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OPINION

How to Achieve Your Goals for the New Year



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I know many highly successful people who write down their goals for the year ahead on New Year's Eve. Are you one of them? I have achieved great results with this approach. Two years ago, I wrote on New Year's Eve that my book *In Defense of Capitalism* should be published in 20 languages. My goal was to sign all 20 contracts within the next 12 months. That was ambitious, because my most successful book to date (*Dare to be Different and Grow Rich*) had been published in 15 languages, but that took twelve years, not twelve months. I've achieved my goal. In fact, I signed 30 contracts for my book on capitalism and now have 25 translated editions of the book sitting on my bookshelf. I visited most of these countries this year and last, which was also my goal.

So, I have once again confirmed: It pays to write down goals and it pays to set ambitious goals. There is no 100 percent guarantee that you will always achieve your goals, but this approach does increase the likelihood significantly. Of course, if you don't set yourself any goals in the first place, you can't fail. At least that's what many people believe. The fact is that they have already failed because they capitulated before they even tried.

Writing down your goals works wonders. And it's not something I am alone in advocating: I have heard the same time and time again in countless conversations with extremely successful people. But writing down your goals is not enough if that is all you do. You also have to program your goals into your subconscious every day. I have developed a very effective method for this, which I describe in detail in my book *Dare to be Different and Grow Rich*.

In a nutshell: I use “autogenic training,” a relaxation method that some people may know or perhaps even master. Anyone who has learned autogenic training knows how to put themselves into a state of deep relaxation, just like self-hypnosis. In this state, you can program goals into your mind. These goals should be specific, preferably quantifiable. Like my goal of signing 20 contracts in one year.

And the goals should be really big and ambitious. Some people who fall short of their goals react by either ceasing to set any more goals or setting their sights much lower. The reason for this is a fear of failure. It seems paradoxical, but if you have repeatedly failed to achieve your goals in the past, then perhaps you should set yourself even bigger goals. Bigger goals have the advantage of generating greater motivation and enthusiasm.

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Elon Musk has even set himself gigantic goals. In the early 2000s, after selling the company PayPal, he was sitting with some of the company’s alumni in Las Vegas and one of them asked him what he was planning to do next. Musk answered: “I’m going to colonize Mars. My mission in life is to make mankind a multiplanetary civilization.” His former colleague’s reaction? “Dude, you’re bananas.”

True, Musk hasn't been to Mars yet. But he has built the most successful private space company with rockets that are far superior and much cheaper than anything ever built by government space agencies. And yet, the first three of his rockets exploded after launch and he was almost broke.

What did Musk do when he was in really dire straits? Did he downgrade his goals and lower his sights? On the contrary. That was when he focused on distant visions of the future and discussed, for example, designs for the space suits the company was developing, even though they were still years away from transporting humans into space. One employee marveled: "They're sitting around seriously discussing plans to build a city on Mars and what people will wear there. And everyone's just acting like this is a totally normal conversation."

Visionaries like Steve Jobs and Elon Musk recognized early on that big goals, the kind of goals others ridicule as completely unrealistic, are more motivating than small goals. Well, you don't have to set yourself the goal of colonizing Mars. But if you want to increase the likelihood of achieving your goals, you should do three things:

1. Stop lowering your sights and set yourself bigger goals.
2. Write down your goals, preferably in a book that you create especially for this purpose.
3. Learn autogenic training and use this method to program your goals into your subconscious every day.

Rainer Zitelmann is the author of the book *Dare to be Different and Grow Rich* <https://daretobedifferentandgrowrich.com/>