

Game-Changing Goals

By Penina Taylor

It's the new year and it's time to review the goals we set last year and see how many of them we met, think about what we want to accomplish this coming year, and set new goals. Unfortunately, upon review, the vast majority of us find ourselves having fallen far too short of the mark, and wondering, "What's the point?"

And yet most of us continue, year after year, to set goals because we all know that the only way to achieve success in any area of our lives is to have a target at which to aim. The old saying, "If you aim for nothing you are sure to hit it", is still true. And yet most people are setting goals that they cannot meet. I'm not talking about shooting too high, because aiming high is absolutely crucial if you are going to make any real progress forward. No, I'm not talking about aiming too high, I'm talking about shooting at the wrong target altogether.

No doubt you've heard the saying that you have to set SMART goals, right? – specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. But then there are those who say that you shouldn't be setting attainable goals, you should be setting goals that seem impossible because otherwise, you will never actually make any upward movement. But then there are those who say you should not be aiming at impossible goals; you should be coming FROM the place of those impossible goals. It's enough to make your head spin.

The truth is that they are all correct, you do need to set smart goals, and impossible goals, but you also need to set the right kind of goals - actual goals. But before we do that, we need to understand what happens in your brain when you create goals and then miss them, time and time again.

So, a little neuroscience here.

When it comes to our behavior there are two main parts of the brain that are the major players. There's the amygdala, which is the primal part of our brain that is in charge of keeping us alive, and the prefrontal cortex, which is the logic center of our brain.

When our brain senses a threat to our well-being, whether it be physical or emotional, that threat stimulus triggers a hormone cascade and our amygdala takes charge. Remember, its job is to keep us alive, physically and emotionally – it's super important to remember that an emotional threat is just as much a threat to our wellbeing as a physical one. When the amygdala takes over, it initiates what we all know as the fight, flight, or freeze response.

When you create goals you cannot reach, and you experience the pain of disappointment, which is often interpreted as failure in your mind, your brain experiences that pain as a threat to your well-being and registers it in your database of predators. The neurons in our brain are always imprinting data and looking for pattern matches – that’s what happens when you get a feeling about a person, place, or thing. There’s a pattern that your brain picks up on as a match and tells you – trust this person or run the other way.

So you set what you think is a goal, and you don’t hit it, and it’s painful and your brain registers setting a goal as a predator – this is an event that is dangerous.

But your logic center says, hey, sometimes you have to try more than once, so you tap into courage and set another goal. If you succeed, your brain has now registered that sometimes you succeed and sometimes you don’t, and that’s different than when you keep setting goals and not hitting them.

But, if the next time you set a goal you don’t meet that one either, the amygdala says, I’m taking over, this is a dangerous situation here, we cannot go there. So now every time you even think about setting goals your amygdala says this is a threat, and your brain does everything it can to help you avoid setting the goals. If you manage to tap into courage and set another goal, believe it or not, your brain will try to help you find ways of sabotaging your efforts that won’t feel like failure. It’s called a survival strategy.

Ok, so here’s an example. Lisa is an entrepreneur who runs a consulting company that helps start-ups build a team efficiently and put all the pieces into place for success. For 2019, Lisa created a list of goals. Top of her list was to hit the \$1 million mark in gross revenue for the year. She knew that in order to make that happen, she would have to sign on at least 20 clients at her price point. So that was another goal, and her third goal was to become known as the leader in her field.

At the end of 2019, Lisa realized that she did not meet any of those three goals. And she was deflated. What did she do wrong? As a high-powered entrepreneur, she knew that she had to gather her team and do an assessment of what had gone wrong over the previous year in order to set their new goals for 2020. She held her meeting and then went off to decide what goals she wanted to set for the team for the coming year. But every time she sat down to work on them, something else came up that took her time and attention. She found herself profoundly distracted, in a way she had never experienced before. She decided that she would have her team suggest new goals and she set them to it. In the end, they decided to use the same goals as for 2019, and discuss new strategies to actually meet those goals in the coming year.

But then something strange happened. Lisa got sick with a flu that just lingered and lingered. She was too tired to concentrate on the work she needed to do to acquire new clients. She had no desire to work on the advertising campaign that would help her to become known as the leader in her field. She ended up handing over the task to her team. Then Corona hit, and suddenly she had another out. Never mind the fact that start-ups still needed her services, that Corona hadn't affected her field, and her closest competitor had actually doubled their gross revenue during this time.

What Lisa didn't realize is that her brain had determined that these goals were a threat and so gave her several excuses – her health, no time, and Corona that she could use to blame for not hitting her goals this year.

The problem wasn't with how high Lisa was aiming, the problem was she thought she was setting goals when she wasn't.

Remember the three goals I said she set?

1. To bring in gross revenue of \$1 million
2. To sign on 20 clients
3. To be known as the leader in her field

None of these are goals. Two of them are metrics and one is a vision. None of them are goals, and that right there is the problem.

It's not how high you aim, it's that you aren't aiming at the right target. Because you cannot meet a goal that isn't in your power to meet. No matter how hard you try, you cannot make another person buy something, sign up for something, or think of you in a certain way. When you set goals you cannot do anything about, you are setting yourself up for failure.

So if those are not goals, then what is a goal?

First let's talk about the two things that are often mistaken for goals: a vision, and metrics.

Vision is crucial to setting goals. Vision is not only what you want your goals to propel you towards, but it's also the fuel that keeps you moving in that direction. It's certainly easy to see why we would confuse the terms vision and goal – because they are both things you are aiming at. If you accomplish all your goals and the end result isn't exactly what you had envisioned, you might be disappointed, but it won't stop you from creating a new vision and setting new goals.

At the same time, having a very clear vision of what you want, gives you the map you need to work with in order to set your goals. Goals are points on the map that move you towards your vision.

The thing about a vision is that it isn't measurable. Being successful is a vision. Having financial freedom so you can travel is a vision. Having a beautiful home, while being somewhat subjectively measurable, is still a vision; these things aren't goals.

But wait – I said that a vision isn't measurable, and I've implied that goals are, so why aren't earning \$1 million or signing on 20 clients goals? They are measurable, after all.

Because how much you earn is dependent on other people, and as mentioned above, there are three things in business you cannot make another person do – you cannot make them sign up for something, you cannot make them buy something, and you cannot make them feel a certain way. You can do things that *may* cause them to *want* to sign up or buy or feel a certain way, but it's totally dependent on what's going on inside their heads and what they *choose* to do about it.

Ok, so a vision is the big picture end result – it's how you want your life, or business, or venture to turn out – it's usually not measurable, although it can have a time attached to it. For example, I want to have my house built before next September. So my house is a vision, but it definitely has a date. And in this case, it is measurable. Either the house is built or it isn't, right? Whether or not it will happen by then, I don't know, but I'm going to do my best.

Let's go back to Lisa. Lisa has a vision to be the leader in her field. How does she define being a leader in her field? Those are what we are going to call metrics, they are what tell her that she has achieved her vision. So, bringing in \$1 million in gross revenue? That's a metric, right? That's a way for her to know that she's achieved, or on her way to achieving her vision. Signing on 20 clients, that's also a metric; if she gets 20 new clients then she'll know that she's heading in the right direction, that her advertising as well as her results are bringing in more people.

So what are her goals? Her goals are the stops she makes that bring her that much closer to her goal. So, a goal for Lisa might be to create (or have her team create) and run a new ad campaign every week. Another goal might be to personally contact 100 potential clients, knowing that a certain amount of contacts generally yields a certain number of "yeses". Another goal might be to spend two hours per day creating new content.

So a VISION is the big picture end result you want to accomplish. It's not always measurable, but it can be. But it's something that can only be accomplished by setting goals to get you there.

METRICS are the results that tell you whether or not you are headed in the right direction, or if you need a course correction. If you have the goal of stopping in the city of Liverpool on your way to Glasgow, and you find yourself instead in Ipswich, you know that you took a wrong turn somewhere, and you need a course correction, you need to change direction.

If I have the vision of being a highly successful teacher, and the metrics are that I will have each course maxed out at 25 participants, but I only get 5 participants, I've landed myself in Ipswich. I need a course correction. It could be something as simple as I didn't start advertising soon enough, or I didn't get my ads in front of enough people, or that I didn't personally connect with enough people. Or it could mean that I'm not using the right wording to attract the right people for this course. Now obviously, interpreting what the metrics tell us can be tricky, and that's why becoming an overnight success actually takes years. It's trial and error. Sometimes you hit on the right combination of goals the first time, and sometimes you don't. Whether or not you hit your metrics tells you that.

A PLAN or STRATEGY is the route on the map. That's how you are going to get from where you are now to accomplishing your vision.

The points along the route are your GOALS. You have bigger goals and smaller goals that make up the bigger goals.

But goals are things that you do, and only you can do. It cannot be said enough times, you cannot make someone buy a product. But you can produce the product, you can demonstrate the product, you can advertise the product, you can give away free samples of the product.

The only thing you can control is what you do, so every goal you set for yourself has to be something that you can do, not something that depends on someone else in order to make it happen. Because here's the thing – let's say you have the vision to have a successful course launch. Now that may be a smaller vision that is part of the larger vision of being financially independent, for example. But you want to have a successful course launch. It's a vision, not a goal, because even if you do everything right it may not happen. The metrics are that you will know you have had a successful course launch if at least 10 people sign up and pay for the course. But that can't be a goal, it can only be a metric. How do you meet your metrics? The steps towards that are your goals. You plan out all the steps along the way, which is your strategy. And if you don't have a successful launch? Then you can say to yourself, okay, the metrics are telling

me that I need a course correction. I'm going to call in a copywriter, or a marketing guru, or whatever you think might be the problem. This is where the trial and error comes in. But then you try again. You know that you met all your goals, you have no reason to consider this a failure because you did everything you thought you were supposed to do. Now, you need to do some research to see why it didn't work. You didn't fail, your strategy didn't work, do you see the difference? This difference may seem small, but it determines whether or not this becomes a threat to your well-being or fuel to propel you forward.

So this year, when you sit down to write out your goals for the year, and you feel yourself responding as if it's a threat - remember you've probably not actually been setting goals at all. Make sure that the goals you set are things that you can do – that you alone have control over – and you're going to hit the mark! Happy New Year.