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Nicole, a coach trainer and certified leadership coach, coaches emerging leaders, leaders in transition and leaders in women-serving organizations. She created Foundational Gifts LLC out of a passion to see gifted people succeed and serves as its Chief Visionary Officer.

For more than 20 years, Nicole has held executive and leadership positions in the human services arena. She is also a certified mediator and a member of the International Association of Coaches.

Those who coach with Nicole come away with clarity of purpose, well-established goals and a renewed mindset toward their personal and professional priorities.

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Empower, Enlighten, Enrich, Equip, Encourage.

A Newsletter of Personal
& Professional Results
from Nicole Kirksey
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Goal Setting Matters

From everyday “to-do” lists to New Year’s Resolutions, goal setting is part of the human experience. People have always needed something to strive for—something upon which to focus energy and effort.

If goal setting is so ingrained in our nature, why are most people so bad at it? Perhaps the problem is the way we approach it. Try the following ideas to gain a fresh perspective on setting your goals.

How to Get Better at Setting (and Reaching) Goals

Size matters. Too many big goals can overwhelm. Try limiting big-ticket goals to one or two.

Make it personal. Asking yourself “Why do I want this?” “How will I feel?” “What will it mean to me?” personalizes goals, making them easier to achieve.

Sharpen your pencil. When written down, priorities get clear.

Create an environment. A physical environment can remind you how daily tasks add up to achieving longer-term goals. Use posters or a computer calendar to create visual reminders.

Stay on course. Even Columbus referred to his maps more than once per journey. Periodic checking of progress allows for re-charting the course or timeline.

Put it on the line. Sharing goals with family, friends and co-workers means public accountability. Pride can be a great motivator.

Get help. Success is always easier to find with support. Talking to people about business and personal goals gets them on board with morale and tangible support.

Try Intentions Instead

If you’re still having trouble, consider that recent brain research suggests that it’s not so much the goal, but the *intention* that gets us what we want. Some people feel goals push us (requiring unsustainable effort) while *intentions* pull us. Goals use “numbers” (pounds lost, sales made, products developed). Intentions bring to light what is personally fulfilling. Intention allows us to visualize ourselves (and how we’ll feel) when we’re successful. It eliminates the “failure” option often associated with the goal achievement process.

How to State an Intention

If the goal is “five new clients by next month” ask yourself, “What will my business be like with those new clients? How will I feel?” Now, state your intention in the present tense. “My business will be prosperous,” becomes: “My business is prosperous.” And “I will feel successful” becomes “I feel successful.”

Whether goal setting or intention setting, one thing is clear—success isn’t achieved by accident. Planning ahead is what successful people have always done to get what they want out of life. ●

Top 10 Ways to Set Clear Expectations

Rather than communicate clear milestones against which to test progress, some managers assume their employees know what to do and how to do it. Below are some tips on setting clear expectations.

1. Start with the results. Focus less on what you want done and more on the results you want to achieve when the project is completed.

2. Define “excellent performance.” Paint a complete picture. Refer to the performance review form.

3. Guide, don’t control. Let workers use their talents to find their own route toward productive outcomes.

4. Tie the mission to each job. People want to know that their role makes a difference.

5. Put the expectations in writing.

6. Stay on the sideline. If you play the game for a subordinate, no one will learn a thing.

7. Give feedback—often! Given along the way, feedback sounds like coaching, not like punishment.

8. Ask for staff feedback. The more two-way communication, the greater the clarity around the expectations.

9. Give positive reinforcement. Mention the thing you like and you’ll get more of it. Be specific.

10. Don’t take it personally. If people don’t perform as you think they should, look for solutions, not blame. ●

Self-Quiz **How Well Do You Deal With Change?**

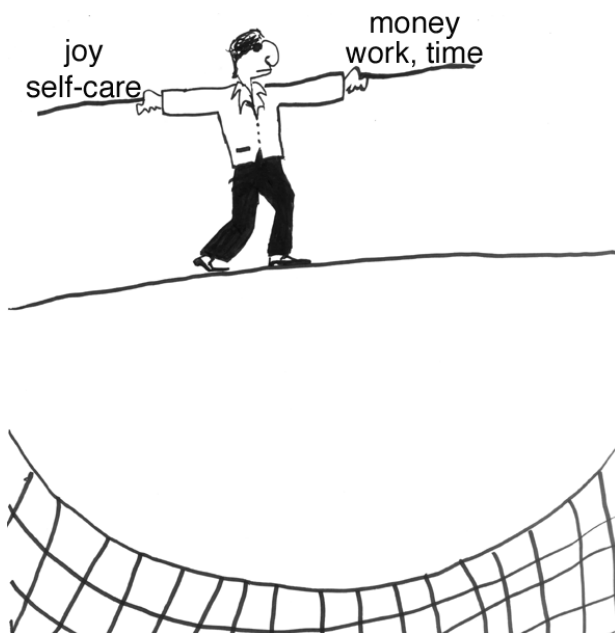
Whether you find change exciting or frightening, awareness of your response to change can help you develop better strategies for working with it. Answer the following questions to find out how you cope with change.

True False

- 1. I hesitate to make a change until everything is 100 percent right.
- 2. Generally, I look forward to change as exciting and challenging.
- 3. I'm the kind of person who has to be totally fed up before I'll make any changes.
- 4. When confronted with a change over which I have little control, I review the events and my behavior to determine if I could have done anything differently.
- 5. Rather than feeling responsible for negative changes that come out of nowhere, I take responsibility for my reaction to them.
- 6. I never make changes unless they are forced upon me.
- 7. During a time of change, I ask for help from those close to me, reliable friends and professionals who can help me develop productive strategies.

- 8. When coming to terms with a major change in my life, I attempt to keep other changes to a minimum.
- 9. When a change or transition occurs, I review how I have handled other such events in my life for lessons on how to handle this event.
- 10. I look to others who have undergone similar changes as models for how I might better address the change in my life.
- 11. After a life change, I step back from the situation to get perspective and to rest in order to regain a sense of balance.
- 12. When I'm caught in a change over which I have no control, rather than blaming or feeling victimized, I "pick myself up, dust myself off" and continue to move forward.
- 13. I try to look at the "big picture" of the change, and acknowledge any mixed feelings I might have.
- 14. I don't hold onto the "way things used to be," but instead move into "the way things are."

If you answered "true" to fewer than eight items, you may benefit from working with a coach to explore different and more positive ways to approach change. Please don't hesitate to call. ●



What's out of balance in your life? What's your safety net?

Recommended Reading

- Outliers: The Story of Success*, by Malcolm Gladwell
- Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, by Charles Kindleberger, et al.
- The 5 Competitive Forces That Shape Strategy*, by Michael E. Porter
- Reinvention: How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life*, by Brian Tracy
- Where Have All the Leaders Gone?*, by Lee Iacocca
- Training Camp: What the Best Do Better Than Everyone Else*, by John Gordon

"It is the follow-through that makes the great difference between ultimate success and failure, because it is so easy to stop."

—Charles F. Kettering, American inventor

How to Succeed with Failure When All Else Fails

Had it not been for failure, humankind may never have known the magnificent Audubon bird paintings that gave rise to the Audubon Society or the inspiring music of Handel's Messiah.

It was only after John James Audubon's business failed in 1819 that he began traveling and painting birds. George Frederick Handel unleashed his creative genius after a night of deep despair over his failure as a musician (he lived in poverty and had suffered a stroke).

The world landscape is strewn with such stories of success rising from the ashes of failure. Yet failure tends to strike fear in our hearts like nothing else. There is so little tolerance for it in our culture and tremendous pressure to get it right every time, to be in control, to succeed and win.

What would it be like to cast failure in a different light, to take it out of the darkness of disgrace and guilt, to remove the feeling of "disaster" associated with failure, to look for what it tells us about our well-being and our conduct in life? What enormous amounts of energy would be freed up? And for what?

Open Door to a New Success

Like Audubon, a failure can be a lever to open the door to a richer, more authentic life. Author Suzanne Falter-Barns says, "There really is no such thing as failure. There is only the rearrangement of plans and the surrender of ego. There is only the twist in the road we never expect."

Spark Creativity

Sometimes we need to be jolted out of our routine and back into the essential work of creating ourselves. Failure doesn't just clear its throat, it blows a trumpet in our ears and stirs up creative juices. We can't help but respond with passion and drive, as Handel did while composing Messiah.

Promote Risk-Taking and Change

Failure is a natural offshoot of adventure and risk-taking, and growth is a natural offshoot of failure. Great courage is needed to face real change. A great failure can be the influence that enables us to take the risk to change.

Getting Through It

In his book *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, Thomas Moore writes: "If we could understand the

feelings of inferiority and humbling occasioned by failure as meaningful in their own right, then we might incorporate failure into our work so that it doesn't literally devastate us."

Here are a few suggestions for working constructively (succeeding!) with failure.

Acknowledge your feelings of pain, humiliation and/or inadequacy.

Laugh, if you can. A little bit of humor goes a long way in learning to accept failure.

Acknowledge your responsibility. Don't deny the importance of the failure, but neither let it overwhelm you with guilt. Guilt isn't helpful; taking responsibility is.

Forgive yourself. Forgiveness doesn't take away the consequences or the memory of the failure, but it does soften the fall and clear a path for the next step.

Build a base of supportive people.

Share the reality of your life. When you stop hiding shame and denying negative feelings, issues are quickly surfaced and resolved.

No self-recrimination. Replace "If only..." with "Next time..." to keep focused on the future.

Reflect. Seek not to blame but to search for the wisdom beneath the failure. With real curiosity, ask yourself these questions:

- How can this failure serve me?
- What does this setback mean?
- What have I learned and gained?
- How can I use this failure?
- How can I see it in a different way?
- What is positive here?
- What am I really trying to accomplish?

Expect to make mistakes again. Some organizations are now building in this expectation and experiencing the enormous potential for innovation, teamwork and achievement that is unleashed when the fear of failure is removed. Individuals also can experience the same potential.

Ultimately, failure is not about loss, deficiency and flaws. It's about learning lessons and courageously moving on. It's about retaining hope and the instinct for joy. The lessons of failure make us wiser, stronger and more prepared for the rest of our journey. ●

BEYOND the Box

The following questions are designed to broaden perspectives, to open vistas, to widen the lens. There is no one right way to approach them. You can journal about them, talk to friends, create art, ponder them while driving or working out, dance them—whatever helps you explore "outside the box."

1. How proficient are you at setting goals?
2. Do you usually achieve the goals that you set?
3. Would intention setting work better for you than goal setting? Why or why not?
4. What was your most important goal this year? Will you/did you achieve it?
5. List five words that describe the word "change" as you experience it? Are they mostly positive or negative?
6. Are you able to see the big picture in any changes you're currently experiencing?
7. What event did you see as a failure in your life that turned out for the best?
8. Is there a failure in your past for which you need to forgive yourself?
9. What did you learn from your most disastrous "failure"?
10. Do you automatically hear feedback as criticism?
11. Might there be a gift for you in the feedback?

Taking Feedback to Heart

A colleague who just heard your presentation is giving you feedback that you were too quiet, you didn't get to the point quickly enough and you lacked a compelling example.

Your breathing goes shallow and your body stiffens, your heart speeds up and you look around to see if anyone is in earshot of this conversation. You worked for days perfecting this presentation—days!

Faced with the often-difficult experience of feedback, many of us respond in unproductive ways. But taking in feedback from others, both positive and negative, is imperative if we are to experience the satisfaction that comes with enhanced competence and improved relations.

It is possible, and necessary, to think positively about feedback. Here are some guidelines that can help.

Turning "Feedback" into "Food for Thought"

Track your own reactions. Recognize that whatever thoughts or emotions arise are your responsibility. When we own our own reactions, we're better able to receive the information and communicate with the person.

Listen with an open mind. Without confirming or denying the validity of the person's perception, simply listen and take in what he or she has to say.

Be curious. It may be appropriate later, but while you're listening, don't explain or defend yourself. Ask for more observations and information. What does the person expect or want you to do

differently? Ask questions to be sure you understand.

Regard all feedback as beneficial. Feedback can help you recognize unproductive habitual styles, improve your work, your offering, your products and services. In any form, it is a gift.

Focus on the message. When feedback is given harshly or by someone with whom we struggle, or if there is personal distortion, focus only on the message. What is the valuable kernel of truth? What can you learn from it?

Get help. To make the best of the feedback, ask trusted friends to listen, encourage and offer suggestions. Work with a coach. It's difficult to make significant change without support and encouragement.

Reframe the feedback. For example, see the feedback on your presentation as a way to improve your skills and thus increase your chances of promotion. Or, the feedback may point you to greater success in a position that doesn't require presentation skills.

The bottom line: Taking feedback to heart puts you in control. It may require ruthless self-honesty and a little detective work, but the payoff is worth it. ●



—Henry Ford

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal."

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