trees and on our desks, goals need to be well stated.

When Goals Change

A goal that was necessary and appropriate yesterday may not be valid today. It is important to establish a few well chosen goals in support of your priorities but also to recognize that the nature of your responsibilities and interests are going to change, and goals and priorities need to be reviewed periodically.

Study the most successful people in your industry or profession. Most of them are confident, low-anxiety people with clear priorities and goals. They know they can't do their best when they lack well defined goals or have well-defined but no longer relevant goals.

Goal Reinforcement

It's easy enough to set a goal, but it's another thing to reach it. To support your commitments, here are some reinforcement techniques:

1. **Contract with yourself.** Author Dennis Hensley describes what he calls "advancement by contract." He writes: "A contract takes precedent over everything else. For example, you make your monthly house payment rather than use the money for a vacation because you have to make that payment: The contract allows the bank to repossess your home if you do not fulfill your obligation."

Hensley suggests carefully selecting three to five major goals in support of your priorities, then signing a contract that aids you in reaching these goals. "Once under contract, you would

have to succeed by a preselected date or else face the consequences of defaulting on the contract."

Hensley recommends reviewing your goals and listing as many benefits as you can that you'll gain by achieving each one. Next, write them into a contract (see box on this page) and make three copies of it. Keep the original. Give one copy each to your spouse, a co-worker, and a friend.

Review your contract when you find yourself becoming distracted by small details or if you think you are not moving in the right direction.

2. **Have someone waiting for your project.** We usually complete work on schedule when we know someone is waiting for it to be done by that date. It doesn't matter whether it is a task related to our day-to-day job or something we have promised a friend to do. Without putting undue pressure on ourselves, we can use our commitment to another to help us achieve our goals. We can ask a friend or colleague to prod us when it seems that we are not directing our efforts to our goals and priorities.

3. **Devise a way in which you will be penalized if you fail to meet your goals.** For instance, your goal is to stop smoking. To motivate yourself, put \$2,000 in a special escrow fund. If you don't complete your predetermined goal on schedule, the money goes to your spouse.

4. **Visualize the goal.** Each day, see yourself having completed the goal. Fantasy helps.

5. **Promise yourself a reward if you meet your goals.** Just as penalties for failure to meet a goal can spur you on, so will rewards. So set up a series of small rewards for yourself as you complete each step or phase in the overall pursuit of your goal.

6. **Post prominently your goals.** Strategically post your goals as a constant reminder. Imagine how embarrassed you will be if you don't accomplish what you have promised.

7. **Affirm.** Each morning when you arise, state what you intend to accomplish.

8. **Affiliate.** Join others who have a similar goal.

9. **Surround yourself with what supports your goal.**

10. **Remind yourself of what you want.** When you find yourself straying from course, say to yourself, "You want to accomplish this, don't you?"

Barriers to Goal Attainment

To help you achieve your goals, it may help for you to know why they often aren't met:

Poor time frame. Goals are chosen that are too challenging for the hours, days, or weeks available to get them done.

Under-resourced. Some managers set a goal even though they lack the tools, money, or proper support to reach it.

Nonsupportive environment. Unforeseen obstacles are always a possibility. Once such obstacles are uncovered, reevaluate the original goal, then recommit to your new choice.

Losing sight of goals or larger priorities. The din can obscure your view of the big picture.

Lacking perspective. From peak to peak, mountains don't look too far apart. In the valley between them, the next peak will look further away, even while you are moving closer toward it.

Confusing priorities with goals. Often we mistake priorities for goals. For example, the statement "I will be healthy," is a priority, not a goal. To support this priority, you might take vitamins, go to exercise classes three times a week, see a doctor regularly, and so forth, all goals to be met.

Ritual. Some rituals consume time while offering little support toward our reaching our goals and priorities. They require a greater investment than their contribution presently warrants. For example, many of us like to arrange our desks and open our mail when we get to our offices in the morning. The desk may need to be tidied but it may no longer make any sense for you, with several to supervise, to be opening your own mail. All told, outmoded ritual behavior is among the greatest obstacles to achieving goals.

Jeff Davidson is a professional speaker and author of 18 books, including Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-up Society (MasterMedia) © 1992, Jeff Davidson.

Self-Initiated Contract

I, _____, agree to accomplish each of the following items on or before _____, and hereby do formally contract myself to these purposes. These goals are challenging but reasonable, and I accept them willingly.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Signature _____ Date _____