



## **Planning Your Success**

(Identifying, Prioritizing and Achieving Your Goals)

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The Roman rhetorician and writer, Marcus Annaeus Seneca is quoted as saying *“The conditions of conquest are always easy. We have but to toil awhile, endure awhile, believe always, and never turn back”*

It is one of my favorite quotes. It speaks to action, belief and even perseverance, but after reading it, I am left wondering “What is it that are we seeking to conquer and how will we know when we have conquered it?”

How do you get past these ambiguities?

The answer lies in taking a systematic approach to planning your success. Whether we approach the question of success as an organization, a corporation or as individuals, the same tasks lie before us:

1. Decide what to achieve
2. Plan to achieve it
3. Execute the plan

It really is that simple.

So what keeps most of us from fulfillment and success?

### **Deciding what we want to achieve!**

I would dare to say that many of us lack fulfillment in our lives because we have not really identified what we want for ourselves, our family and our community. Without a destination there is no journey and therefore little fulfillment or feeling of personal success.

All our actions and effort should be pointed towards those goals we wish to achieve, those priorities that fulfill us and that bring meaning to our lives and enrich the lives of those around us.

Bottom Line; If we don't know where we are going, how can we expect to get there?

So lets take the first steps, together, right now.

## Creating your Vision

Let's create a vision for your life and identify some specific goals. Whether you are looking to change your career, chase your childhood dreams, or just pay the bills on time, you first need understand what matters to you as an individual.

Spend the time to honestly reflect on your answers to the questions below. It is likely that you will find a few other questions to ask and answer along the way. That's ok, write it all down and consider the impact of focusing your life on the attainment of these goals.

*\* Remember there are no right or wrong answers here... it's your life, you get to decide.*

- 1) What would you need to accomplish to be satisfied with your life?
- 2) If there were a real passion in your life... what would it be?
- 3) What is your role in your community, your country, the world?
- 4) What's missing in your life?
- 5) What would you do if nothing stood in your way?

If you are like me, you have identified some pretty compelling visions as a result of asking yourself these questions. Visionary goals can and should act as a guide in making your day to day decisions about what to work on. Remember that each step you take should be leading you toward realization of your vision and goals.

## How we accomplish our goals does matter.

I want to take a moment here to address the subject of values and of being ecologically sound in your vision of the future.

## Values

Most of us spend too little time considering what we value. When I speak of values I think of the following examples; Humor, Service, Freedom, Integrity, Creativity, Peace, and Growth, the list is as long and diverse as there are people in the world.

What's important is that *you* understand what *you* really value. That understanding will lend support to the identification of your life's purpose and it will impact how you go about the business of achieving your dreams.

*\* Imagine the difference between someone that values peace and community when trying to affect political change and the person that values power and control in the same situation.*

My own values are shaped by my family's history and traditions. Growing up in the Ohio countryside as part of a farming community, I was taught the values of being self sufficient, of perseverance and personal courage. These values have shaped me into who I am right now. They have shaped my approach to all things and have lent real support to my personal level of achievement.

These values, and others, were exemplified to me in stories about my great grandfathers during the time of the depression in the 1930's. Each man created his own path in a world that provided little hope for the future. These men saw no obstacles, only opportunities to care for their families and for the welfare of others.

One got up each morning, went to the local market to purchase a few dollars of fruit and other foods and went door to door selling it for a small profit. Whatever he didn't sell, he took back to his family to eat.

The other, a farmer, gave away the livestock and grains that he could not sell to the markets. He hired passers-by and paid them with shelter and food. Both of them stood firmly on their values of faith, hope and charity to achieve these things.

## **Ecology**

Now let's address what we mean by use of the term ecology and the meaning of being ecologically sound. In the context of our decision making, we should consider the impact of our decisions and accomplishments on our physical being; on those we interact with and on the world in which we live (*safe to ourselves, safe to others and safe to our environment*).

When we get out of synch with the principles of ecology, we risk the success of our vision. If you are on an ecologically destructive path, your creative power and the likelihood of your success will decrease proportionally.

As an example; consider that most barriers to success in corporate and private life arise from conflicts of interest. People often do not *consider the impact* of their plans, actions and decisions *on others (Positive or Negative)*. As a result we often end up with a lack of support for our goals at best and a lack of trust or outright sabotage at worst.

*\* Conversely, when we consider others in our plans and we make them our allies, they will play a role in ensuring our success.*

Ecological soundness is all about the consequences of our actions, and making sure that we think before we act or speak.

### Finding Direction

We have spent some time now considering your vision and aspirations. So how should we begin to work with these visions and goals of yours? Let's take a look at some common methods for sorting priorities.

The first method is a simple effort vs. benefit analysis. In looking at your answers from above, you will likely find goals that reside across a spectrum of *level of effort* and *perceived value or benefits*.

For each goal or aspiration you identified, rate the anticipated level of effort and the benefit (High, Medium, or Low) *For example:*

| Number | Goal / Vision  | Effort | Value/Benefit |
|--------|----------------|--------|---------------|
| 1      | Get in Shape   | L      | H             |
| 2      | Learn to Paint | M      | M             |
| 3      | Change Career  | H      | M             |

Chart your table results in the priority matrix below.

|                |        |                        |        |      |
|----------------|--------|------------------------|--------|------|
| <b>Benefit</b> | High   | 1                      |        |      |
|                | Medium |                        | 2      | 3    |
|                | Low    |                        |        |      |
|                |        | Low                    | Medium | High |
|                |        | <b>Level of Effort</b> |        |      |

Priority Matrix

From this straightforward exercise, your priorities become visually apparent. The goals that fall in the green would be those to consider starting work on *today*.

The reason we focus on your highest value, lowest effort items first is to ensure you increase your level of success, satisfaction and fulfillment as quickly as possible. Remember that; *success breeds success*.

I have used the above method in my personal and professional life for many years. The process does not always make the priorities easier to accept, but it does make them very apparent.

If you find yourself looking at the result and feeling uncomfortable with what you see, that's ok. Don't feel as though you haven't done something right. Rather, understand that the reaction you are feeling is your gut instinct, your unconscious, letting you know what you really want.

Be aware of your feelings when completing this exercise. If something does not feel right, then it isn't. I was, luckily, taught to trust my instincts and feelings at an early age.

*Flipping a coin; the ultimate in 'gut' checks*

Once, when trying to decide between two toys I wanted to buy at a flea market, my grandfather taught me to decide between them by *flipping a coin*; Heads for one toy, tails for the other.

I flipped the coin and felt a tinge of disappointment at the result. That moment of let-down let me know that it was the other toy I really wanted. The next time you need to decide between two priorities, just flip a coin... you might be surprised at the clarity it brings you.

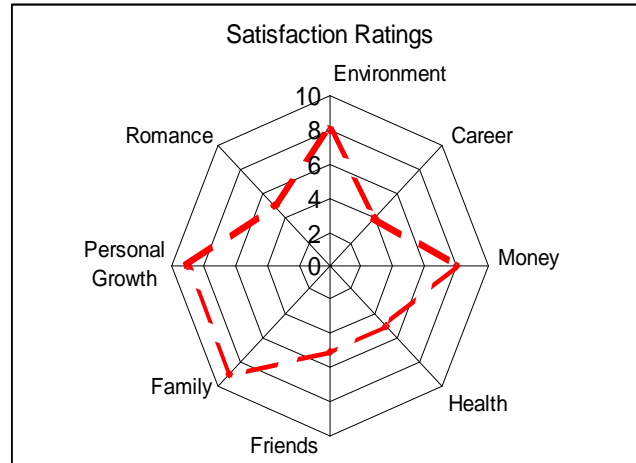
**Prioritize for Balance**

Another approach to prioritization is to consider *balancing* different aspects of your life that you wish to improve. For each aspect, consider your level of satisfaction and rate it from 1 to 10.

*For Example:*

| Number | Aspect of Life   | Rating |
|--------|------------------|--------|
| 1      | Your Environment | 8      |
| 2      | Career           | 4      |
| 3      | Money            | 8      |
| 4      | Health           | 5      |
| 5      | Friends          | 5      |
| 6      | Family           | 9      |
| 7      | Personal Growth  | 9      |
| 8      | Romance          | 5      |

Once again, you can visually chart your satisfaction ratings. Using any chart similar to the below will allow you to instantly assess your personal life balance and highlight the areas you may wish to improve or focus on.



There is no need to limit this exercise to the areas of interest above or to this level of thought. For example, the same exercise can be completed against your job performance or maybe the component parts your environment.

### Focus on Results

So we have put a lot of effort into identifying and prioritizing your goals. Now we need to sharpen your focus and determine real outcomes that will let you know you have achieved your goals.

Let's assume you have selected the goal, *improved health*, as a priority. How will you know when it is improved? Once improved, how will you maintain it? And so on...

Notice the difference in clarity between the following goals:

1. Improved health
2. Improve my health by reducing my weight to 195 lbs and maintaining it for life.

Spend some time, right now, with one of your goals and ensure you understand, *specifically*, what you want to achieve and how you will know you obtained it.

### Motivation

Let's deepen your understanding of what it will mean to achieve your goal. Let's truly understand your motivation for success.

The improved health example above is from my own life. It resulted from the birth of my son. When I considered my health at the time he was born and tried to

envision spending time with him as he grew, I realized that I was in no shape to give him the time, level and type of attention he would need.

The result I was truly looking for from improved health was being able to play soccer and basketball with him; to be able to sit on the floor and read a book or play with matchbox cars; to know that I could protect him physically if needed.

Gaining this type of perspective on your results is important to providing you the motivation to achieve your goals. Spend some time envisioning what will be different about your life once you achieve your goal. Clearly describe what you will be able to do, how it will look and feel.

See yourself, in your mind's eye, enjoying the benefits of your accomplishments. To some, this will sound like daydreaming. That's because it is. If you can't dream it; if you can't see it, you will not accomplish it. *Give yourself the gift of your dreams. You are worth it.*

### **Making Progress**

Identify the one or two things you can do today that will move you in the direction of your goal. In my case I did two things:

1. I publicly committed to my goal and
2. I purchased a book on healthy eating

*\* Your first steps should always be simple and direct.*

You should always consider making a public commitment to your goal. The reason for this is that it significantly increases your personal commitment and it let's others know what you are trying to achieve and may enlist them in your cause.

Further, you may find that others have done the same thing and are willing to share how they reached that same goal. By modeling someone else's process, you may have a pre-built roadmap for your own success.

### **Roadmaps**

A roadmap is nothing more than the sequence of steps you need to take to accomplish your goal. To develop a roadmap, follow the steps below.

1. Clarify the destination/goal
2. Identify your starting point
3. Determine milestones on the path to your destination
4. Break your milestones into smaller steps
5. Take your first step

*\* Be sure to measure your progress against the smaller steps in your plan. Measurement is a key to success at any level, personally or professionally. If you are not measuring your progress, you are not providing focus on your goals.*

### *Timelines*

I have purposefully not spoken to creating a specific timeline associated with your roadmap. I have multiple reasons for this.

Timelines often:

1. Provide an arbitrary measure of your success
2. Don't account for the need to maintain your success
3. Ignore the quality of that which you wish to achieve

In this context, success is *timeless*. I believe you should always be working towards your goals. There is no time. You have only to consider *what you should be doing right now*.

### **Persevere**

You now know and truly understand the object of your conquest. You have

1. Decided what you want to achieve
2. Developed a plan to get you there
3. Taken the first steps to execute it

You "*have but to toil awhile, endure awhile, believe always, and never turn back*" in order to make it real.

When you consider the greatest achievements of your life you will remember that you persevered until you reached them.

You have only to watch a small child learn to understand what I mean here. They try until they learn to walk, until they learn to speak, until they learn to read. There is never an approach of failure, only one of continuous learning and adjustment until they get it right.

Remember that your life provides an abundance of feedback to help you achieve your dreams. Are you listening to it and adjusting your behaviors and methods?

Whenever you encounter roadblocks or interference along the way, consider it, learn from it, and move on or around it. Whenever you think there are no other options, think again. Keep moving forward.

## **Maintain Your Self Esteem**

Many people have a view of themselves that gets in the way of their success. When we take the time to take care of and truly care for ourselves, success and satisfaction flow in quick succession.

*\* It is important that you believe in you and know that you and your dreams are worth caring for.*

Always start and end with yourself. If you are not healthy, happy and able, you can not truly help or care for anyone else. Take the time to care for yourself and to develop your plans for success.

You and those that love you will be happy you did.

## **Closing Thoughts**

In a single chapter it is hard to delve deeply into any one of the areas we have discussed, but my hope is that I have presented you with enough for you to consider taking your first steps right now.

While I use many of these methods and ideas in my own life, they are by no means the only way forward. I encourage you to continuously learn and grow by any method that works for you.

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