✓ STAY AT HOME (UNTIL THE LOCKDOWN IS LIFTED)
✓ STAY ALERT
✓ STAY SAFE

GOAL

Every endeavor we undertake starts with a goal. A goal starts as an idea, which morphs into a desire, which becomes a goal. Ideas are vague, desires are inspiring, and a goal is actionable inspiration.

A goal is not a plan. A goal should not be overly specific. And a goal should be deeper than a simple metric.

But a goal is a constraint, and an important one. Imagine that, an inspiring constraint.

Most important, goals let us know what we should be doing. Without them, we simply don't know the appropriate way to act.

Goals focus us in a direction, gives us a general end-state, and allow maximum flexibility for getting there.

I will run the Mumbai Marathon next year.

We will improve work with our customers and learn what makes them happy.

We will build 2,000 units of affordable housing.

We will have a conference in November

Those are goals. They set context. Beyond this they can be refined with any number of tools, but right now, let's just examine them at a high level.

What do goals give us?

Context

Our goals set the boundaries for what we will achieve. By doing so, they help us focus on that achievement. At the time of goal setting, it is often dangerous to over-define the context. The tighter the definition of the context, the tighter the constraint and, therefore, the fewer the possible successful outcomes are available to you.

The goal with goals is to focus. Try having fewer, obtainable goals.

Pressure

Two of the examples above have time boxes. These are additional constraints that can both inspire or defeat you. They can inspire by letting you know how much effort you need to expend between now and then to be successful. They can defeat you if the time box is overly aggressive. One year of training, or the month of July, could be comfortable, daunting, or unrealistic. "Stretch goals" are often intended to be positive pressure but end up causing harm. Apply pressure with care.

Narrative

We are beginning to build a narrative. As we employ our goals, we are then forced to interrogate them to get a deeper understanding of the narrative: What problem are we trying to solve? Who wants this really? When are we going to find time for this extra work? What's the least amount we can do to achieve a good or even wonderful outcome? What good will come of this? How much will it cost? And so on. It is crucial during the implementation of any goal that the people involved regularly discuss what they are doing and why; otherwise, the "work" (the tasks of completing the goal) will

become more important than the goal itself. This loss of focus is what causes a large number of projects to fail.

"True north"

The goal is... a goal. We tend to set them and forget them. But they need to be front and center throughout a project: Where is our intended victory point? What are we progressing toward? We just did a ton of work; was it necessary? We're planning another ton... should we? What have we learned in the past week or so relative to the goal? Does that learning change our goal or our implementation? You cannot improve if you don't have a clear goal. Your deliveries will be arbitrary if you don't have a goal. Your goal is the basis for all measurement of success.

Clarity

It's worth saying again, goals inspire action. They aren't the drudgery of task-level definition. Whether it's as specific as building 2,000 homes or as vague as making people happy with our products, the goal gives us reassurance that we are doing something with a concise, easy-to-comprehend statement. When the goal is clear and reinforced, the roles and actions can also be clear. When people have clarity, they—not surprisingly—are confused less often.

Testable hypothesis

In order to meet your goal, it is helpful to have a way of knowing if it has been met. Again, the more specific that hypothesis, the fewer paths to success you have (the tighter you've made the constraint). In your case, your success criteria are your own and can be any range of attainability.

So, goals do some heavy lifting. They give us direction, as individuals and as groups. Without them we have no direction—and we seldom have them. This is why we have *directors*; they are supposed to be in charge of understanding our purpose for us and feeding us work.

This used to work quite well when it took minutes, days, or weeks to receive information, and when the number of things we could be doing was limited. With current

technology, we could be doing almost anything at any time; this limitless potential means that staying focused on one task or one project is nearly impossible. The only way to stay focused now is to have goals, immediate and consuming, that encourage us to limit our attention to the work at hand, and to watch that work to make sure it really is the right thing to be doing right now.

Now, more than ever, goals are necessary.

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