Setting Goals FOR A SUCCESSFUL 2008

BY KAREN CHILDRESS

Imagine what it would be like to begin 2008 with confidence and enthusiasm about achieving whatever is most important to you and then ending the year with the satisfaction of knowing that you accomplished what you set out to do. If you've ever set goals and met them, you know how good it can feel. If you've set goals and fallen short or missed the mark entirely, then you know how challenging it can be to maintain momentum throughout the year, especially when you're juggling a career and a busy personal life.

Tim and Jinny Ditzler are co-founders of Best Year Yet (www.bestyearyet.com), an organization committed to helping people and organizations achieve their most important goals. "Our premise is that anyone can set goals," says Tim. "[But] the people who are satisfied, who are winners, are the ones who make things happen." Tim notes that there's a great deal of interest now in a book and DVD called *The Secret*. "It's about the law of attraction, and it's accurate," says Tim. "But if we don't sustain focus on that which we want, it won't be attracted. There is no magic in just having a goal." What's important is having goals that are meaningful–goals that you can stay excited about in a sustained way so that you can see them through to fruition. And, that takes more than wishing and wanting. It requires clarity, focus, and decisive action.

First, what is a goal? It's anything that you set out to accomplish within a defined time frame. Goals should be specific, not vague. For example, "to be more productive" isn't a goal. It's a good intention, a hope, a good idea; but it's not a goal. "Create and follow a master task list at work every month this year" is a specific goal, one that you can measure and know with certainty at the end of the year whether or not you achieved it.

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Goals should be aggressive and yet attainable. Don't set yourself up for failure by setting goals that you always miss because they're too big; but don't limit your success by aiming too low either.

WRITE IT DOWN

Jinny says very few people ever put their goals in writing. "They can talk about them, but after a month or two, the goals have gone off the radar screen," she says. This is, in part, because we're all so busy and have so many options to consider that often we don't know what we should choose. "Goal setting forces us to sit down and take responsibility for the results we want to achieve in our lives," says Jinny.

The act of writing down your goals accomplishes two things. First, in order to put goals in writing, you have to really think about what you want. The process engages you in pondering what is most important and relevant. Second, once goals are written down, you'll (consciously and subconsciously) begin to make decisions on a daily basis that will move you toward achieving those goals.

REVIEW AND REFLECT

But before you put pen to paper–or fingers to keyboard–first assess what you accomplished in 2007. If you had written goals for the year, review that list. If you didn't write down your goals and need to refresh your memory, look through your calendar for the year to see how you spent your time. Pause for a moment to savor the feeling of success for what you accomplished. Then, if you made goals last year that you didn't achieve, give some thought to what got in your way. Was it plain old procrastination? Did a goal that seemed important back in January take a back seat to new, more important goals as the year unfolded? As you review last year, decide if it makes sense to carry forward any incomplete goals into 2008.

Next, spend some time reflecting on what you most value. Looking back over 2007, were there things you wish you'd spent more or less time on? Or given more or less energy to, either physically or emotionally? What feels important to pay attention to in the coming year?

WHAT IS YOUR LEADING ROLE?

The Best Year Yet program involves answering 10 questions that result in a year-long action plan. Jinny says questions 6 and 7 are especially important for people who juggle career and home. Question 6 is "What roles do I play in my life?" Your list might include, for example, practice manager, mother, student, athlete, and volunteer. Be sure that your list includes a role for taking care of yourself to keep your life in balance. Being aware of all the hats you wear helps answer question 7, which is "Which role is my major focus for next year?" For this question, the process involves placing a 1-10 value on how you'd rate your current performance in each role. A score of 10 means that you're totally satisfied with a particular role. A score of 2 or 3 means that you want to do much better in this role in 2008. Once you've completed your assessment, choose one role in which you want to have a breakthrough during the next 12 months. Although it may be tempting to choose several roles, Jinny recommends picking just one role to focus on in the coming year.

In addition to looking at the roles you play and deciding where you want to put most of your attention, consider the different areas in your life where you might also want to devote energy or achieve something specific: career, family, home, health/fitness, financial, creative endeavors, personal growth, spirituality, and leisure pursuits. You may have your own categories as well, depending on what you have going on in your life. When you factor in your most important role along with goals you'd like to achieve in other areas of your life, you'll cover all the bases.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

As you prepare to write down your goals for 2008, consider how high to set the bar. Perhaps you have just one big goal that you'll focus on for the entire year or one business goal and one personal goal. Or maybe you have five or six smaller goals that all feel important. Start with as long a list as you'd like, but before committing them to your "official" list, rank order your goals and then drop off the less critical ones–especially if looking at the long list makes you feel overwhelmed. Avoid putting "should" goals on your list. Focus your attention on the ones that are important to you.

When you have the "right" goals written down, break them down into steps if needed (smaller goals with shorter time frames), and then create an action plan for how you'll achieve them. For example, if you have a goal to lose 15 pounds in 2008, some of your smaller goals might be to walk for 45 minutes three times a week starting in January, begin twice-weekly yoga classes in February, and make an appointment with a nutritionist for sometime in March. Baby steps will get you there.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Those who argue against having written, specific goals often say the process feels too restrictive, that it goes against the idea of being present and living in the moment. According

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to Jinny, nothing could be further from the truth. "What keeps people out of the present is that they spend their time worrying about the past or about the future. They're in their heads," says Jinny. If you're regretting all the things you didn't accomplish last week or last year, or fretting about what you should do tomorrow or next week or with the rest of your life, it's indeed a challenge to stay in the moment. "Having written goals," says Jinny, "frees us to live more fully and be more present because we have confidence that we are on track and doing what is most important." Having clear goals and living in the moment aren't mutually exclusive. "I think it's quite difficult to be present if you don't have a focus about the kind of person you want to be and the contribution you want to make with your life," says Jinny. "It's like being a piece of old newspaper floating in the street, without direction and without intent."

As this year comes to a close and you're thinking about 2008–all that you want to do and the kind of success you'd like to experience–consider these words from one the most successful businessmen in modern times, Malcolm Forbes: "Success follows doing what you want to do. There is no other way to be successful." pm

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Goals vs. Intentions

Goals are concrete and have deadlines. At the end of the year (or week or month, or whatever your time frame happens to be), you should be able to answer "yes" or "no" to the question of whether or not you achieved a goal. Intentions are more like New Year's resolutions. They're more difficult to measure, but valuable nonetheless. Intentions are a nice adjunct to your written, specific goals. Merriam-Webster's says an intention is "a determination to act in a certain way." The easiest way to explain the difference between an intention and a goal is by example:

GOAL: Add $3,000 to my savings account by 12/31/08.

INTENTION: Make more conscious spending decisions; avoid impulse buying.

At the end of the year, you can easily see whether or not there's an additional $3,000 in savings. Although it's not as black and white, you'll also know (in your heart, if not in your wallet) at the end of the year if you were more conscious around money. Perhaps you occasionally purchased a stack of magazines at the checkout counter or grabbed a pair of shoes you didn't need just because they were on sale; but if you were generally more aware of how you spent (or didn't spend) money throughout the year, then you could probably conclude that you were true to your intention.