

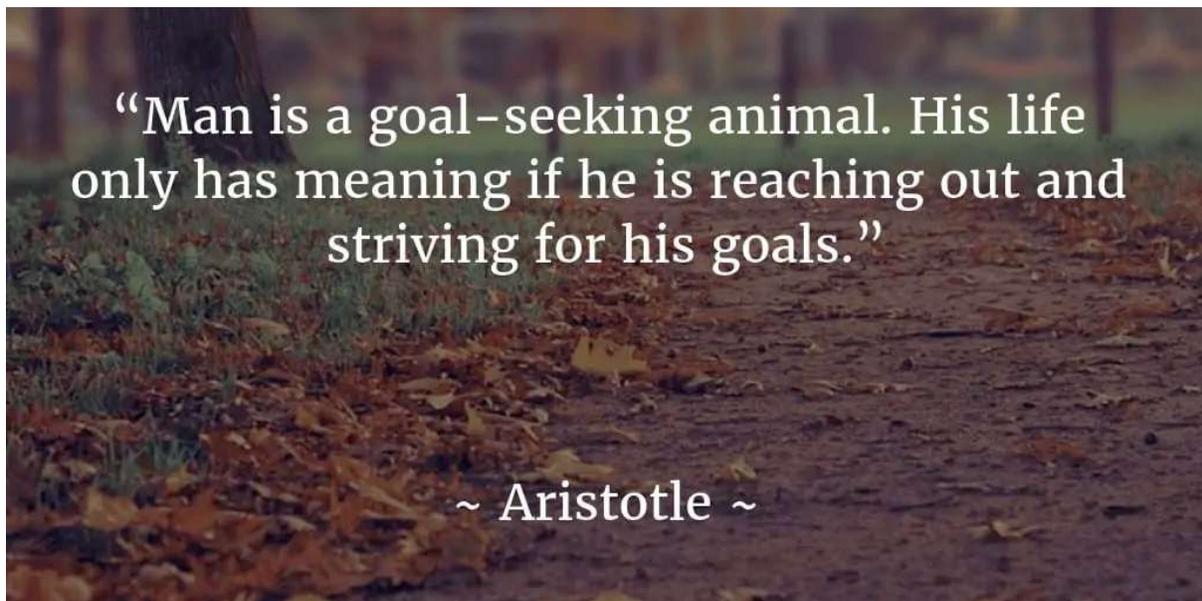
3 HIGHLY EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING TECHNIQUES

Goal setting is a powerful process that helps you choose where you want to take yourself in life. By knowing the goal setting techniques, and setting effective goals, you can be clear about where do you need to focus your attention and efforts to go ahead in life.

WHY SHOULD YOU SET GOALS?

Aristotle said 2300 years ago:

Man is a goal seeking animal. His life only has meaning if he is reaching out and striving for his goals.



And it was Benjamin Mays who said:

The tragedy in life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach.

At its heart, the act of goal setting is a deed of motivation. The main purpose of your setting goals is to increase your motivation levels.

GOAL SETTING THEORY

A little history of the science of goal setting. Edwin Locke, a retired Dean's Professor of Motivation and Leadership at the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, College Park, is a pioneer in the Goal Setting Theory, which he first presented in his 1990 book, [A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance](#).

Locke's theory was based on studies involving about 40,000 people from eight different countries over 25 years. A thought-provoking conclusion he pulled from all those studies was that in 90% of the cases, *specific and challenging goals led to higher performance* than easy goals, "do your best" goals, or no goals.

Locke defines a goal as "the object or aim of an action."

Any goal has two main features –

1. *Content, and*
2. *Intensity.*

The content of a goal is the *desired result* while the intensity is the *needed efforts*.

1 GAME TO PLAY WITH YOUR MIND

Goal setting can be an incredible game we play with our minds. Once you set a goal, the simple act that you have set a goal makes you more inclined to hold on to it. That is human nature.

And if you were to *write it down* instead of just telling it to yourself, your desire to hug it even tight becomes stronger.

Psychologists say when we set a goal, we put out a part of ourselves into that future goal. *You don't just set a goal; you own it as a part of yourself.*

This is called "*endowment effect,*" a phrase coined by Richard Thaler in 1980. It says when you own something – a gift or a dream or a goal – you cling to it and don't want to give it up. Because now it has become a part of your identity, and you price it at a higher value than others around.

Now, a second related phenomenon needs a mention here: the confirmation bias.

The “[confirmation bias](#)” is a condition when your mind tries to find or interpret things in a way that confirms your preconceived ideas. So, if you set a goal and share it with others in your social circle, your mind tries to find methods to make it real by automation.

2 SIGNALS TO WATCH OUT FOR

There are two caveats to keep in mind while you set your goals, however:

1. If **others are setting a goal for you**, and you find the goal a stretch, then you may end up using unethical ways to achieve it, or lie about having achieved it. However, if it's you who's setting them, you will be more committed to those goals. *So, don't let other set your goals.*
2. If **you are broadcasting your goals** to anyone who would listen to praise you, you will end up sabotaging yourself. Because receiving compliments for being a guy having a lofty goal might fool your mind into feeling as if it has already achieved the goal. This will take away your motivation to make efforts for realizing your goals. *So, don't tell your goals to anyone.*

Set your goals yourself; don't let others do it for you. And once you set your goals, keep them to yourself; don't tell others.

3 GOAL SETTING TECHNIQUES TO USE



Three highly effective, and perhaps the best, techniques of goal setting are:

1. The **SMART** Method
2. The **HARD** Method
3. The **WOOP** Method

Let us dive into the three highly effective systems of goal setting, and learn how to best set your goals.

1. THE SMART METHOD

For this, we take a cue from George T. Doran's 1981 paper in *Management Review* to identify how can we find out if our goals are worthwhile and purposeful.

What he described in that original document has almost become a *gold standard* today, that goals should

be: **S.M.A.R.T.** This became famous when one of the most successful CEO's ever on planet, Jack Welch, inducted this model in GE in the early 1980s.

- **S** — Specific — should target a specific (clearly stated) area for improvement.
- **M** — Measurable — should have numbers or indicators to measure progress.
- **A** — Achievable — should stretch you a little, but stay within your skill/knowledge range.
- **R** — Realistic — should say what results can be achieved in realistic terms, with available resources.
- **T** — Timely — should specify when the results are due, so that a sense of urgency is there.

2. THE HARD METHOD

This is a very easy and effective way to follow when you want to set personal goals. This second way was ideated by Mark Murphy in his well-researched 2009 book [Hundred Percenters](#), to set effective goals, is: **H.A.R.D.**

- **H** — Heartfelt — have emotional attachment with your goals when setting them.
- **A** — Animated — imagine vivid pictures of the positive feelings you'll have after achieving them.
- **R** — Required — build a sense of urgency and necessity into the goals you're setting.
- **D** — Difficult — make your goals difficult and be prepared to take their challenges head-on.

3. THE WOOP METHOD

The third goal setting technique is the newest one. [Gabriele Oettingen](#) and Peter Gollwitzer, psychologists at New York University, created WOOP as a result of their *20+ years of scientific research*. It has proven to be effective across ages and life domains. There is an app too (check your [Appstore](#)/[Playstore](#)).

WOOP has been shown to [improve effort, attendance, and even GPA](#) among *students* by significant margins. WOOP reduced insecurity-based behaviors (e.g., looking through the partner's phone log) and increased commitment in *romantic relationships*. WOOP doubled regular physical exercise over a time period of four months and increased fruit and vegetable intake by 30% over the period of two years.

A visualization technique, also known as *Mental Contrasting with Implementation Intentions* (MCII) in the scientific literature, **WOOP** stands for:

- **W** — Wish – wish something you want to accomplish for real, one that's exciting, challenging, realistic.
- **O** — Outcome – imagine the best outcome of your goal, and feel how would the outcome make you feel.
- **O** — Obstacle – imagine the personal obstacles that prevent you from accomplishing your goal.
- **P** — Plan – make an if/then plan to name an action you could do if your obstacle occurs.

Final Words

When you set effective goals, you feel better about them immediately after. That itself sets the dice rolling. And remember that happiness for most of us, most of the times, isn't a thing that just happens; it comes from planning and setting goals for things that are important to us.

By the way, what is your [personal definition of success](#)? Share with your friends a simple one-line social media post about what exactly do you mean by success.

Let that be your goal today.

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