

Forget About the Goal. Focus on Systems Instead.

Taken from an article by James Clear www.jamesclear.com

We all have things that we want to achieve in our lives — getting into better shape, building a successful business, raising a wonderful family, and so on.

And for most of us, the path to those things starts by setting a specific and actionable goal. What I'm starting to realise, however, is that when it comes to actually getting things done and making progress, there is another way to think about things.

It all comes down to the difference between goals and systems.

The Difference Between Goals and Systems

What's the difference between goals and systems?

- **If you're a coach**, your goal is to win a championship. Your system is what your team does at practice each day.
- **If you're a writer**, your goal is to write a book. Your system is the writing schedule that you follow each week.
- **If you're an entrepreneur**, your goal is to build a million dollar business. Your system is your sales and marketing process.

None of this is to say that goals are useless. However, I've found that goals are good for **planning** your progress and systems are good for actually **making** progress.

If you forgot about your goal and focused only on your system, would you still get results? I think so. So why can it be useful to focus on systems instead of goals.

1. Goals can reduce your current happiness.

Choosing a goal can put a huge burden on your shoulders. Can you imagine if I had made it my goal to write two books this year? Just writing that sentence stresses me out. But we do this to ourselves all the time. We place unnecessary stress on ourselves to lose weight or to succeed in business or to write a best-selling novel.

Instead, **you can keep things simple and reduce stress by focusing on the daily process and sticking to your schedule**, rather than always worrying about the big, life-changing goals.

When you're working toward a goal, you can find yourself thinking, "I'm not good enough yet, but I will be when I reach my goal." The problem with this mindset is that you're teaching yourself to always put happiness and success off until the next milestone is achieved. "Once I reach my goal, then I'll be happy. Once I achieve my goal, then I'll be successful."

SOLUTION: Commit to a process, not a goal.

When you focus on the practice instead of the performance, you can enjoy the present moment and improve at the same time.

2. Goals can be strangely at odds with long-term progress.

You might think your goal will keep you motivated over the long-term, but that's not always true. The goals we set are often about short-term result. Consider someone training for a half-marathon. Many people will work hard for months, but as soon as they finish the race, they stop training. When all of your hard work is focused on a particular short term goal, what is left to push you forward after you achieve it? This can create a type of "yo-yo effect" where people go back and forth from working on a goal to not working on one. This type of cycle can make it difficult to build upon your progress for the long-term.

SOLUTION: Release the need for immediate results.

I was training at the gym last week and I was doing my second-to-last set of clean and jerks. When I hit that rep, I felt a small twinge in my leg. It wasn't painful or an injury, just a sign of fatigue near the end of my workout. For a minute or two, I thought about doing my final set. Then, I reminded myself that I plan to do this for the rest of my life and decided to call it a day.

In a situation like the one above, a short term goal-based mentality might tell you to finish the workout. After all, if you set a goal and you don't reach it, then you might feel like a failure. But with a systems-based mentality, I had no trouble moving on. Systems-based thinking is never about hitting a particular number, it's about sticking to the process and not missing workouts, rather than hurting yourself to complete every last bit.

Of course, I know that if I never miss a workout, then I will lift bigger weights in the long-run. And that's why focusing on systems can be more useful than on the goal. The goals we set are often about short-term result. Systems are about the long-term process.

3. Goals suggest that you can control things that you have no control over.

You can't predict the future. (I know, shocking.) But every time we set a goal, we try to do it. We try to plan out where we will be and when we will make it there. We try to predict how quickly we can make progress, even though we have no idea what circumstances or situations will arise along the way.

SOLUTION: Build feedback loops.

Each Friday, I spend 15 minutes filling out a small spreadsheet with the most critical metrics for my business. For example, in one column I calculate the conversion rate (the percentage of website visitors that join my free email newsletter each week). I rarely think about this number, but checking that column each week provides a feedback loop that tells me if I'm doing things right. When that number drops, I know that I need to send high quality traffic to my site.

Feedback loops are important for building good systems because they allow you to keep track of many different pieces without feeling the pressure to predict what is going to happen with everything. Forget about predicting the future and build a system that can signal when you need to make adjustments.

Fall In Love With Systems...

Goals can provide direction in the long term and can even push you forward in the short-term, but eventually a well-designed system which will move you towards that long term direction will always win. **Committing to the process is what makes the difference.**

For more info from James Clear
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