



## Why Goal Setting Doesn't Work

*You can have anything you want in life, but you do have to pay....attention. To the extent that you don't pay attention, you pay with pain. Pain is your unconscious mind's way of letting you know you have to pay attention.*

Adapted from Taneo Sands Kumalae

Have you ever made new year resolutions? Have you thought about what changes you'd like to make? Do you dream of a whole new direction for your life? That is the time when positive intentions abound. Many people start diets, detoxification programmes or new projects with great enthusiasm. But how well did you do with last year's resolutions?

But you know that goal setting works. Applying the right amount of energy and discipline works too. Add a hefty dose of determination and perseverance and surely all obstacles can be overcome, right? So why do so few goals get realized? Most people will quickly answer: laziness, lack of staying power or distraction. So, they think the solution must be more will power. The battle begins. Achieving those goals begins to feel like a gargantuan task that will require hard work, sacrifice and more effort than is humanly possible. Some people hire personal coaches to police their efforts on a daily or weekly basis to make sure they toe the line and honour their commitments. They believe they can make those goals happen. But they often get only short-term results. What if there was a better way?

**The biggest problem with goal setting is often the goal itself.** 'What do you want?' is the most difficult question to answer. Yet it is also the most important question to answer well. If you don't choose your goal carefully, chances for success are slim. Most people choose goals with their heads. They think they want something for all kinds of good reasons. They think they should have it, they must have it or they need to have it. These kinds of head goals often conflict with the heart. The heart has very different kinds of goals. The heart wants happiness for everyone, peace, love, connection and forgiveness. It is not so interested in the mundane goals that make sense to the head. In addition, these head goals may also conflict with your soul intention. The life journey your soul has in mind for you may differ completely from what you think you want...

**The most common mistake people make is size.** Yes, size matters! Most people think too small. They've been disappointed so many times in the past when their goals never happened. What's the point of aiming high? So now they choose to set only small achievable goals. They think small wins will be easier. Their focus gets preoccupied with minutiae. Thinking small doesn't challenge their desire to stay small, safe and inadequate. Notice how this forms a type of self attack. It not only limits possibilities, it confirms their smallness and saps their energy. At least they won't be disappointed when nothing happens. Plus they get to verify their belief that aiming high is pointless. But the price of being right might be never giving one's gifts, never showing up and never being happy.

Is it possible to think too big? Some people develop a habitual strategy of thinking too big. They set goals for all of humankind, for world peace, for huge, wonderful



sounding spiritual goals, for enlightenment, for happiness. Notice that this kind of goal ignores or overlooks the goal setter. Such sweet self deprecation also hides a subtle form of attack. Who died and made them God? Does the goal setter feel beyond all needs and desires? Unless they are ascended beings, this is unlikely to be true. Some goals are just a bit too vague, some might be impossible to achieve, some might describe states of being (which are not goals), and some are just ambiguous and impossible to measure. Whether they are big or small, there is nothing wrong with wanting these goals. But setting goals of the right size will empower you much more.

**Typical violations of the NLP Outcome Frame are easier to spot.** The most common mistake people make is setting goals that are all about what they DON'T want instead of what they do want. It is so common to hear people say:

*'I want to lose weight'*

*'I want to quit smoking'*

*'I want to leave my job, relationship, house, etc'*

How you phrase a goal has a powerful effect on your result. No one grows up wanting to be a loser or a quitter. No one wants to lose their wallet or their keys. No one gets a positive energy surge from thinking of a negative goal. The question to ask is: 'What do you want instead?' It's important to describe what you really DO want in a phrase that is broader and more meaningful for your life as a whole. What will you be able to do, once you have achieved this little milestone? Who will you get to be then? What else will you be able to do or give?

**Healing illness is a tricky area.** People say 'I want to heal my health problem'. That sounds specific and positive. But wait a minute! A six year old doesn't grow up thinking 'someday I want to heal my health problem'. The thinking behind this goal has become obsessed with the health problem and has bought into the illness being a reality. By focusing on healing in this way, the attachment to the illness is reinforced. This is yet another form of self-attack. Although it is important to want to be well, again it is necessary to ask, 'and then what?' Create a vision of how life will be when you are well, including the necessary changes and improvements.

**Setting goals is dangerous!** People don't realize how powerful this process can be. Intention is everything. As soon as you set your desire in a particular direction, energy begins to flow. Things start to change. Nothing will ever be perceived in the same way again. Before you ever had the idea for that goal, there was no conflict. Notice that whenever you want something to be different from how it is now, what you are also saying is that where you are now is not acceptable. This amounts to an attack in itself. Most of the goals people set don't work out well because the hidden backlash of self-attack actually sabotages any positive energy. This becomes heightened when a person wants something too much. When it becomes almost an obsessive need, the attachment to the goal can become poisonous. So by now, you might be beginning to wonder: how is it possible to set goals that work?

*One day a man approached Ikkyu and asked: 'Master, will you please write for me some maxims of the highest wisdom?'*

*Ikkyu took his brush and wrote, "Attention."*



*'Is that all?' asked the man.*

*Ikkyu then wrote: "Attention, Attention."*

*'Well,' said the man, 'I really don't see much depth in what you have written.'*

*Then Ikkyu wrote that same word three times: "Attention, Attention, Attention."*

*Half angered, the man demanded: "What does that word "Attention" mean, anyway?"*

*Ikkyu gently responded, "Attention means attention."*

*In Schiller 1994*

**So what do you need to pay attention to?** The best way to create positive change happening is to set a new direction rather than set goals. By all means, pay attention to all those things you think you want, but ask yourself some deeper questions too. Think broader and imagine the bigger picture of your life. Create a vision that incorporates all the positive elements that you truly want. Think about your life as a whole. Consider your soul journey. Remember what it felt like to be 6 years old, looking forward to what you wanted to be when you grew up. Re-assess those goals using your heartmind. Imagine this new vision for your life, for who you want to be, for how you want to give your unique gifts. Then, after you have integrated your heart, mind and soul towards this new image of enjoying your new life – then add your passion! Every action you take will then seem effortless. Things will fall into place for you. Your journey will feel more fun than reaching the destination. Then the act of paying attention will be a daily blessing you give yourself, rather than a self-attack.

*The way to use life is to do nothing through acting,*

*The way to use life is to do everything through being.*

Lao-Tzu (6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.)