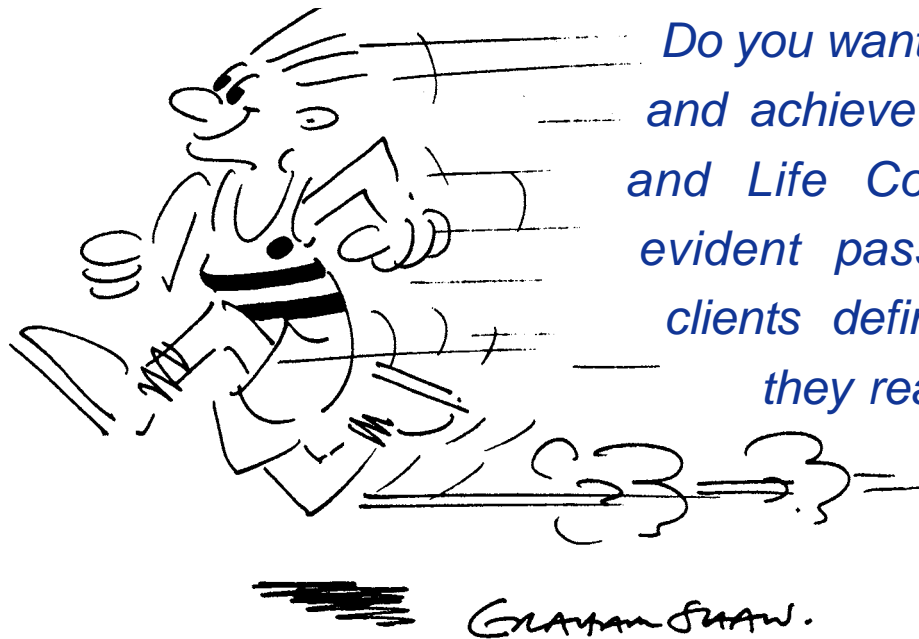


# The real value and purpose of setting goals

Karen Skehel



*Do you want to discover how to set and achieve goals? Top Business and Life Coach Karen Skehel's evident passion for helping her clients define and achieve what they really want prompted me to ask her to write about what's most important to her....*

I believe 100% in the power of setting goals to bring about the results you want to achieve in your life. My beliefs have been reinforced by seeing goals materialise in my clients' lives, and in my family's life, as well as in my own life. The beauty of setting goals is that you are never too old or too young to start the process and benefit from the outcome.

Whilst I do use coaching within my own family with caution, I have a couple of stories which are constant reminders to me of the power of goal setting. My left handed, 11 year old son, who had struggled with hand writing speed throughout his early schooling, set a goal to **"More than double my hand writing speed"**. With the goal very firmly in mind, he automatically became motivated to take a "d-i-y" hand writing programme. He worked on the programme himself with little in the way of reminders from me. His handwriting speed accelerated, and the goal was achieved.

For 67 years, or as long as she could use a crayon, my son's grandmother, my mother, enjoyed art as a hobby. However, she had reached a point where she wasn't getting very much from her art. I took her through a goal setting session around her art and she established what she wanted to do: **"Become an Artist of Excellence"**. She herself realised she was not spending enough time on her art, and became highly motivated and highly focused. At the age of 68, she applied, and was accepted, to do a BA Hons Degree Course, and has since won prizes for her art. In both cases, it was literally the setting of their own goals which led to these outcomes.

Goals can also be used in the moment to dramatically change the outcome. Today, I was playing a one set tennis match. I wasn't playing well, and found myself down 5-2 and 40 love down. Unexpectedly, I became inspired by the idea of winning from such a place. **"Winning from 5-2, and 40 love**

**down"** became the goal of the moment, which really excited me. I shared my goal with my opponent. My game changed beyond recognition. I became very focused, and determined whilst at the same time very relaxed. I started to enjoy the match. Instead of losing many games to love, I was winning games to love. I finally went on to win 7-6.

Stephen Covey, in "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" (Covey, 1989) tells his readers to "begin with the end in mind" – and when we set a goal we are doing just that.

## **What is the purpose of setting goals?**

So many people go through their lives like rudder-less ships - without clear direction - and are literally subject to storms and winds in the sea of life. Lack of direction can often lead to feelings of stress and anxiety, poor concentration levels, lack of confidence, and living life from a place of being reactive rather than proactive. Not only that, but people without goals often

have little determination, patience or tenacity.

When you set and achieve a goal, you have an opportunity to pat yourself on the back. Even if you don't achieve exactly what you set out to do, there are likely to be numerous achievements and learnings along the way that you can acknowledge yourself for. All this helps build self esteem.

For those who are serious about sport, who are running a business or have a senior role within a company, setting goals is an essential ingredient to success. In spite of this, not everyone does it. It may take a conversation with a coach, or business advisor to get them thinking along these lines.

Setting goals is not just for sport or work, everyone can benefit from a well-worded goal. Whether you seek a new partner, a better relationship with your existing one, a new job, a new house, more energy, more abundance, improved health, a stress-free life, or something else, the right goal for you, can make all the difference.

## How do you set goals?

Setting goals is a very easy process to do at its simplest level. I spend quite some time designing personalized goals with my clients. I find that it is most effective for people to focus on the top areas of their lives – perhaps their business (if that is appropriate) as well as one or two other areas. Choosing the top areas is an important part of the process. I find clients are most motivated if they are working on the areas of their lives which are going to make the greatest difference to them. It is important to bear in mind too, that what may be important today, may not be so key in a few months time. If you find yourself neglecting an area that you have designated top, one reason may be that it is not now so important. If you find this happening, a great tip is

to check in with yourself by asking your self how important it is to have this thing. Answer with a score out of 10 – where 10 is very important and 0 is not important.

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There is a balance to be achieved between working on all areas that need attention – and just working on one area. Focusing on multiple areas can be distracting leading to little being achieved. Focusing on one area alone also has its downsides. Not only can it impact negatively on your work/life balance, but an over-focus can lead to what I call “attachment to the outcome”.

You may have experienced a situation where you wanted something so much that it became crucial that you had that “thing” in your life. It could be the promotion, the new job, the new house, or the new partner. When you find yourself attached to a particular result, you may find that it often gets in the way of your ideal result coming about. One way of “letting go” of your attachment is to spread your focus by having one or two other key goals.

Once you have your top two or three areas, the next step is to set a goal that is going to really inspire you in each of these areas. Defining an inspiring goal is a challenging exercise to do alone. A coach who is experienced in working with clients to define inspiring goals can help greatly with this process. One of my clients, a Managing Director of a

Design Agency, wanted to work on his business. He wanted to realize its potential, become more financially successful, move forward, and be busy.

This led to a goal which was very inspiring for him “**My business buzzes to the tune of £50K profit per month**”. This was a particularly challenging goal because the business had made a loss for over 9 months. Five months into the coaching and the business is on an upward trend – last month profits were just under £50K – and we still have a month to go with the coaching.

A goal that is hugely inspiring for a client has an energy of its own. I equate it to what happens when a surfer rides a powerful wave. Once on the big wave, all a surfer needs to do is focus and

balance and he will be carried to the shore – without the need to do much more. (Of course, if he wants to reach the road from the shore, he will need to take some action).

Another of my clients is a singer. Her long term goal is “**My first record deal published**”. Whilst it is hugely inspiring for her, she wanted a goal for the short term. In her case, it is to “**Perform at least 5 concerts with my own material**”. At the time she set this goal, she hadn't performed any concerts with her own material. Between the time she set this goal and our next meeting, two weeks later, she left the country to be with her sister, who had just had a baby. She wasn't putting any time into getting her concerts. Yet in the meantime, the goal was working for her. “Out of the blue” she received two invitations to perform concerts with her own material.

Sometimes I work with clients who have a gap in a certain area of their lives, but are resistant to setting a goal in that area. Often they are in the place where they don't want to take action on something, in case they don't get what they want. This can be in situations where they have tried many things without success. I have encouraged

them to set a goal, with the explicit instruction that they take no action.

Another client suffered tendonitis for many years, which was impacting on her ability to play and coach tennis. She was resistant to setting a goal around healing her tendonitis – she had tried many things and didn't want to do more. I encouraged her to set a goal and requested that she take no action. Some months into our coaching relationship, she chose to use some new processes, including visualisation. Her tendonitis healed and she went on to launch a tennis initiative for underprivileged children: taking them off the streets and coaching them in tennis.

### What makes a powerful goal?

Like making a cake, there are several key ingredients. With a cake, I would say flour is perhaps most essential, and with goal setting, it is inspiration that, for me, is most essential. I take great trouble with my clients to ensure that together we define a goal that scores top marks for inspiration. A goal to lose weight became **“Look fabulous in my black PVC catsuit”** for a female client, and **“Lean, mean, well oiled machine”** for a male client. Given that we are working in a coaching alliance, it is when I am as inspired by a goal as my client is that the magic really starts to fly.

For the second most important ingredient, I rate succinctness. A truly powerful goal can also double up as a mantra. It is easy to repeat as often as possible and it is easy to remember. Finding a new job can become **“Love what I do”** and recovering from a difficult patch can become **“Sparky, witty Jonny is back”!**

I also rate challenging as an important ingredient- alongside inspiration and succinctness. Getting the level of challenge right is key to the success of the goal. Some clients are inspired by challenge – particularly if challenge is amongst their core values. Whereas for others, too much challenge can be counter-productive. A goal that is too challenging can deter a client from taking action. If a client is determined to stay in the “this will never happen

place” then some adjustments are needed: either to their perspective or to the goal. I come from the place where everything is possible – and encourage my clients to move into that place. Technology has shown us that things that were impossible in the past are possible today, and most people have had experiences where they weren't initially able to do something, have thought that they never would and have since learnt.

If you are working on your goals without a coach, then it may make sense to go for a goal which is a touch less challenging. If, however, you choose to work with the support of a coach, then in most cases you are paying to be challenged to go further than you can on your own. This usually involves you in going outside your comfort zone. That in itself can be challenging. If you do go where you wouldn't normally, not only will you usually find rich rewards, but also your comfort zone expands. One of my clients put it this way: “Karen has given me the confidence to do things that I have never been comfortable doing. With her help, the uncomfortable became comfortable – and part of what I do. She structured things so that the impossible seemed possible and was possible to achieve”.

**Nick Duckett,**  
**Managing Director,**  
**TVMusicUK**

A challenging goal doesn't necessarily mean it's difficult to achieve. An example from my own life: I am naturally someone with an extremely busy mind. In the past, left to its own devices, my mind would mull over both concerns and projects for hours on

end – during the day and often at night, too. It was draining. I wanted to be able to turn my mind off – whilst still retaining my innate ability to be creative. This led to a goal which was hugely inspiring for me **“Be the Zen Master of my on/off switch”**. The goal started to take on an energy of its own. Coincidentally, I signed up for a spiritual training, which encouraged meditation daily. Meditation was something I had practiced for a number of years in the past, and I had stopped simply because I wasn't at that time getting results with it.

This time things were different. Almost from the moment I started to meditate again, I found that my mind became quiet. I was the “Zen master of my on/off switch”. A hugely challenging goal was achieved with the minimum of effort.

Classical goal setting will encourage you to go for something realistic within a specific timeframe. If making a goal realistic means that some of the inspiration is lost – then go for the inspira-

tion is what I say. I recently started with a client at the stage of transition from full time employment to running his own business. The goal that truly inspires him is “**Respected in my outstanding £5 million business**”. From a standing start, this goal could be considered unrealistic within the 6 months of our initial contract. So he has a sign-post goal around his business plan being written and approved by the bank. This gives him a short term focus, whilst the longer term goal is the one that truly excites, inspires and motivates him.

In most cases, it makes sense to frame goals in the positive. That said, there are times when a goal which appears to be expressed in the negative is more motivating to a client than the other way round. I have had a number of clients who came to me with health challenges. One had pain from a hernia and had used drugs to control the symptoms for 7 years. Prior to our setting a goal, she found that no drugs meant intolerable pain levels. She could have set a positive goal such as “100% healthy” but instead chose “Pain and Drug Free” for her goal. These were the words that did it for her. After one session, she had given up her drugs this time without pain – and has maintained her drug and pain free state ever since.

Classical goal setting will encourage you to go for goals that are measurable. I would 100% agree with that. Not only is a measure motivational, but both yourself and your coach will know how close or how far you are from achieving the goal, at any point in time. With business and sports goals, it is fairly easy to incorporate a measure. A desire to grow and sustain a business became “My sustainable £30K per

month Business Building Business” for one of my clients.

Which brings me to what happens if you don’t achieve the goal that you originally set. This may be because you changed your mind. What you set out to achieve initially, no longer holds the same interest for you. For the more spiritually minded, it can be useful to include a caveat to your goal setting, particularly when you find yourself hugely attached to the outcome. This can take the form of a simple sentence

which can be added to a goal e.g. “Achieve my goal ....or whatever the grand design has in store for me”.

Often, it is only a matter of time until the goal you set becomes yours. There are likely to be many learnings and achievements on your path from the moment you set your goals. I recommend that you keep a note of your learnings and achievements - since, in my experience, human beings are particularly good

at forgetting, as well as dismissing their achievements. However valuable goals setting is, and whatever the outcome, I find it empowering to remember that “Life is a journey, not a destination”. (Who was it that said that?!<sup>(1)</sup>)

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*Note: <sup>(1)</sup> There’s a quote from the tennis player Arthur Ashe which goes: “Success is a journey, not a destination. The doing is often more important than the outcome” – Ed.*

*See: <http://www.cmgww.com/sports/ashe> (10th October 2004)*

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