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HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

# Forget About Goal-Setting. Focus on the System Instead.

All of us have things that we want to achieve in our lives – getting fitter or stronger, building a successful business, raising a perfect family, writing a best-selling book and so forth.

For most of us, the path to achieving those things starts by setting a specific and actionable goal. At least, this is how I approached goal-setting in my life until recently. I would set goals for exams I wrote, weights I wanted to lift in the gym and clients I wanted in my business.

However, I soon realized that when it comes down to getting things done and making progress towards the things that are important to us, the jump from the idea to the ultimate goal

seemed somewhat far apart. I thought there had to be a much better way of achieving those goals and the answer seems to lie in the difference between our goals and the systems we utilize to achieve our goals.

## The Difference Between Goals and Systems

- **If you are an entrepreneur**, your goal is to build a successful business. Your system is your sales and marketing processes.
- **If you are a triathlete**, your goal is to complete a triathlon. Your system is your training schedule for the months leading up to the event.
- **If you are a writer**, your goal is to write a book. The system is the writing schedule that you follow each week.
- **If you are a coach**, your goal is to win your league. Your system is what your team does at practice each day.



Consider the following for a moment. If you completely ignored your goals and only focused on your system, would you still achieve results?

For example, if you were an entrepreneur and ignored your goal of building a successful business and only focused on delivering exceptional service to your clients each day, would you still get results?

I think you would. You see, by focusing on the system and process of doing the work the business owner can enjoy the same (or perhaps better) results than building a successful business. The system allows one to experience progress leading to the ultimate goal. It is, practically speaking, breaking up the penultimate goal into smaller sequential and progressive goals.

There are three reasons why you should rather focus on systems instead of goals.

## **1. Goals reduce your current level of happiness.**

When you set a goal and start working towards it, you are essentially saying “I’m not good enough yet, but I will be once I reach my goal.”

The problem with this mindset is that you are conditioning yourself to always put happiness and success off until the final result is achieved. “Once I achieve my goal, then I’ll be happy. Once I reach my target, then I’ll be successful.”

**Solution: Commit to a process, not a goal.**

Choosing to pursue a goal puts a huge burden on your shoulders, yet we do this to ourselves all the time. We place unnecessary stress on ourselves to succeed in business, lose weight or win a championship. Instead, we can keep things simple and reduce stress by focusing on the daily process and sticking to our schedule, rather than worrying about big, life-changing goals.

When you decide to focus on the practice instead of the ultimate result, you can enjoy the present moment and improve at the same time and without doubt reach the goal.

**2. Goals could actually hinder your long-term progress.**

We tend to think that goals will keep us motivated over the long-term, but that is not always the case.

Consider someone training for a marathon. Many people will work hard for months on end in preparation, but as soon as they finish the marathon, they stop training. Their goal was to finish the marathon and now that they have completed it, that goal is no longer there to motivate them. When all of your hard work is focused on a particular goal, what is left to push you forward once you have achieved it?

What usually happens is that this creates a type of “yo-yo” effect where individuals go back and forth from working on a goal to not working on one. The problem with this type of cycle is that it makes it immensely hard to build upon your progress for long-term success. The idea really is to consistently strive towards life or career goals and not simply regard once events i.e. such as a promotion as being indicative of success of your career. A good month is as successful if you met new friends, signed up a new client or your child did well at school.

**Solution: Release the need for immediate results.**

A personal experience might be allowed to convey this theme.

A week ago I was training at my CrossFit box doing a grueling workout and close the end of my workout with my last set of deadlifts I felt my back go into spasm. This has happened before, so I knew it wasn't a serious injury, but merely a sign of fatigue towards the end of my workout.

I started reloading my bar and thought about attempting the second workout with my class members. However, I then reminded myself that I planned to do this for the rest of my life and decided to call it a day. Whilst it was not the most glamorous thing in the world to stretch and foam roll while my class members were completing the workout, I felt perfectly fine the next day because I listened to my body. The immediate result would not have justified the long term goal.

In a situation like the one above, a goal-based mentality would have resulted in me finishing the workout at all costs to achieve my goal. After all, if you set a goal and don't achieve it, you end up experiencing failure. With a systems-mentality however, I had no problem abandoning my workout. You see, systems-based thinking is not about hitting a particular number, it is about sticking to the process and not missing workouts i.e. being consistent.

Invariably, I know that if I never miss a workout, then I will lift heavier weights and become stronger in the long run. That is why systems are more valuable than goals.

Goals are about short-term results whereas systems are about the long-term process. In the end, the process always wins.

### **3. Goals create the impression you can control things that you really have no control over.**

We all know we cannot predict the future. Yet, every time we set a goal, we invariably try and do this. We try plan where we will be and how we will get there. Essentially we try and predict how quickly we can make progress, even though we have no idea what circumstances, eventualities or situations might arise along the way.

#### **Solution: Build feedback loops.**

At the end of each week I spend 10 minutes completing a sheet containing the most important metrics for my business. This would typically include the number of leads

followed-up for that specific week, the number of visitors to my website, sign-ups to my newsletter and so forth.

Comparing these numbers each week with previous weeks creates a feedback loop that indicates to me if I am doing things in my business correctly. Essentially, it creates an objective measure of performance that will indicate whether I am doing certain things right and certain things wrong. It is as simple as that.

Another form of a feedback loop would entail that you log information such as weights lifted, times of workouts, weight lost and so forth and compare these figures over time to determine whether you are in fact making progress.

Feedback loops are important for building good systems as they allow you to keep track of many facets of your performance without having to feel the pressure to predict what is going to happen in future.

In a nutshell, it allows you to forget about predicting the future and rather serve as a signal when you need to make adjustments. After all, if you set a goal and you do not build in reasonable and regular feedback loops, how do you really measure your progress?



# The Beauty is in the System

The purpose of this article is not to suggest that goals are useless. On the contrary, I have found that goals are good for *planning* progress, but ultimately systems are good for actually *making* progress. In this sense, goals can provide a sense of direction to your efforts and even push you forward in the short-term, but ultimately a well-designed system will triumph.

Having a system is what matters.

Committing to the process and consistently applying the system is what makes the difference.