



If You Expect Results, Don't Focus On Them

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Have you ever set a goal, but failed to achieve it? Whether a professional goal like achieving a sales quota or a personal goal like improving physical fitness, most people have struggled at some point to achieve the results they set out to achieve. People aspire to deepen their industry knowledge, learn how to read financial reports, play a musical instrument, or improve their speaking skills, yet year after year go by without it happening. Some aspire to lose weight or improve a relationship, yet instead gain weight and deepen their conflict. They actually go in the opposite direction from their desired outcomes.

In people's defense, reaching goals requires effort and energy. Many goals require changes in habits and getting out of comfortable routines. Change can be painful—both mentally and physically. It requires deferring the urgent, convenient, and fun for the important. It requires competing with physical desires, exercising self-control, and overcoming the fear of looking foolish. Achieving goals requires courage, discipline, sacrifice, and time.

As a consultant and executive coach, the core of my job is helping organizations and individuals change behaviors. When people ask me what type of work I do, I feel like saying that I help people change. When I consider the type of effort I put into most days, it is centered on helping people develop new behaviors required to reach their goals. Even when I'm working toward my own goals, I'm applying the same principles of change. Whether writing books, developing a new skill, or achieving a course record on my mountain bike, I'm working on the behaviors required to reach my goals.

While goals are the starting point for most organizational and individual accomplishments, they are not the means by which desired outcomes are achieved. People don't obtain results by focusing on results. Results are attained by focusing on that which produces results, not the results themselves. The only outcome people get from focusing on results is anxiety. Great athletic coaches don't tell their team to go win. Great sales leaders don't tell their sales people to achieve their sales targets. Great business leaders don't merely tell their employees to better collaborate and meet their project deadline. Instead, they coach their people on developing the attitudes, behaviors, and skills that are needed to reach their goals.

To most effectively reach your goals or help others reach theirs, move your attention away from the goals. Set the goals initially so you have the clear direction and hope for a better future that goals provide, but then turn your focus to what needs to be done on a daily basis to reach the goals. Identify the actions and behaviors that need to be performed daily. Turn your attention to today. Don't fret over tomorrow or the next day. Don't dwell on the ultimate goal you want to achieve. Simply do what you need to do today. Avoid the sodas, desert, or extra helping of food today. Spend the 30 minutes in the gym today. Make the phone calls you need to make today. Get up early today and spend an hour on your manuscript. Don't measure your biceps, look at the scale, count the pages, or fret over your quota. If you simply do what you need to do today, the results will take care of themselves.

If you can say at the end of today that you did a good job of adhering to your diet, maintaining your exercise program, making your follow-up calls, or controlling your angry outbursts, you will reach your desired outcome. With the exception of planning for important upcoming events, just focus on doing what you need to do today. Instead of focusing on this quarter, month, week, or even tomorrow, simply focus on today.

At the end of today, score how well you did at doing what you needed to do today. When tomorrow comes, do it again and record your results at the end of the day tomorrow. When the week is done, look at your scorecard. Compare how well you did each day against the actions and behaviors you expected to perform. If you did well, you will reach your goals. If instead you let the urgent, convenient, or immediately satisfying displace the important, you won't.



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What should you put on your daily scorecard? Is it spending an hour a day coaching your employees, making five follow-up phone calls, or exercising thirty minutes in the gym? Is it reading one chapter of a non-fiction book, reducing the number of emails in your inbox by fifty, or writing two thank-you notes? Whatever it is, determine what you need to do on a daily basis to reach your goals and write it down in a journal or spreadsheet. Now forget your goals and turn your focus to your daily scorecard. Focus on one day at a time and let your daily progress accumulate. The days will turn into weeks, the weeks into months, and before you know it, your goals will turn into realities. Your book will be published. Your body will be physically fit. Your relationships will be satisfying. Your project will be finished. You will be speaking in public with confidence, using your newly developed skill, or traveling abroad with the satisfaction of having learned a new foreign language.

As extra credit, share your scorecard with a friend or colleague. If you have a coach or manager who leads as a coach, share your scorecard at the end of the week with him or her. Be accountable to not only yourself, but to someone else. Include consequences in your weekly scorecard review. Reward yourself with a small celebration for a good scorecard, or defer something gratifying for a not-so-good scorecard.

Through your own daily discipline, accountability, and consequences, you will reach your goals. You will enjoy the satisfaction that comes with accomplishment rather than the frustration that comes with not making progress toward those elusive outcomes.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com) and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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