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## HERE'S TO GOALS!

by Kathy Graham



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A New Year's Resolution is really just a goal that some person or group leader would like to achieve in the New Year. A resolution implies an object/situation that's desired but not yet attained...so why all the fuss about having failed to do something that's not been done before and the effort to achieve the goal has been in existence for only how many days or weeks now?

Rather than focusing on the destination goal, Stanford University's Dr. Jennifer Aaker suggests adopting a "journey mindset" to move forward while enjoying the path/experiences along the way. She recommends viewing a goal as a North Star that anchors one in the right direction because her research has proven that such an approach actually propels the continuation of the goal-aligned behaviors after the goal is reached and creates further success in achievement of next goals<sup>1</sup>...because next year—and next month—there will be yet another goal, another New Year's Resolution wanting completion.

Tools, such as Dr. Aaker's "journey mindset," are needed because, unfortunately, embracing a specific goal can create other conduct that negatively impacts reaching the desired goal. For instance,

- GE leader Jack Welch's "stack-ranking" approach to achieving yearly productivity goals worked for Welch, but "stack-ranking" to achieve the same type of goals is considered to have contributed to Enron's leader Jeff Skilling's demise<sup>2</sup>, and Microsoft's leader Steve Ballmer dropped it in 2013 because of stack-ranking's negative side effects<sup>3</sup> that perhaps contributed to the loss of billions of dollars in acquisitions and missed opportunities<sup>4</sup> even though Ballmer's productivity gains likely from its use tripled sales and doubled profits during his CEO tenure from January 2000 to February 2014<sup>5</sup>.
- Daniel Goleman in his March-April 2000 *Harvard Business Review*, "Leadership that Gets Results," notes that the leadership style for achieving goals known as "the pacesetter style" sounds "admirable, yet has surprisingly negative impacts on results (i.e., goal achievement), culture, and morale.
- Numerous other studies have proven that goal behavior for individuals and group leaders that focuses efforts on achieving only one aspect, the target, can have unintended adverse impacts on quality, decision-making, and sub-group behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

Thankfully, in addition to Aaker's "journey mindset," there are many other tools given on the following page to reach all goals of interest: PITHY SAYINGS, QUIT WORKING, GAMIFICATION, TEMPORAL LANDMARKS, VISUALIZATION, and GRIT.

**PITHY SAYINGS:** My favorite: “How do you eat an elephant (i.e., something gargantuan in size)?” Answer: One bite at a time. “What do you do if you’re choking?” Answer: Take a smaller bite. Another: University of Chicago Booth’s Career Advancement Programs Director Anita Brick’s favorite: “If at first you don’t succeed, do something smaller.” **TAKEAWAY:** Is the goal too large? If yes, break it into sections...and remember to use PITHY SAYINGS to keep important messaging upfront and fresh.

**QUIT WORKING:** Quitting continuous work has been repeatedly shown to improve performance, so introduce more “Quit Working” moments: Use: **90 MINUTE ACTIVITY CYCLES**, then relax for 10 minutes<sup>7</sup>; **GET OUT**, leave the work area for lunch—it’s also good for business—read Keith Ferrazzi’s *Never Eat Alone* book for details; **SLEEP MORE**, as more sleep—naps or 7-8 hours/night are equally powerful—makes work more productive, easier to achieve goals<sup>8</sup>; **PLAY SOLITAIRE/ONLINE GAMES:** studies show that up to 20% of work time spent doing Internet’s silly games results in 9% overall more output<sup>9</sup>...while 3-minutes of playing Solitaire offers a 200% better likelihood of giving the correct answer to complex decision-making problems<sup>10</sup>. **TAKEAWAY:** Adding breaks in away from goal-focused periods revitalizes/increases chance of earning the goal.

**GAMIFICATION:** Making goal-focused activities **FUN 3 WAYS**<sup>11</sup> increases the chance of reaching the goal more likely. **FIRST FUN APPROACH:** tie a goal to an enjoyable game or activity—**POKÉMON GO your goal** in some manner: music, etc. **2<sup>ND</sup> FUN APPROACH:** add in **IMMEDIATE ENJOYMENT**—do only or mostly goal-reaching activities that are enjoyable. **3<sup>RD</sup> FUN APPROACH:** note that **FUN ALREADY EXISTS**—when performing X goal activity, it’s fun because of Y, Z factors. **TAKEAWAY:** Have fun on the journey, truly enjoy the required activities, revel in the experiences needed for goal attainment.

**TEMPORAL LANDMARKS:** Temporal landmarks are periods of time marked off by something: New Year’s Day, every morning (Emerson: “Tomorrow is a new day...begin it...with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.”); beginnings of weeks, months, seasons, quarters. **IF AT FIRST YOU DON’T SUCCEED, START ANEW ON A TEMPORAL LANDMARK** because they relegate past periods’ imperfections into the previous mental accounting period, giving a new fresh slate to focus on achieving the big picture. **TAKEAWAY:** When stuck, start over using the next “new” day—e.g., New Year’s, any Monday, first day of Spring, new quarter, birthday/anniversary, etc.—as a new beginning. Relegate goal achievement failures to the past, which effectively frees up energy to actually reach a desired goal<sup>12</sup>.

**VISUALIZATION:** Go for **TWOFERS** when visualizing goal—athletes who pursue two goals versus one gain more benefit from their visualization activities preceding their actual work on achieving their goals<sup>13</sup>. **TAKEAWAY:** Double the power of visualization by tying two achievement goals together into one visualization before commencing goal activities.

**GRIT:** GRIT is passion and perseverance. GRIT is having authentic INTEREST in the goal and in what needs to be done to achieve it. GRIT is knowing and believing in the PURPOSE of the goal and how to earn it. GRIT is unrelenting PRACTICE activities needed to capture the goal. GRIT is HOPE that turns temporary failures into learning that enables goal attainment<sup>14</sup>. **TAKEAWAY:** Does the goal elicit passion, interest, a motivating purpose—if not, perhaps another goal is the answer? **GRIT is the “secret sauce” that—with above other tools—makes New Year’s & Other Goal Journeys Do-able & Enjoyable.**

<sup>1</sup> Aaker, J., & Huang, S.-C. (2019). It’s the journey, not the destination: How metaphor drives growth after goal attainment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 117(4), 697-720.

<sup>2</sup> Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Simon & Schuster.

<sup>3</sup> Armatas, Andrew. “How the Solution Becomes the Problem: The Performance Solution That Backfired at Microsoft,” *SAGE Publications: SAGE Business Cases Originals*, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Steve Ballmer (2022, January 5). In *Wikipedia*.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Ballmer (2022, January 5). In *Wikipedia*.

<sup>6</sup> Heat, C., Larrick, R., & Wu, G. (2009). Goal-induced risk taking in negotiation and decision making. *Social Cognition*, 27(3), 342-364.

<sup>6</sup> Bell, C., Celani, A., & Tasa, K. (2013). Goals in negotiation revisited: The impact of goal setting and implicit negotiation beliefs,” *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 6(2), 114-132.

<sup>7</sup> Schwartz, T. (2013, February 10). Relax! You’ll be more productive. *The New York Times*.

<sup>8</sup> Schwartz, T. (2013, February 10). Relax! You’ll be more productive. *The New York Times*.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, D. (2012, August 6). The case for vacation: Why science says breaks are good for productivity. *The Atlantic*.

<sup>10</sup> Harvard Business Review. (2013, July 1). The Daily Stat: Why you might make a better decision after a quick game of solitaire.

<sup>11</sup> Fishbach, A. (2021). Gamify your life. *Chicago Booth Review*.

<sup>12</sup> Dai, H., Milkman, K.L., & Riis, J. (2014). The fresh start effect: Temporal landmarks motivate aspirational behavior. *Management Science*, 60(10), 2563-2582.

<sup>13</sup>Blankert, T., & Hamstra, M. (2017). Imagining success: Multiple achievement goals and the effectiveness of imagery. *Basic Applied Social Psychology*, 39(1), 60-67.

<sup>14</sup> Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*. Simon & Schuster.