

On The 7 Reasons It's Important to Have Written Goals

I recently had a conversation with one of my many nieces. She has been out of school for a few years now, but isn't at all satisfied with the direction her career has taken. In fact, she's not too happy with her personal life either. Her voice developed more than a touch of a whine as she said: "I don't know what to do."

So I asked her about her goals. Her response was a rather slack-jawed look of surprise. "Goals?" Well... at least she wasn't whining anymore.

I asked her what she would like to see as her career in a few years. I asked her where she'd like to see her life in a few years. She knew the answers to those questions and became quite animated as she discussed her desire to start her own business. We talked about what she would need to do in order to accomplish her goal, what she would have to change, and what obstacles she might face.

When we parted ways she felt a lot better about her job because she knew that she wasn't trapped in it. She was taking a necessary step to prepare herself for a long-term goal. She had her eye on the prize and that focus energized her.

That's the power of goals.

In our experience very few people have written goals in every area of their lives (<3% of the population). If they have goals, most people have them in the financial area of their life, i.e. retirement, new house, car, etc. What are your goals?

There are seven reasons why you need to have goals:

1. To give direction to your life
2. To make sure that you are the one that is choosing the direction of your life -- not someone else, not fate, not the media, etc.
3. To motivate you
4. To make sure you get what you want from life
5. To save you time
6. To reduce your stress
7. To give you a sense of accomplishment

While it can be fun to live without direction in the short-term, in the long-term human beings are hard-wired to need a purpose and direction. Goals give a sense of direction and purpose to life. It is often easy to let others set our direction for us. We take a job because family or friends point us in that direction and then we follow the dictates of our bosses. We move in other directions because popular culture or the media tells us to do so. The simple truth is that if we do not set our own goals then we will find it too easy to follow a path set by others. This can lead to stress and unhappiness. We have a greater chance of happiness and fulfillment following our own path and pursuing our own goals.

While goals certainly give our lives direction, they also provide the motivation to get us through difficult times and choices. Perhaps going to college at night while working full-time may be stressful and difficult in the short-term, but in the long run being able to pursue the professional goals we desire will make it worthwhile.

Goals also serve as the destination for what we really want out of life. For some people, goals are measured in money or material goods, while for others goals are measured in time or freedom. If we do not have goals outlined that suit our unique perspective on life, it is easy to become sidetracked by life and others.

Goals can also help save time. When your "To-Do" list becomes too long and your calendar too full, then you can simply compare your goals to the list. What items help you achieve your goal? What items are necessary to your goal? Scratch off the rest as unimportant.

Just as goals save time, they also reduce stress because using your goals to focus your life and choices make it easier to make those choices. Should you take that new position at work? How does it match your goals?

Finally, goals give you a measurable sense of accomplishment. Every goal you achieve, in fact every step you make toward that goal, can give you a boost of energy and momentum to keep going. Each success powers you toward the next level of success.

Now go out and set your goals!