



GLENN DUHIGG COACHING

Framework For Goal Attainment

Introduction

Change is hard for most people primarily because we are creatures of habit. Studies have shown that we repeat about 45% of our behaviors in the same location, day in and day out.¹ Think about your daily routine on a typical work day. What patterns of behavior do you notice across the work week?

New Year's Eve is a trigger for many people to make resolutions to change in the coming year. Goals are set. Commitments made. But it would seem that most of us are much more effective at goal setting than actually changing our behaviors and establishing new habits. Our goal intentions are not predictive of actually attaining our goals.

¹ Nowack, K. (2017) Facilitating Successful Behavior Change: Beyond Goal Setting to Goal Flourishing. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 2017, Vol 69, No 3, 153.

The Framework outlined here is based on evidence from the behavioral sciences and neuroscience research. My hope is that you can apply it to reach the goals that matter most to you. I wish you well in striving for what really matters most.

Goal Setting

It's important to note that the source of motivation is super important. And it's the *quality* of the motivation, not the *quantity* that is most important.

Motivation

It's really helpful to reflect on where our motivation is actually coming from, when we are thinking about setting goals and making change. Read through the descriptions below and identify the source of motivation. Motivation can be categorized as Autonomous (High quality), Controlled (Low Quality) or as Amotivation (Lowest Quality). It's important to note that the *quality* of motivation is more important than the *quantity* of motivation in goal setting. Here I list, in descending order of quality, the sources of motivation and what they might look like, so that you can identify the real source of your motivation.

Autonomous Sources of Motivation (High Quality)

Intrinsic Motivation is the highest quality form of motivation and it drives us to reach our goals. When we enjoy doing something, just for the experience of doing it, then we are far more likely to persist. Think about your tasks at work. What tasks are the most interesting and engaging to you? Many of the people I work with are software developers. You should see the energy that's created when they participate in Hackathons, where they get to work on whatever they like. There is inherent satisfaction in the chosen work and people really enjoy the experience. What about exercise? Have you found an activity that is its own reward? The positive experiences we have when we are fully engaged in the activity are their own reward. Trail running and surfing are inherently motivating for me. In fact, just writing that thought makes me want to go! What about you?

Personal Value is another high quality form of motivation. Here we can see the value of a behavior and it's aligned with our personal values so we are motivated to do it, even if we don't take joy in doing the task itself. Think of tasks at work that you might not love to do, but you do them because your values & goals are congruent with the values & goals of the organization. Maybe your boss delegates a task to you that you don't find particularly enjoyable, but they explain why it's so important and link it to a goal you have. You endorse it fully. Back to the exercise example. Maybe you go to the gym, but don't really love it. But if being in a healthy weight range and having strong bones as you age is personally meaningful to you, then you will be motivated to stick with it. You'll persist.

Controlled Sources of Motivation (Lower Quality)

Internal Pressure is a lower quality form of motivation that is quite unstable. Here we feel that we “must” get the work done on time to gain approval or that we “must” go on a morning walk to lose weight to look good. Our primary motivation is to manage our self-image and seek approval. Our ego is front and center and we run the risk of being controlled by guilt and shame. We tend to focus on appearance and taking credit, rather than in valuing the work or appreciating the health benefits of exercise.

External Pressure is a lower quality form of motivation still. Here we are controlled by rewards and punishments. At work we might be subjected to command and control management by our leader. This strategy might work in the short term, however we will tend to take shortcuts to get the work done, and the quality of output will not be as high as it could. Furthermore our wellbeing will suffer and we are likely to become disengaged. We will not be motivated to persist. Similarly when we are incentivized to exercise by our employer it will not lead to persistence if we are not invested in the activity itself. Look out for the “shoulds”! Unsolicited advice and being told what to do generally doesn’t increase motivation. It usually leads to resistance.

Amotivation (Lowest Quality)

Amotivation is when we have no desire to enact behavior at all. Amotivation is the lowest possible motivational quality. At work this may present as having no interest or finding no value in work, or not feeling capable or effective at our work. It’s about just going through the motions. With exercise we might find that we occasionally give something a go, but for the most part we have given up on even trying.

Self-Assessment

Where is your motivation coming from to reach your goal? Which category? Is it of high or low quality? Remember that higher quality forms of motivation lead to more sustained engagement, greater commitment to goals and better performance.

Source Category of Motivation:
High or Low Quality:

So how do we move forward into effective goal setting with this knowledge? If the source of motivation is autonomously situated then you are likely to persist. If the source of motivation is controlled, then it’s helpful to explore whether you can somehow find value in the goal or not. At work your boss wants you to lead a project. You are not interested in the work and you’re already spread thin. But what if you want a promotion? Maybe delivering on the project will give

you the cross-functional experience your boss says you need to get to the next level. Maybe taking on the project can meet your goal? What if you were feeling overwhelmed with your work last year and your eating & exercise plan went out the window? Now you're beating yourself up about the weight you have put on. We can turn this low quality motivation into higher quality motivation by searching for a value that resonates authentically with ourselves. What about being a role model for your children? What about having energy and vitality and managing stress more effectively? Try to make a link. The degree to which the goal is aligned with your interests, values and vision is important. (We call this "self-concordance" in goal oriented, solution focused coaching.)

Our focus so far has been on the *quality* of motivation. In the next section we will explore a technique that has been shown to significantly increase the *quantity* of motivation. Let's go!

Your Vision

Hope for a better future and believing that we can create it is a powerful motivator. Exploring our dreams and personal vision of our ideal self acts as an emotional driver to enact change. Now imagine you have reached your goal. What's different? Describe what you see. What thoughts and feelings do you have?

Future state. What does it look like?
What does it feel like?

Now compare that future state with where you are today. What's the gap that needs to be bridged? What steps will you take to get there? What might get in the way? What will you do to overcome challenges and obstacles?

Current state:
Gap to bridge?

Research studies have shown that it's really effective to compare our desired future state with the current reality. In coaching we call this visioning or mental contrasting. My wife once wrote, "Live and Work Overseas for 2 Years!" on a post-it note and stuck it on the refrigerator. Within the year we moved our family from Australia to the USA. 2 years has turned into 8! It works, but you need a plan. More on that soon.

So what do **you** want to do? Who do **you** want to be? What is **your** vision for your future? What will it be like to realize these parts of **your** ideal self?

Write your responses here:

What do I really want to do?
Who do I really want to be?
What is my personal vision?
What will it be like to realize these aspects of my ideal future self?

These questions seek to build your autonomy, so that you act with volition and make choices that are aligned with your deeply held values and interests. When our goals really matter to us they will be engaging, energizing and lead to greater effort to achieve them .² Hopefully the fire is lit!

My Goal

Time to set your goal. There are 5 options when we are setting a goal. We can start something. Stop something. Do more. Do less. Or do it differently.³ What is it for you?

Which option are you choosing?:
I want to?:

SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) have been very popular over the past 20 years in goal setting and management practice. Interestingly, current research suggests that going after really challenging goals leads to greater effort, focus and persistence. Maybe it's time to drop the A and R, or at least stretch them out a little. That said if the goal is simply too complex or overwhelming then that can lead to inertia. Maybe the way forward is the middle ground.

It can be helpful to focus on shorter term goals (proximal goals) rather than longer term goals (distal goals) to achieve quick wins, driving motivation and self-regulation. It seems that we start out strong with a new goal, but can come undone in the middle as our drive fades. One technique is to use short goals and subgoals to establish "sprints" where we effectively shorten the distance from start to finish, and then go again. There is research that shows it's helpful to focus on what we have achieved early on and then shift our attention to what still needs to be done as we approach the attainment of our goal. It's important to get over the finish line.

² Grant, A. (2006) An Integrative Goal-Focused Approach to Executive Coaching. In D. Stober and A. Grant (Eds), *Evidence Based Coaching Handbook* (p165). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

³ Nowack, K. (2017) Facilitating Successful Behavior Change: Beyond Goal Setting to Goal Flourishing. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 2017, Vol 69, No 3, 153.

If you do have a longer term goal then try breaking it up into chunks to maximize motivation. We seem to be most motivated at the beginning and end of goal striving, so shorten the middle stages by creating subgoals to generate wins.

There is also evidence that writing out your goal, sharing your commitment to the goal with supportive people and updating them of your progress increases goal attainment. So you know what to do! Support matters. 😊

If you already have the skills/ability to achieve the goal then set a performance goal to reach a higher level of performance. If you need to learn new skills to reach the goal then set a learning goal to focus on knowledge acquisition.

Frame the goal as an approach goal focused on obtaining an outcome, as opposed to an avoidance goal.

Write your goal here, make it as specific as you can, list what success will look like, frame it positively and record who you will share your goal with and when you will update them:

My goal is: Sub-goals are:
Success is:
Share with:
Updates:

Here is an example I've set for re-working this plan.

Goal - Update Framework for Goal Attainment. Sub goals. 1. Literature review. 2. Draft Plan 3. Write 4. Edit 5. Publish.
Success - Shared with clients. Published on Website and linkedin.
Share - With my kids. (13 & 15)
Updates - Daily over the weekend.

Develop A Plan

Developing an effective plan is crucial to attaining goals. Remember that our goal intentions are not a good predictor of our goal attainment. We often have the best of intentions, but don't really

www.glennduhiggcoaching.com

get started or stick with trying to change our behavior, especially if there are competing goals or unplanned obstacles. This is why gym membership sales are strong in January and folks aren't going by March!

Implementation Intentions

Also known as **If/Then Planning** significantly increases the likelihood that behavior change will be sustained. I share this technique with pretty much all my coaching clients. If/Then Plans take the straightforward form of - If X (trigger/cue), then I will do Y (behavior). The habit triggers can be situation based or time based.

A situation based example would be - **If** my direct report is speaking, **Then** I will listen with the intent of really hearing them.

A time based example would be - **When** it's midday M-F, **Then** I will walk the dog for 25 minutes.

What is your plan?

State you plan. Write it as Implementation Intentions (If/Then Planning).

My Plan
If:
Then:

My plan for the example above is here as a guide.

My Plan: Publish Updated Framework for Goal Attainment. Sub goals. 1. Literature review. 2. Draft Plan 3. Write 4. Edit 5. Publish.
If: At 8am on Friday, Saturday & Sunday
Then: I will systematically work through the subgoals to reach my goal.

On average it takes about 60 - 90 days to get behavior change to stick, to form new habits. Refer to your plan daily to facilitate maximum neuroplasticity! Set a reminder. Print it out and put it up on the wall. What will work best for you? Do what works.

Remember behavior change and establishing new habits is hard for most people. To give yourself the best shot, high quality motivation and deliberate practice such as If/Then planning will really help. Relapsing into old habits is part of the change process too. Expect it. Plan for it.

The complexity of the new behavior and aspects of our personality are factors also. To make it easier, it helps to set up routine nudges to remind us to practice and track progress. I use the alarm on my phone to remind me it's practice time and keep a log to note progress. What works for you?

Nudge -
Track -

Managing Obstacles

Obstacles are bound to arise. Expect them and plan your response in advance. Name the obstacles that might derail you in reaching your goals. Develop a strategy to address each obstacle in turn. List an obstacle and your strategy here. Try using the if/then format. For example - **If** finance push back on budget for an additional role **then** I will call a meeting to present data on how another role will increase sales by X%. Another example - **If** my colleague continues to argue with me in meetings **then** I will raise the issue with them in private after the meeting. **If** I don't feel like exercising, **then** I will remind myself that it will lift my mood and I will show up better for my family.

Obstacle:
Strategy:

We usually have more motivation to strive for goals at the start and when we have almost attained our goal. We risk flatlining in the middle, as our orientation shifts from all that we have achieved, to all that is still left to do! It can be helpful to set sub-goals with smaller actions and follow up time frames to maintain motivation as needed.

Dealing With A Relapse

Sometimes we get derailed and our default thinking might be that we have failed, so we give up. Don't fall into this unhelpful thinking trap. Messing up, making mistakes or relapsing is actually a vital part of the change process. It's thought that it is not unusual to relapse 6-8 times on the path to sustainable behavior change. Reframe this experience as part of the journey to goal attainment. What can you learn here? What can you do differently next time? What unhelpful thoughts or behaviors can you replace? Your capacity to learn, grow and develop is not fixed.

We are a work in progress, always. Remember how good it will feel to achieve your goal. Now draw upon that energy to restart your plan and challenge any default thoughts that hold you back. **Commit to improvement and eventually to mastery, not to the unrealistic desire for perfection.**

Share with your supporters. Update them on the relapse, what you learned, and what you'll do next time.

What can I learn here?
What unhelpful thoughts can I challenge & reframe?
What can I do differently next time?
How will it feel to obtain my goal?

Now return to action by integrating these learnings into your plan.

Build upon your progress. Incremental change is powerful. We build capacity each time we move forward into action or tackle another obstacle. Make it easy to succeed by adapting your plan as necessary. It may even be necessary to re-evaluate goals and replace them with more attainable goals, if our physical and mental health is suffering. Talk with your supporters to get the social support you need and don't go it alone.

Goal Attainment

Congratulations! Time to celebrate your win. If the goal was aligned with your values then you should be feeling a sense of satisfaction about now. Reflect on your achievement. Answer these questions to embed learnings from the experience that you can draw upon next time round.

In what ways are you closer to your ideal self?
What does it feel like to realize your goal and/or vision for yourself?
How do you feel with the outcome achieved?
What strategies & strengths got you there?
What did you learn from the obstacles you encountered along the way?
What worked well for you and what might you change next time?

I hope you found this Framework For Goal Attainment to be practical and effective. Let me know how it worked for you. You can reach me at: contact@glennduhiggcoaching.com

References

Grant, A. (2006) An Integrative Goal-Focused Approach to Executive Coaching. In D. Stober and A. Grant (Eds), *Evidence Based Coaching Handbook* (p165). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Nowack, K. (2017) Facilitating Successful Behavior Change: Beyond Goal Setting to Goal Flourishing. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 2017, Vol 69, No 3, 153-171.

Nowack, K. (2021) Hacks for Effectively Setting and Reaching Goals. *Talent Development Magazine* May 2021. Downloaded 01.14.2023.

Rigby, C. Scott & Ryan, Richard M. (2018) Self-Determination Theory in Human Resource Development: New Directions and Practical Considerations. *Advances In Developing Human Resources* 2018, Vol 20(2), 133-147.



GLENN DUHIGG
COACHING



