

The Power of Intention: Career goal-setting in an unpredictable world –September 09

In this changeable and unpredictable world of work, goal setting can be a frustrating exercise. There is significant evidence, though, that people who set goals are most likely to achieve them, that is, if the goals themselves are congruent with an individual's motivators, real engagement and self-confidence. As a career coach, however, I am very cautious about the wisdom of some goal-setting processes, in particular the S.M.A.R.T process: Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Results (focused) and Timely.

S.M.A.R.T goals tend to be extrinsically motivated, rather than being internally referenced. Accessing internal drivers and taking into consideration the possible ecological impacts of choices made is a better predictor of success. When career decisions and first steps are congruent, the likelihood of 'success' is greater.

The limitations of S.M.A.R.T goals include placing a measure (Measurable) on the success of the goal, which can be a distraction from the true value of the achievement. Creating a goal that is 'Achievable' is wise and realistic, however, I often wonder what opportunities might be passed by if one is open to broader possibilities, and what learning might be missed when 'Results' don't happen within the predetermined timeframe ('Timely')?

In my view, a firmly-held and well-grounded intention is more likely to open up someone's experience and the opportunities that unfold. I encourage people to think deeply about what is important to them in their lives. Having even a vague idea of purpose or a long-term vision for one's self is an excellent beginning.

Next steps can be identified and the adjustments and contextual considerations made in a far more ecologically sound way.

Let's compare 2 different ways of presenting a career goal identifying the different approaches:-

1. To be enjoying and building competence in XYZ field. (Intention)
2. To have established a profile in the XYZ field by December 2010 and be earning \$80K per year. (S.M.A.R.T)

The first (1.) offers an intrinsic value and quality, whereas the second (2.) is externally focused, with measurable results. To me, the first example is more likely to have sustainable results, given that the individual has enough courage and determination to work through hurdles.

By digging deeper into a more intrinsic sense of purpose, we are more likely to find ways to have more-meaningful careers and to make a contribution. Self-help books abound on this subject and we all know people who live with a very clear sense of what they are about. They seem to take hurdles as they come because there is a greater purpose they are intent on.

In 'The Power of Intention' by Dr. Wayne Dyer describes intention as "a strong purpose or aim, accompanied by a determination to produce a desired result." But his whole thesis in this book is about the power of a greater intention than the egocentric one, which is limited by our limited beliefs and desires. He proposes that the more 'spiritual' orientation of intention is more likely to create a field of energy that manifests experience greater than our limited dreams.

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