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HARD GOALS

The Secret of Getting From Where You Are to Where You Want To Be

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MARK MURPHY is founder and CEO of Leadership IQ, a leadership training services provider. Leadership IQ has carried out some of the largest and most comprehensive leadership studies ever conducted and the results have been used by companies like Microsoft, IBM, MasterCard, First Energy and others. Mr. Murphy's work has been featured by *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *BusinessWeek*, *The Washington Post* and many other publications. He is also an experienced turnaround advisor having taken more than 100 organizations from weak financial situations to record-setting levels of prosperity. Mr. Murphy is an experienced public speaker and has lectured at Harvard Business School, Yale University, the University of Rochester and the University of Florida. He is the author of four books including *Hundred Percenters* and *The Deadly Sins of Employee Retention*.

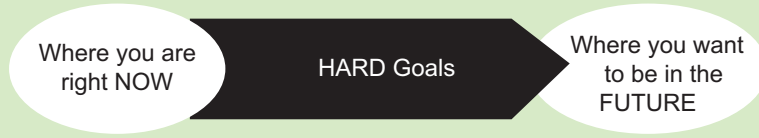
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MAIN IDEA

Why is that some people achieve so much while others seem to just spin their wheels and get nowhere? When you analyze the science of achieving big things, you'll find superachievers set themselves HARD (heartfelt, animated, required and difficult) goals and then go out and work towards achieving those goals with passion and intensity. It's the setting and achieving of those HARD goals which drives their achievements.



To achieve more, get into the habit of setting yourself HARD goals – goals which are heartfelt, animated, required and difficult.

H Heartfelt Pages 2 -3

If you don't really care about your goals, there's not going to be much motivation for you to achieve them. To achieve more, make certain you're going after what you want more than anything else. HARD goals are not just nice-to-have if they're not too much trouble. A HARD goal has to be something which promises you more value than any other goal imaginable and therefore you're not going to let anything get in the way of making it happen.

A Animated Pages 3 - 4

HARD goals are so vivid and alive in your mind that if you don't reach them, you'd feel like something's missing in your life. You can and should use the same visualization and imagination techniques which some of the greatest minds in history have used to make your goals come to life in your imagination. Geniuses use their imaginations to soar and so should you.

R Required Pages 5 - 6

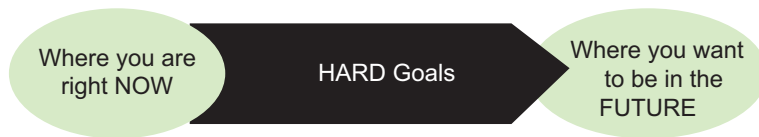
Procrastination is the killer when it comes to realizing your dreams. HARD goals overcome this by using cutting-edge techniques from science such as behavioral economics. You have to convince yourself achieving your goals is a necessity, not an option. If you make the future payoff of your HARD goal so much more satisfying that what you're experiencing today, you automatically make your HARD goals look a lot more attractive – and the more attractive they are, the greater the urgency you will feel to get going on them right away.

D Difficult Pages 6 - 7

When it come to difficulty, there's a definite sweet spot to aim for. You want to set goals which are so hard they will force you to tap into all the talents you possess so you'll feel a sense of achievement. On the other hand, you don't want your goals to be so difficult you give up without even trying. What you have to do is assess your past experiences, figure out where your goal-setting sweet spot is and then set goals within that sweet spot which will propel you forward to the stellar results you want.

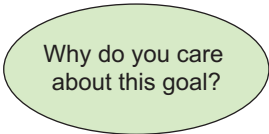
Putting everything together – HARD Goals Page 8

The generally accepted wisdom in business is execution is more important than vision – it's better to fully implement a half-baked idea than it is to get stuck in analysis paralysis and do nothing. That may be true but if you aspire to accomplish impressive things, set HARD goals which are so powerful implementation won't be a problem. Get your goals right and implementation will take care of itself. That's the power of HARD goals to move you from where you are now to where you want to be in the future.





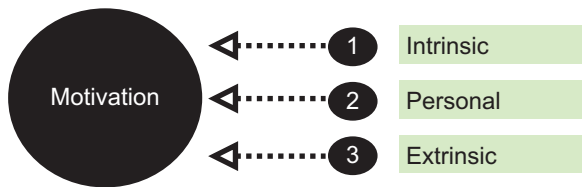
If you don't really care about your goals, there's not going to be much motivation for you to achieve them. To achieve more, make certain you're going after what you want more than anything else. HARD goals are not just nice-to-have if they're not too much trouble. A HARD goal has to be something which promises you more value than any other goal imaginable and therefore you're not going to let anything get in the way of making it happen.



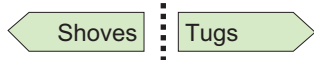
Answering this question is Job #1 when it comes to achieving more. Your goal won't be at all helpful if it exists only because your answer to this question is:

- My boss feels this is important to achieve.
- I'm setting this goal because I have to.
- My doctor / spouse / chairman said this is worthwhile.

When it comes to setting a goal which has the power to propel you forward, none of these answers will do. You've got to set a goal you feel a heartfelt connection to. In practice, there are only three ways to build this kind of connection:



1. *Intrinsic motivation* – you're much more motivated to achieve if you're doing something you really love doing. If the goal involves something you'd normally do in your free time when nobody's pressuring you or rewarding you some other way, then you have genuine intrinsic motivation – which is great. Giving a true 100 percent effort is easier if you're passionate about what you're doing. This is a matter of figuring out your own personal "Shoves" and "Tugs."



Everyone has Shoves and Tugs. Shoves are issues which demotivate you and drain your energy. Tugs motivate you and make you feel fulfilled and wanting to give 100 percent. Shoves and Tugs are not the opposite sides of the same coin but to increase your intrinsic motivation, you've got to inject more Tugs into your goals and decrease or mitigate the number of Shoves you feel as well. Once you have a clearer picture of what acts as a Shove or a Tug for you individually, you can then look for more Tugs to inject into your daily routine. Some questions to ponder:

- Describe a time recently when you've felt like giving up on what you're attempting. What was the Shove which made you feel burned out at that time?
- Describe a time when you've felt on top of the world and exceptionally motivated. What was the Tug behind that?

2. *Personal motivation* – if you have a deep personal connection to your goal, you're going to be far more motivated. For example, if you take on a HARD goal which delivers very specific benefits to the poor who are unable to help themselves, you will get a mental boost which will override any negative thoughts you might otherwise have had. If you become emotionally connected to the beneficiaries of your goal, accomplishment becomes easier and motivation will swell. To personalize your HARD goals:

- *Individualize* – get to know one person who will derive a benefit. As Mother Teresa said: "If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will." Get to know one person who will benefit from what you're trying to do and you'll often feel much more motivated than if you're merely trying to help a faceless group. Many charities use this approach effectively to get people to give more. Instead of suggesting donations will feed the masses, they have profiles of individuals who will receive help. Donors respond differently when they see individuals rather than anonymous members of a larger group. Studies have even shown donors typically give twice as much when they hear about specific recipients rather than giving money to help a statistic.
- *Personalize* – make the person who benefits from achieving the goal yourself. Develop a feeling for what it will mean to achieve your goal which goes beyond merely making more money. Make your goal intensely applicable to you at a personal level rather than being a number plucked out of thin air which fits nicely on a spreadsheet. Great companies have always found ways to build personal connections and you need to do the same with your HARD goals. Companies that tend to do best over the long haul do so by delivering value to people they consider bigger than themselves rather than by sacrificing their customers to boost short-term shareholder value.

3. *Extrinsic motivation* – find something, anything which will make you feel more motivated about your HARD goals. Extrinsic rewards certainly have their place. If used effectively, they can get you started on your HARD goals. Financial incentives, for example, really do work when set properly and when the rewards fit the activity and offer commensurate return for the effort involved. Sometimes, even the reward of having a little fun once the challenge passes and everyone has survived will be exceptionally motivational. The key to making an extrinsic reward work is to ensure the rewards are appropriate. You can't have fun rewards for serious activities or vice-versa. For example, to motivate everyone in your organization to fight for the survival of your firm, you wouldn't offer to throw a company picnic. Having a frivolous extrinsic reward on offer won't be terribly helpful or motivational at all. By contrast if you offer a 25 percent bonus when the company has completed its recapitalization process and its year 1 sales targets are met, many more people will be motivated to put in the hours required.

The whole point is you can mix-and-match rewards to your heart's content when it comes to setting a HARD goal. Neither intrinsic, personal or extrinsic goals are inherently "right" or "wrong". All three types of motivations have their pluses and minuses. You can and should come up with a mix of all three types of rewards that works for you and you'll immediately get to work on achieving your HARD goal.

Working for money or greater market share sounds motivational but too many company management teams assume once they've offered employees more money, they've connected people to their goals. Perhaps executives with share options are motivated by that but the people on the frontlines need something more. Experience has shown companies motivated solely by money (for example Enron, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers) won't outperform competitors who create more of an emotional attachment to their customers.

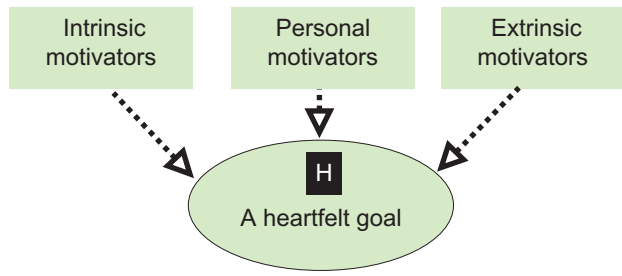
A good example of a company which gets it right when it comes to setting heartfelt goals which have nothing to do with money is Google. It has a corporate philosophy which includes a list of "Ten things we know to be true." Number one on that list is:

1. Focus on the user and all else will follow.

While many companies claim to put their customer first, few are able to resist the temptation to make small sacrifices to increase shareholder value. From its inception, Google has steadfastly refused to make any change that does not offer a benefit to the users who come to the site:

- The interface is clear and simple.
- Pages load instantly.
- Placement in search results is never sold to anyone.
- Advertising on the site must offer relevant content and not be a distraction.

To make the first step in moving from where you now are to where you want to be in the future, make sure your goals are genuinely heartfelt. The litmus test for this is the goal is something you want to do rather than something you feel you need to do. If you embed enough motivators – intrinsic, personal and extrinsic all work fine – that you make your goal something you feel emotional about, you'll have much more energy and commitment. Build a deep connection because if you don't really care about it, nobody else will either.



"When you're at the beginning of your goal process, you need to develop feeling. You want an emotional attachment to your goals that gives you the ceaseless energy to pursue them no matter how tough it gets."

– Mark Murphy

"Some companies still use a fairly antiquated goal-setting process called SMART Goals (which stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-limited). Not only do you not see the words feel or heartfelt anywhere in there, but Specific and Measurable usually get companies all excited about turning every goal into a number, killing off any excitement."

– Mark Murphy



HARD goals are so vivid and alive in your mind that if you don't reach them, you'd feel like something's missing in your life. You can and should use the same visualization and imagination techniques which some of the greatest minds in history have used to make your goals come to life in your imagination. Geniuses use their imaginations to soar and so should you.

As humans, we respond to visual stimulation. We remember pictures far better than we remember words. To make this work for you in the achievement of your goals, you have to take your HARD goals and convert them into some intensely vivid and engrossing mental images. You have to make your goals visual. Converting ideas into vivid mental images is the "secret sauce" some of history's greatest minds have used as well so if you get into the habit of doing this, you'll be in exceptionally good company.

"Before I put a sketch on paper, the whole idea is worked out mentally. In my mind I change the construction, make improvements, and even operate the device. Without ever having drawn a sketch I can give the measurements of all parts to workmen, and when completed all these parts will fit, just as certainly as though I made the actual drawings."

– Nikola Tesla, inventor

"Tesla came to the idea of the self-starting motor one evening as he was reciting a poem by Goethe and watching a sunset. Suddenly he imagined a magnetic field rapidly rotating inside a circle of electromagnets. The energized-circle imagery apparently was suggested by the disk of the sun and the pulse of rotation by the poem's rhythm."

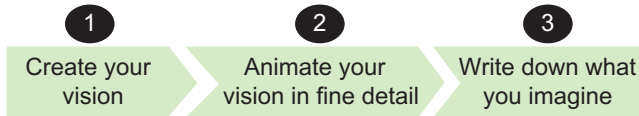
– John Bess, Tesla's biographer

"I had a scheme, which I still use today, when somebody is explaining something that I'm trying to understand: I keep making up examples. For instance, the mathematicians would come in with a terrific theorem, and they're all excited. As they're trying to tell me the conditions of the theorem, I construct something in my mind which fits all the conditions. You know, you have a set (one ball), disjoint (two balls). Then the balls turn colors, grow hairs, or whatever, in my head as they put more conditions on. Finally they state the theorem, which is some dumb thing about the ball which isn't true for my hairy green ball thing, so I say, 'False!' I guessed right most of the time."

– Richard Feynman, physicist and Nobel laureate

To animate your goal, you've got to do a "Martin Luther King" on it. When he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he didn't say "I envisage a future where race relations in America will steadily improve year-to-year." Instead, he created a vivid mental image which still resonates today: "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." In a similar vein, President John F. Kennedy didn't say in 1961 that America should concentrate on winning the space race with the Soviet Union because that would be nice. Instead, President Kennedy stated: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth." Great politicians are masters of speaking visually and have used this to create momentum and passion for their aims all throughout history.

So how do you go about animating your own HARD goals?



- First, create a vision in your mind of what it would feel like to achieve your goal. This has to be crystal clear and so realistic it will feel like you've already achieved your goal.
- Then animate your vision. If your goal is to finish a marathon, create a mental picture of sweat pouring down your back as you cross the finish line and hug your kids. If your goal is to win a promotion, see yourself secretly jumping for joy in the stairwell after being told of your success. Animate achieving your goal right down to fine detail using a first-person perspective. Make your goal come to life in your mind.
- Once you've got a mental picture clearly set in your mind, you then have to write it down. Committing everything to paper allows you to store that mental image for future use and at the same time encodes what you're writing into your mind. As you go through your mental image and place objects on paper, scale them and define the spatial relationships between things, you're doing some intensive cognitive processing at the same time. In practical terms, you're reinforcing the mental image you've created by writing it down.

Admittedly, animating your vision will be difficult for most business goals but it can be done. Some of the best examples of people who succeeded in this area would include:

- Steve Jobs – who launched Apple's iPod as being like having "1,000 songs in your pocket." Similarly, when Apple launched its MacBook Air, Jobs stated it was "The world's thinnest notebook."
- Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page – who walked into venture capital firm Sequoia Capital to get funding for their start-up. They stated the goal of Google was "to provide access to the world's information in one click."
- Starbucks founder Howard Schultz – who described the goal of Starbucks as being "Starbucks creates a third place between work and home."

It's tempting to say these guys had an advantage in that they were launching something big and therefore it was easy for them to come up with visual images for their goals but the reality is any business goal can be matched with vivid imagery if you follow a system. There are nine dimensions you can use to bring a business goal to life by adding detail which will make it vivid in your mind. The nine dimensions are:

1. **Size** – Think about how big or small the things you see in your vision are. Is your "better than the iPad" invention bigger or smaller than a Kindle? Have you come up with a cutting edge electric car which is the size of a Lumina or an Explorer? Is the beach house you're going to buy with your bonus check small and cosy or big and luxurious?
2. **Color** – look closely at your mental image for color clues. If you're trying to lose weight, visualize yourself with a great tan after you've lost all that weight because you now spend so much time in a bathing suit out by the pool. Or visualize just how blue the ocean is outside your new beach house. Colors can stir up all kinds of useful moods and thoughts.

3. **Shape** – identify the various shapes which you can see in your vision. Visualize yourself picking up items and feeling them. Are they rough or smooth? Are the items heavy or light? If your vision is to develop some kind of new device, visualize picking up the item at the shop counter when it goes on sale. If your goal is to get more organized, imagine running your hand over your uncluttered desk.
4. **Distinct parts** – think about how different parts will work together to realize your goal. Say your goal is to get a raise. Imagine changing your work schedule so you do more hours on some key project on a weekend. Then visualize sales climbing as your project comes to fruition. There will be a meeting with the boss to discuss your accomplishments followed by the arrival of a bonus check. Then visualize how you'll celebrate with your family and so on.
5. **Settings** – where are you when your HARD goal finally comes together? How does it feel – relaxed, celebratory, scary? Who else will be in on it? Visualize where you'll be and what you'll be doing.
6. **Background** – describe what's happening behind the scenes as your goal comes together. Perhaps your achievement won't feel like it's real until you have a cheering audience who acknowledge what you've done. Build that into your vision because it will help you see what needs to happen first more clearly.
7. **Lighting** – describe the lighting involved in achieving your goal. Lighting can affect your mood and energy level. Not everything needs to happen in a well-lit room to be helpful. If your goal is to night-ski in Monte Carlo, there's no use visualizing a speedboat in bright sunlight.
8. **Emotions** – describe what you'll feel like when you realize your dream. Who else will be there and how will they react? Visualize the facial expressions, the body language and everything else which will follow.
9. **Movement** – are you doing something when you realize your dream? Describe it clearly. If your goal is to plan better for your retirement, you can visualize yourself being able to get more sleep because you feel good about things.

Not all of these dimensions will be applicable to every business goal you have in mind so this is not an exhaustive list to work through. Rather, the nine dimensions are reminders of the ways you can inject some helpful mental imagery into what would otherwise be sterile business goals. The undeniable fact is we humans are wired to respond to mental images much more than the written word. Do everything you can to inject vivid imagery into your business goals and they will not only become more real but you will also improve your chances of achieving them.

"The biggest impediment to any goal is lack of visual stimulation. We're human, and so we're visual, and our brains remember pictures better than they do words. So why not make it work for you and not against you? Start with a first-person perspective and draw a picture or make a collage or vision board of your goal that captures specific elements like size, color, shape, distinct parts, setting, background, lighting, emotions, and movement. Then write your goal down using concrete words that will sear it into your brain. I'm not saying every one of your HARD Goals will make you an Einstein. But if you follow the rules, you'll certainly be acting like him. After all, this is the guy who said, 'I very rarely think in words at all.'"

– Mark Murphy

HARD Goals → **R** **Required**

Procrastination is the killer when it comes to realizing your dreams. HARD goals overcome this by using cutting-edge techniques from science such as behavioral economics. You have to convince yourself achieving your goals is a necessity, not an option. If you make the future payoff of your HARD goal so much more satisfying that what you're experiencing today, you automatically make your HARD goals look a lot more attractive – and the more attractive they are, the greater the urgency you will feel to get going on them right away.

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"I'll start tomorrow. Three words that are the death knell for goals. Because how many times have you said 'tomorrow' when what you really meant was 'never'? I know, as the words tumble from your mouth, you believe them: 'I'll start a diet tomorrow.' You feel strong, relieved, and 100 percent committed to your goal. It seems as if nothing can come between you and the promise of tomorrow. A tomorrow that really will be the first day of the rest of your life. But then tomorrow actually comes. And once again, we face the same decision: start right now or postpone starting for one more day. C'mon, it's just one day, right? Seriously, how bad is it really going to be to postpone for one more day? The answer, of course, is postponing for one day probably isn't the worst thing ever except that one day is never one day. One day becomes two, two days become three, and three days become years."

– Mark Murphy

So what can you do about procrastination when it comes to working towards your HARD goals? The solution lies in something mathematicians term the "discount rate." All of us tend to value the present far more than we do the future. The discount rate measures how much more money you'll need to come up with in the future to equal the same value as something in the present.

To calculate your discount rate, you use the formula:

$$\text{Discount Rate} = \frac{\text{One-Year Increase}}{\text{Current Value}}$$

- If you think having \$150 one year from today is just as appealing as being given \$100 today, then your discount rate can be calculated as:
Discount Rate = \$50 / \$100 = 50 percent
- If you'd be prepared to forgo receiving \$100 today in order to receive \$120 in a year's time, then your discount rate is:
Discount Rate = \$20 / \$100 = 20 percent
- If you need to get \$180 in one year's time before you'd be prepared to forgo receiving \$100 today, then your discount rate can be calculated as:
Discount Rate = \$80 / \$100 = 80 percent

When it comes to the discount rate which will work for you, there's no absolute right or wrong answer. It will vary depending on your financial situation, what other uses you have for money at present (which economists term your "opportunity cost"), how much risk you think is involved, your expectations for the future and so forth. When you take all of those factors into account, you will certainly need the future payout to be higher than what today's payout would be. Or put differently, your discount rate will rarely if ever be zero. It will always be a higher number than that.

Once you understand the concept of a discount rate, it then becomes feasible to combat the problem of procrastination by outflanking your own brain. In practical terms, you have to create a strong sense of urgency about your HARD goals. There are six ways you can pull this off:

- Six ways to create a sense of urgency**
1. Put your present costs into the future
 2. Bring future benefits into the present
 3. Make future benefits sound better
 4. Minimize your costs
 5. Attack your personal discount rate
 6. Limit your choices

1. *Put some or all of your present costs into the future* – which in effect lowers your discount rate. An innovative saving-for-retirement program called *Save More Tomorrow* suggests participants commit to progressively increase their savings rate as they get pay raises. People like this approach to saving more because they are saving their future pay raises without impacting on their current take-home pay levels. To commit to your HARD goals, try pushing some of the initial costs out into your highly discounted future where they won't seem all that big at all.
2. *Bring some of the future benefits into the present* – so that way your brain doesn't discount the benefits and your goal looks attractive right now. Banks now offer savings plans where by putting money into a savings account, you go into a lottery-like draw for prizes of cash every month. Putting some of the otherwise future benefits into the here-and-now can increase your motivation appreciably. Try and figure out how to bring some of the projected benefits of your HARD goals forward.
3. *Make those future benefits sound even better* – because people often view costs in concrete terms but benefits in abstract terms. Say you're the CEO of a hospital and you want to set a HARD goal: "We're going to create a culture that values patient safety." To enhance the perceived value of your goal, you might state it this way: "We're going to report every single mistake which could have potentially harmed a patient, even if we didn't actually harm anyone, and within 72 hours we're going to learn at least two correctable lessons from each incident and within 96 hours we're going to implement a solution so every nurse and every doctor knows with certainty patient safety is our number one priority."
4. *Minimize your costs* – take your costs and mentally recast them as benefits instead. There are two questions you can use to do this consistently well:
 - What will I learn from doing this?
 - How will this demonstrate my commitment to a larger goal?
 As you work your way through answering those two questions, you might find you can reframe your costs as projected benefits. You're gaining new knowledge and new skills which will probably be rewarding in their own right but also you'll be better equipped to do more of everything in the future. Being willing to incur costs also definitively demonstrates your commitment towards achieving your larger goals. You build momentum.

5. *Attack your discount rate directly* – make it lower. You might try bench marking yourself to see whether you’ve set your personal discount rate at an unsustainably high level. Talk to people in a similar position to yourself with regards to goals, challenges, behaviors and so forth. Find out what kind of discount rate they use when making judgement calls and consider whether you need to readjust your discount rate to be more realistic and sustainable.
6. *Limit your choices* – reduce the number of alternatives which are competing with your goals. While generally the more choices you have the better, too many choices can confuse the decision making process and make you lose focus. Sometimes, the best way to move forward is to have less choices so your brain doesn’t feel overwhelmed. Narrow your choices and you enhance the likelihood you’ll stick with and ultimately achieve your goals. This is especially true if you’re working to a deadline – take away choices so things are less confusing.

In an interesting social experiment, researchers divided students into two groups. One group was offered a basic cheese pizza to which they added toppings like mushrooms, peppers, pepperoni and so forth for 50 cents each. The other group was offered a “super” pizza with 12 ingredients and were told the price would be reduced by 50 cents for each topping they subtracted. Those who added toppings ended up with 2.7 ingredients on average whereas those who subtracted ended up with 5.3 ingredients each. So what does this have to do with setting goals? If you can take mental ownership of your goal first, then procrastination is not going to be such an issue. If you see yourself owning your goal you will respond aggressively against anything or anyone who attempts to take your goal away from you.

In a similar vein, if you’ve animated your goal intensively and brought a vivid picture of your goal together in your mind, your brain will take ownership. You’re going to be more willing to work hard to make your goal come together in just the same way as people dislike deducting pizza ingredients. If you make it so you can almost smell, touch, feel and taste what it will be like to achieve your goal in your mind first, then your mind is going to drive you to stop standing around and get to work. The more animated your goal is, the more required it will be as well. The two go hand in hand.

“Procrastination is the number one killer of HARD goals. But that doesn’t mean your goals have to be its next victim. You can use these tricks to alter how you view and value your future payoffs so they become more attractive than what the status quo is offering today. You can intentionally move some of the immediate costs of your goal into the future in order to sync up the costs and benefits. Or, conversely, you can bring some of your goal’s future benefits into the present. Both will make your goal look a whole lot more attractive and amp up your urgency to get going on it now. It’s easy to consider all the things you’ll have to sacrifice in order to achieve your goal, and that kind of list can be a real downer. But you can overcome that negativity with another kind of list – one that details the specific and concrete ways in which your goal is going to make your life a much better place to be. And what about directly attacking how you discount the value of the future? With a little bit of bench marking, you can more accurately recalculate your discount rate and make it easier to get started on that goal of yours today. Also, limit your choices, make it easier on yourself to choose a goal.”

– Mark Murphy



When it come to difficulty, there’s a definite sweet spot to aim for. You want to set goals which are so hard they will force you to tap into all the talents you possess so you’ll feel a sense of achievement. On the other hand, you don’t want your goals to be so difficult you give up without even trying. What you have to do is assess your past experiences, figure out where your goal-setting sweet spot is and then set goals within that sweet spot which will propel you forward to the stellar results you want.

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When you look back on your professional and personal life, what accomplishments are you personally most proud of? This will vary considerably from person to person and this is a judgement call you alone have to make but as you do this exercise, pause and ask a few key questions:

- Were the accomplishments of which I am most proud easy or hard to achieve?
- Did they require little or a lot of effort on my part?
- Did I already know everything I needed to know when I first started working on those goals or did I need to acquire new skills and competencies along the way?
- When I first started out working on this goal, was I nervous or confident I would get there?
- Was I completely relaxed throughout the process or did I need to get amped up to realize my potential?

If you’re like most people, the things you’re most proud of achieving in your personal life or career were difficult, demanded a lot of effort, forced you to learn new stuff and were full of moments of worry when it wasn’t clear whether you’d get there or not. And thus, HARD goals have to be difficult if they’re to engender any genuine sense of accomplishment within you. They must make you stretch and tap into the wellspring of possibilities which already exist in your personality but require an effort to activate. Difficult is an integral and essential component of HARD goals.

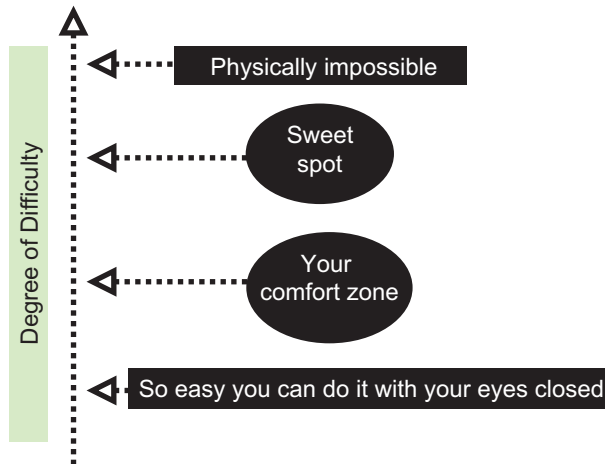
Humans have a natural ability to achieve remarkably difficult goals. History is full of people like Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa who founded a nation, put a man on the moon, liberated a nation, fed a people and so on. These and other people pushed past the boundaries of what was logical in order to achieve some exceptionally difficult goals. It’s fair to conclude based on these and other inspirational examples that if we’re not achieving difficult goals, it’s because of a lack of motivation rather than a lack of inherent talent.

It’s easy to assume those high performers had better intelligence, more talent, better nurturing experiences, a more robust support system but that’s not true – studies have shown high performers are not necessarily more gifted than average people. They’re simply more motivated, harder working and more intensively focused than the average person. Attitude begets aptitude in every case you care to analyze. The stellar performers in every field get there through their ferocious work ethic and by putting in enough practice to develop the skills required. There are no “right” or “wrong” genetics involved when it comes to any individual reaching expert status in their chosen field and then going on to do extraordinary things. Difficult goals are within your reach – just like they are for everyone else.

Studies have shown setting difficult goals always leads to better performance because:

- Difficult goals force you to pay attention – you have to get worked up and performing at optimum levels rather than sleepwalking through life on autopilot.
- Difficult goals force you to learn – they motivate you to get out and learn how to do different things.
- Difficult goals instill confidence – because you assume nobody would give a difficult goal to a dummy.
- Difficult goals convey the message what you're doing is important – you're not just churning out a report noone will read but you're doing something which will make a difference.
- Difficult goals force you to be at your best – they demand that you dig deep and bring you're A-game to bear on the challenge at hand.

So while it is abundantly clear difficult goals are good, it's also obvious you can overdo it as well. If you set a goal which is physically impossible, that won't exactly motivate you. When it comes to setting goals, there's something of a sweet spot of difficulty:



That sweet spot will be unique to you. Some people habitually underset their goals or set goals which they can achieve without raising a sweat. Others regularly overset their goals – they make their goals so hard they never bother getting started because obviously they won't happen. To get good at setting HARD goals, you have to set goals which will make you stretch and dig into normally untapped reserves. In other words, you have to set goals which are in that sweet spot and which force you to learn new things so you keep your brain alive and well.

Note also a HARD goal which is set in that sweet spot will be somewhere above your personal comfort zone in terms of difficulty. Goals within your comfort zone can be achieved with no real extra effort on your part. When you hit that sweet spot, you're on pins and needles because you know you're going to have to put in a 100 percent effort to achieve it. Goals within your comfort zone won't make any difference in your professional or personal life and you may get bored thinking about them. On the other hand, if you overshoot your sweet spot and try to set goals which are just plain ludicrous, that won't be terribly motivational either. The best goals will be HARD goals which are located in that sweet spot of difficulty which lies just above the level of difficulty which is within your own personal comfort zone.

So how can you tell when you get the degree of difficulty right? It's simple – you'll feel intimidated by the goal you're setting and your first reaction will be to back off. HARD goals are often intimidating because you will have a fear of failure, that people will see for themselves that you're not as good as you claim to be. This can be pretty embarrassing to say the least.

Although fear is actually helpful, the way to overcome excessive fear from holding you back on setting HARD goals is to ask yourself a simple question:

What's the worst thing that can happen if I fail at achieving this goal?

As you answer this truthfully, you'll come up with a short list of potential repercussions. When you analyze each of those items in more detail and look for examples where people actually died from embarrassment or suffered any of the other dire outcomes you have envisaged, you'll find your fears will automatically dissipate. In fact, if you're afraid to try something hard because you assume people might think you're weak if you don't pull it off, you'll find plenty of examples of people who were highly respected for attempting very tough goals and coming up short. As you debunk your fears one by one, rational analysis will come back into your goal setting process and you will feel empowered to tackle some HARD goals.

Experience has shown you will have little or nothing to fear from attempting HARD goals. The very act of attempting to do something difficult will build and enhance your capacity to do even harder things in the future, whether you succeed the first time around or not. The trick is not to get paralyzed into inaction by assuming there is a long list of dire consequences which will result if you don't make a success of it first time around. That's never true. If anything, people will respect the fact you tried something really tough.

One final point about setting difficult goals. When you're starting out in any field, there's not much use setting a performance goal because you don't yet know what you don't know. In that case, you're better off setting learning goals. Learning goals can still be difficult, but they are more oriented towards putting you in a position to tackle big performance goals later on. So, if you've never played golf in your life, don't set a performance goal to: "Break 100 on the next round of golf I play." You're better off setting a difficult learning goal: "I will master my back swing and focus on keeping my head down and my body centered whenever I take a swing. I'm going to practice each shot 100 times, while analyzing and correcting what I'm doing wrong, so I can master the basics of playing golf."

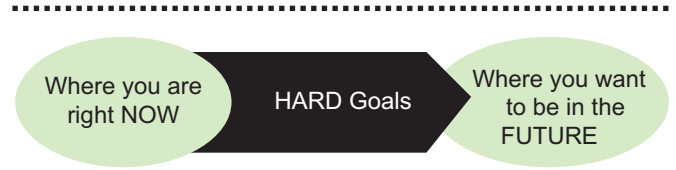
"Just doing your best doesn't cut it in the world of HARD goals. But how difficult is difficult enough? Well, if your current HARD Goal doesn't measure up to all those things you've felt in the past when doing something great, increase the difficulty. Shake that brain up, make it register the message that you're a high performer, that you can make a difference, that your goal is required. Because the more difficult your goal, the more necessary it's going to feel and the better performance you're going to deliver."

– Mark Murphy

HARD Goals

Putting everything together

The generally accepted wisdom in business is execution is more important than vision – it's better to fully implement a half-baked idea than it is to get stuck in analysis paralysis and do nothing. That may be true but if you aspire to accomplish impressive things, set HARD goals which are so powerful implementation won't be a problem. Get your goals right and implementation will take care of itself. That's the power of HARD goals to move you from where you are now to where you want to be in the future.



To get to where you want to be, get into the habit of setting HARD goals. Until you have a goal which activates your brain, touches your heart, forces you to learn and grows to become an absolute necessity in your life or career, nothing much will happen. Once you have a HARD goal in place, you'll smash through walls and every roadblock imaginable to make it happen.

To get started on implementing your HARD goals, there are a few things you can try:

Strategy #1 – Cut your HARD goals in half

Project an approximate date by which one of your HARD goals should be finished. Then cut your time frame in half and ask:

What must I have accomplished by this point in time to feel like I'm on track to achieve the full HARD goal?

Then get to work on being on track at the halfway point and you will automatically be making good progress towards your goal. You can also cut that half-way point in half again and come up with what you need to have accomplished in the first quarter of the time period if that would be helpful. You can keep doing this progressively until you come up with monthly or weekly targets if you prefer. By working backwards in this way, you can break a large HARD goal down into clearly identifiable steps and figure out what to do first. Each of those steps might be challenging in and of themselves but this will give you a time frame to work from.

Strategy #2 – Call a friend

Pair up with someone you respect and share your HARD goals with them. Explain to them in detail:

- H – Heartfelt: Why you care about your goals.
- A - Animated: What it will look like when you achieve your goal.
- R – Required: Why this goal is necessary right now.
- D – Difficult: What you're learning because of your goals.

Then ask them to check in with you periodically and find out how your progress in implementing those goals is coming along. Tell them you want them to grill you when they speak with you and ask probing questions like:

- What did you accomplish today to advance your goal?
- Describe how much progress you've made on this goal.
- What have you learned today which will be helpful?

The point of this is by enlisting the help of a friend, you keep your HARD goals at the front of your mind. That regular check-up will motivate you and keep you moving forward.

There's never been a better time to learn how to set and achieve HARD goals. You can look back in history to see some of the HARD goals others set and achieved:

- Abraham Lincoln: "Fight so government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."
- Ronald Reagan: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"
- Winston Churchill: "Whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."

Maybe your HARD goals aren't quite so enduring or quite so far-reaching but the essential fact remains HARD goals are what you want to be setting for yourself and then working to achieve. HARD goals push you and your organization to your limits. They force you to learn, to grow and to give it everything you've got. They force you to move in new directions which you never could have imagined.

To achieve more and get to where you want to be, don't look for shortcuts. Figure out the HARD goals it will take and get to work.

"People spend way too much time trying to figure out how to trick themselves into implementing mediocre goals. What we need instead is extraordinary goals – HARD goals. Listen, all the daily rituals in the world won't help us achieve greatness if the very goal we're trying to habitualize is weak. Do we really think that Steve Jobs or Jeff Bezos or Google's founders resort to little gimmicks to accomplish their goals? (Seriously, do we have the iPad, Kindle, and Google search engine because somebody put a sticky note on their fridge?) Or do we think that they're so deeply connected to what they're doing, that their goals are so important and meaningful to them, that they'll swim through a pit of alligators to fulfill those goals?"

– Mark Murphy

"What you need are the ways to make your goals worthy of your natural gifts. Because when your talent meets a HARD Goal, greatness is sure to follow."

– Mark Murphy

"One of the most important findings from our research on goals is that people who set HARD goals feel up to 75 percent more fulfilled than people with weaker goals. With a nod to Burt Bacharach and Hal David, I'd suggest that the one thing there's just too little of right now is HARD Goals. There is no shortage of enormous challenges facing us individually and collectively. We're dealing with big issues like terrorism, wars, economic collapse, oil spills, corruption, deficits, unemployment, health care problems, and to top it all off, the bulk of people in the world are either starving or becoming obese. The one thing that has kept civilization going as long as it has is every so often we get a leader that knows how to set HARD goals. Listen, I know it's an unsettling world right now. But you and I both know that denial, blame, excuses, and anxiety are not going to make it any better. We need to harness the energy of this moment, scary though it might be, and turn it into greatness. Whether we're going to grow our company, lose weight, run a marathon, or change the whole darn world, we're going to have to saddle up a HARD Goal and ride that sucker at full gallop."

– Mark Murphy