



# FIVE ideas to inspire goal setting and achievement

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There is a lot of great information on goal setting to inspire and guide you to achieve whatever goal you have in front of you. There are books, blogs and posts written by people who have hit unbelievable goals and we have a lot to learn from them. To help cut through the clutter, we've taken the real-world experience of nearly a million-and-half goal setters and summarized it into **five guiding principles** to help anyone who would like to go from goal setter to goal achiever.

## 1. Goal setting is personal.

From parents to teachers to managers, our lives are filled with other people's goals for us. But let's get one thing straight: These are not goals. This is a to-do list. They become goals when we find a way to make them personal —when we prioritize them above everything else that gets in our way every day.

According to research done by Werner, Milyavskaya and colleagues, "some goals just feel easier" to achieve. These are the goals that align with our identity and values. We may work harder to achieve these goals but it sure doesn't feel like it.

## 2. Goal setting is emotional.

But then again, what isn't? Over the last decade, multiple studies have shown that although we are bombarded by data, information and facts, our brain leaps to emotional decisions. Goal setting is no different. The drivers of goal achievement are often irrational. We train for months to run a marathon and earn a t-shirt. We climb to the top of a mountain and come back with nothing more than a story to tell our friends. We sacrifice everything to give our children the best – and wind up with empty pockets.

Knowledge and data alone are not enough to achieve a goal. They can provide a direction and a framework but too much information can lead to inaction. The fuel that powers goal achievement is emotional commitment. Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP, a thought leader on the science of goal setting, calls this grit. Grit is defined as our perseverance and passion for long-term goals. It's what drives action and helps us power through the obstacles and distractions on our way to goal achievement.

## 3. Goal setting requires focus.

The same emotions that empower action toward a goal can contribute to us getting off track on our way toward goal achievement. Research published in 1988 (Samuelson, Zenkhauser) described a status quo



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bias that affects decision making. Regardless of our best intentions to set a goal, make a change and head in a new direction, we are wired to default to the status quo. This is what makes changing our spending habits, sticking to a new diet or adhering to an exercise regimen the more difficult decision. And instead of heading in the new direction, we stay on a familiar course.

Setting a goal and maintaining focus requires active decision making on a daily basis. Most people abandon New Year's resolutions within six months – and almost 25% within seven days. Successful goal setters rely on a variety of tools to maintain focus. The most common is writing goals down. Another tool is to get off to a fast start. One study showed that those who get off to a fast start are more likely to follow through and ultimately achieve their goals. These tools work regardless of whether you are pursuing a short-term or long-term goal.

## 4. Goal setting is a cycle, not an end point.

There seems to be a connection between goal setters who achieve short- and long-term goals, as well as big and small goals. That connection is the power of inspiration. According to a *Harvard Business Review* article, "Inspiration facilitates progress towards goals." Inspiration mirrors goal setting in that it is personal and emotional – what inspires one person may not be effective for another. But the relationship creates an achievement cycle that results in top performance and success.

Big goals may seem more powerful and memorable, like landing someone on the moon or starting a new company. But for those who aren't top performers or find it hard to achieve bigger goals, setting short-term goals may start them on the path to higher achievement. In the words of the researchers, "**Goal progress and goal inspiration build on each other to form a cycle of greater goal inspiration and greater goal pursuit.**" So the best idea might be to stop thinking and talking about your goals and get busy working toward them – whether they are big or small.

## 5. Goal setting should be celebrated.

Some would say this should only be applied to goal achievement. But it's the whole process that deserves celebration. Many goals have built-in milestones such as graduations and weddings. These moments are emotional and visual. They create memories and they suggest future goals. The key is to create similarly memorable and rewarding moments for your goals. Ensure there's time to pause and enjoy the moment. Behavioral scientists talk about a "post-reward pause" that briefly slows down performance but afterwards, you will re-emerge and re-commit to new goals with a higher level of proficiency and effort.





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## Here's a quick guide to rewarding yourself.

### Build a foundation of intrinsic rewards.

In other words, celebrate achievements internally. Skipping dessert, exercising more, painting a picture or volunteering in your community can reward you and pay huge dividends in both physical and mental health.

### Add in some extrinsic, or tangible, rewards to support progress to your goal or actual goal achievement.

Buying a luxury item or indulging in a memorable experience are two perfect examples.

### Don't always wait until the end for the reward.

Consider breaking larger goals into smaller milestones.

### Visualize your reward.

This can remind you of the emotional reasons you set the goal in the first place and focus you on moving forward – rather than on all of the distractions or rationalizations for giving up.

### Look for opportunities to reward others.

It sounds like a greeting card but when we teach, we learn; when we give, we receive; and when we support others in their goal quest, we reinforce our own goal journey.

Goal setting is personal and emotional. It requires constant focus. And it's different for everyone. What works for you doesn't always work for me. There are so many factors involved and so many biases we bring to a new goal. Consider these five principles as you get started on achieving success.

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BI WORLDWIDE is a leader in real-world goal setting. Our GoalQuest® platform has challenged nearly 1.5 million salespeople to set and attain self-selected goals by making them personal and emotional. We are proven experts in providing communications and learning tools to ensure focus. And we have the broadest collection of both tangible rewards and experiences to help celebrate accomplishments of all kinds.

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