



## CHAPTER 8

# GOAL SETTING FOR A LIVEABLE PLANET

*You will recognize your own path when you come upon it, because you will suddenly have all the energy and imagination you will ever need*

*- Jerry Gillies*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, goal setting will help you to stay focused and take the actions you need to take to help combat global warming.

How does one set goals effectively? Here is one way you can do it.

### Step 1: Get clear on what it is you want to achieve (your goal)

Do you want to reduce your household electricity use by 20%? Do you want to simplify your life so you are less of a slave to time and material goods? Perhaps you would like to be someone who inspires others to start acting in environmentally responsible ways. There are endless possibilities for what you can create and it is time to start exploring these.

But what if you have no idea? You are so used to things being as they are and you can't imagine life being any different. One of my Psychology university lecturers, Alex Main, recommended the following strategy to me.

1. Look at the lives of the people whom you admire (at least one person must be someone you know personally).

2. Pinpoint what it is about that person(s) whom you really admire. What are his or her admirable characteristics?

For me, I first looked at my Japanese friend, Takeshi. Takeshi has a lot of energy and passion for the environment and sharing its wonder with others. He is a great teacher whose mind and heart are so open! Anything and everything is possible for Takeshi.

I also admire our local sustainability consultant, Ben Rose. Ben is someone whose actions speak louder than his words. He has halved his household's greenhouse gas emissions and adopted a simpler, more fulfilling way of life. Ben now coaches and inspires families to do the same.

From looking at the lives of these two inspiring people, I can see that I want to help people wake up and start taking global warming seriously. I want to

also be someone who walks the talk when it comes to making a difference to the environment.

At first, you may feel a bit funny exploring what you want, as the cynic in you may be saying 'nah, don't be stupid. It's not possible!' or you may even be thinking 'my life is fine just the way it is'. Just be aware of what your critical inner voice is saying, thank the little voice for sharing and carry on exploring what you want for your life.

If you have trouble doing this activity, here are a few questions to help you start thinking about the type of things you may want to create.

1. Would you like the problem of global warming to be fixed?
2. Would you like to contribute to help solve the problem?
3. Would you like to be part of the solution to the problem?

4. Would you like to help others learn more about global warming?
5. Would you like to join an environmental organisation?
6. Would you like to catch public transport more often?
7. Would you like to speak out in public about global warming?
8. Would you like to reduce your household electricity and gas?
9. Would you like to own a fuel efficient vehicle?
10. Would you like to eat more healthy, organic, vegetarian meals?
11. Would you like to buy less and save more?
12. Would you like to spend more time with you friends and family?
13. Would you like to do some volunteer work?
14. Would you like to identify your life purpose?
15. Would you like to get into activism or politics?



## Step 2: Write it down

Once you are clear on what you want, write it down immediately! According to scientific studies, the simple act of writing down your goals increases

your chances of achieving them. Researchers at Yale University took a group of 400 graduating students and instructed these students to write down their goals. Only 3% of the 400 students actually wrote down their lifelong goals in a specific manner. 20 years later, all the students met for a reunion. What the researchers found was the group who had written down their goals seemed a lot happier than the others and were more successful than all of the other 97% combined. So, if in doubt, write it out!

## Step 3: Make sure your goal(s) meets the criteria

You can increase your chances of achieving your goal by making sure it meets the following criteria:



**Present Tense:** Studies have revealed that the mind doesn't know the difference between what is real and what is vividly imagined. An example of this can be seen in Olympic athletes and bodybuilders.

When they visualise themselves executing a particular exercise, they have the same brain activity as when they actually perform the exercise. Simply by saying 'I am reducing my carbon footprint' instead of 'I will reduce my carbon footprint' makes it seem more real and more likely that you will do it.

### Specific (clear and concise):

#### SPECIFIC



Specific goals help you to establish crystal clear focus and

drive. Vague goals are like sightseeing in Rome without having a map. You may eventually stumble across the Colosseum and the statue of David, but it will take you longer and be a lot harder to get there than it should have been. Vague goals also make it harder to know the precise point when you have actually achieved the goal.

#### MEASURABLE



**Measurable:** By being able to measure your goal (e.g. the

amount of electricity and gas saved on your bill) you will know whether you have achieved your goal or not for the obvious reason that you will be able to measure it. Below are some of the different things you can measure:

- Time: the time spent in the shower, time spent reading and educating yourself and others on global warming, time spent volunteering every week, etc.
- Electricity: you can measure the amount of household electricity used by reading your energy meter box or power bill.
- Money: you can calculate the amount of money you spend and save every week by cutting back on eating and drinking at fast food outlets/restaurants/cafes/hotels, buying unnecessary goods, etc.

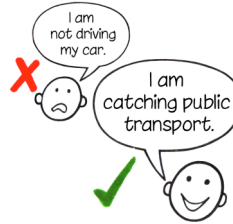


**Achievable:** If your goal is totally unreasonable and not achievable, you will start to stress out, put yourself under unnecessary

pressure and lose motivation. The stress may become too much, things will start to seem too hard and there is a good chance you will want to give up. Some examples of unachievable goals are:

- *'I am bringing the Tasmanian tiger back from extinction'*: The Tasmanian tiger is a species that is sadly gone for good.
- *'I am going to stop the one degree rise in global temperature'*: Unfortunately a one degree rise in global temperature is inevitable according to reports by the IPCC.

**Positive:** Positive goals make us feel good not only when we achieve them but while we are thinking about them and also working towards achieving them. If I set myself the following goal 'I am not driving my car into the city in order to decrease my



'pollution', what images immediately jump to mind? Images of a car and pollution. These images hardly inspire me and empower my behaviour change. Instead I

could set myself this goal:

*'I am catching public transport into the city. As a result, I get to enjoy reading interesting books, I feel calmer and the air is cleaner'*

How do I feel after setting this goal? Pretty good! When I think about this goal, positive images of myself enjoying the day and a healthier planet spring to mind (and not having to worry about the traffic and finding a parking spot!).



**Time Limit:** Dr James Hansen (Leading Scientist at NASA) says we have less than 10 years to do something about

global warming before we reach the point of no return. If we don't set clear deadlines for our goals, chances are we may never achieve them in the small space of time we have available. Having a time limit means you clearly know when you have or haven't achieved your goal. The time limit will motivate you to stop procrastinating and take action.

### Putting it all together

You can follow this simple formula to create goals.

It is now \_\_\_\_\_

(Insert future date when I have achieved my goal)

I am/I have \_\_\_\_\_

(Insert the last step you need to take to know you have achieved your goal)

Below is an example of one of my personal goals:

It is now the 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2007



I have delivered my presentation 'Global Warming: Too Hot to Handle?' to over 1000 students. They are making changes to their lives and lowering their energy usage.

Now take some time to set some of your own goals in the space below

It is now \_\_\_\_\_

I am/ I have \_\_\_\_\_

It is now \_\_\_\_\_

I am/ I have \_\_\_\_\_

It is now \_\_\_\_\_

I am/ I have \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Step 4: Break it down**



Imagine your favourite burger. Juicy and bursting with flavour! How would you normally eat it? Most people would eat a burger one bite at a time. If you were to eat it all in one mouthful, you would not enjoy the taste, you would make yourself sick and probably would not want to eat another burger anytime soon.

Now goal setting works the same way. You have your long term goal (a goal that can be achieved at some point in the future) and then you have your short term goals (goals you can achieve in the near future such as today or tomorrow). If you don't break down your long term goals into smaller, short term

goals, you are going to make yourself feel sick and overwhelmed. It is only through achieving all your short term goals (your bite sized pieces) which can be done right here and now, that you will be able to achieve your long term goals (the big, juicy burger).

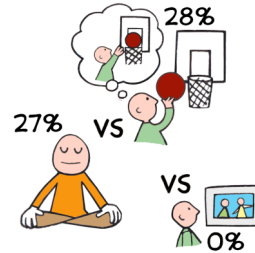
This is where so many people get stuck in life. They set a big goal for themselves and they don't break it down into smaller steps. Why do you think people would stop at this stage? They get overwhelmed, they start to think 'it's all too hard' and then they give up.

What's the solution? You may want to try this clever strategy. Imagine a movie has been made of you achieving your goal (the goal can be however big or small you want it to be). You are sitting back, eating some popcorn and watching the ending of this movie. You finally reach the part where you have done what you have always wanted to do. You have achieved your goal! It's your victorious moment. You

have helped the earth in some way (perhaps your children and grandchildren are cheering with joy and applauding you). Notice how it feels. Then all of a sudden someone presses the rewind button on the remote control and you see yourself moving backwards in time. You observe all the small steps you had to take to reach your goal, you see the dramas of coming up against obstacles (perhaps apathy and cynicism from others), all the hard work as well as the satisfaction of completing the smaller goals.

What you are doing is a process called top down planning. Imagine yourself at the end, having achieved your goal and then work backwards up until this point in time, seeing all the steps you need to take.

## Step 5: Visualisation



Visualisation can help us to achieve our goals. The latest research into visualisation reveals that your mind can't tell the difference between an activity you visualise and one you actually perform. Researchers at Ohio State University tested out this idea. They took a group of basketball players and split them up into three teams. Each group was given a basketball and told to shoot foul shots. The players' scores were then recorded as a baseline measure. The first group was then told to practice shooting foul shots for 30 minutes a day for 30 days. The second group had to visualise themselves shooting foul shots for 30 minutes a day for 30 days, however they couldn't actually shoot any shots. The third group couldn't

practice shooting any foul shots and couldn't visualise themselves doing so either. What did the researchers find after 30 days? Who had improved the most?

The group who didn't practice and didn't visualise showed no improvement. The group who only imagined themselves shooting but never picked up a ball improved by 27%. The group who practiced shooting but didn't visualise improved by 28%. That's only 1% difference! This demonstrates the power of visualising yourself taking the actions you need to take. If you make your visualisation as realistic as possible by involving all of your senses (feeling the appropriate feelings, hearing the appropriate sounds, tasting the appropriate tastes and smelling the appropriate smells) then you will increase your chances of success.

Does this study tell us that we can just sit there, hold hands and collectively visualise a reduction in greenhouse gases and it will happen? That would be nice, but visualisation on its own isn't the solution to global warming. It can however help all of us to achieve our goals with more confidence and ease.

## **Step 6: Take Action**

What else do you need to do after you have created an effective goal, written it down, broken it down into bite sized pieces and visualised yourself carrying it out? You need to take immediate action. You are either taking action towards your goal or you are not taking action. Now I don't know about you, but for me this has always been the hardest part. If I had an assignment to do or project to complete, I would clean my room, check my email, rearrange my desk, I would tell myself 'It's too hard' and I would do or say anything I could to avoid getting started! What would happen is I would either have two days to

write a 3,000 word essay or I would have missed the opportunity altogether. Often I would feel stressed out and disappointed in myself.



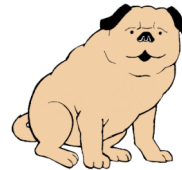
The key to getting started is to set yourself the smallest, easiest goal to achieve.

Let's say you want to have a home energy audit

performed on your house. You can start by setting yourself the following goal 'I am picking up the phone and booking a home energy audit' or 'I am on the internet and googling the words *home energy audit*'. Once you have made the call or googled the words, it will propel you onto do another action and then another. Before you know it you will have completed dozens of environmentally friendly actions. This technique has also helped me to complete university assignments well before their due dates, simply by setting myself the goal 'I am writing one sentence of this essay'. After writing one sentence I don't stop

there, I go onto write a second and a third...before I know it I have written a significant amount of the essay. Once the action has started and you have some momentum, the rest flows with incredible ease.

## Step 7: Keeping your goal alive



Treat your goals as you would treat your precious pets. What do I mean by this? Let's say one day I woke up and decided 'I really can't be bothered feeding my dog

anymore. I can't be bothered patting her or giving her a wash. From now on she can look after herself What would happen to my dog? She would die! Similarly, if I don't nurture my goals, feed them, look after them and do something for them everyday they will die too. The situation for our planet will stay the same or most probably get worse.

How can you keep your goals alive? Many people create visual displays of the future they want, some type out their goals in large font and put them in a place where they can see them everyday. Famous actor and comedian, Jim Carey, kept a fake \$10,000,000 cheque in his wallet for 10 years and looked at it on a daily basis. Whilst I'm not suggesting 'Let's strive to acquire more wealth!' this was a powerful strategy that kept Jim focused on what he was up to in life. We can do the same when it comes to creating a healthier, happier world.