

Running head: CREATING AND MAINTAINING MEANINGFUL GOALS.

TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITIES:
THE CARE AND FEEDING OF MEANINGFUL GOALS.

by

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Abstract

This paper describes a project where the author creates a workbook appropriate for a seminar on setting and attaining meaningful goals. The paper is divided into two parts. Part one introduces the project and describes the purpose, intended audience, and so forth. Part two details the project by creating definitions and introducing the "action plan" based on important concepts on goal setting from the literature. The appendices contain handouts for implementing the action plan described in part two.

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Turning "Dreams" Into "Realities": the Care and Feeding of Meaningful Goals.

Most people have dreams, events or conditions that they would like to see "come to pass" in their lives. Ironically enough, there seems to be very little, if any, research in the literature on the topic of "dreams" other than that of the nocturnal state. What are these "dreams", why are they important, and how does one achieve them?

Introduction to the Applied Practice Project

In this project, the author seeks to transform a body of literature into a usable method for one to set, maintain, and achieve "meaningful goals". The primary assertion is that one cannot achieve one's dreams without setting and maintaining "meaningful goals", thus one will come closer to achieving one's dreams by achieving meaningful goals.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to help teens and adults develop the skills necessary to create, maintain, and achieve meaningful goals for their lives. It is hoped that developing the skills necessary to achieve meaningful goals will allow one to live a richer, deeper, more meaningful life.

Description of the Type of Applied Project

This project seeks to create a workbook suitable for presentation at a community seminar. Information about "meaningful goals" will be presented hereafter, with handouts ("worksheets") presented in the appendices.

Potential Contributions of the Project to the Field

Many people go about the goal-creation process in an ineffective manner (c.f. Koestner, Lekes, Powers, & Chicoine, 2002). This project should result in the learner gaining the skills and tools necessary to achieve meaningful goals. Follow-on projects may be useful to professionals in the field in teaching these skills.

The author also appears to have a unique presentation for his goals model (Price, 2005) and method, though a more substantial literature review is recommended before this claim can be verified.

Description of the Target Population

The target age is "teen through adult". This project is intended to be useful for high school and junior-high school students, college students, and working adults. The method should be applicable to people of all backgrounds (race, religion, ethnicity, etc.).

Expected Findings or Outcomes of the Applied Practice Project.

The expected outcome of this project is a seminar/workbook combination for setting and maintaining goals. Expected topics include what goals are, setting goals, and maintaining and achieving goals.

The Method

What is a "Meaningful Goal"?

Before one can set a meaningful goal, one must determine what a meaningful goal is. While the literature is replete with information on what goals are, there does not exist (to this

author's knowledge) any specific mention of what a "meaningful goal" is. Many people believe that they understand what a goal is, a desired end or state of events, however that simple definition can be misleading. For instance, goals have depth, proximity, duration, focus, specificity, valence, collectivity, coherence, complexity, hierarchy, and difficulty (Price, 2005; Cox, 2002, pp. 90 - 92; Koestner et al., 2002; Singer, Hausenblas, & Janelle, 2001, pp. 506 - 10) associated with them. Defining a goal simply, such as "a desired end state", ignores that complexity; however it will suffice for the purposes of this paper.

Unfortunately there is no specific definition for "meaningful goals" in the literature, however there is ample evidence that a goal must be set with one's values and interests in mind to be effective (Koestner et al., 2002; Franken, 2002; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). In other words, for a goal to be effective that goal must mean something to the person that sets it; it must be important to them, or at least interesting to them, and match well with their values and principles. This, then, is what this paper will consider to be a "meaningful goal": a goal that is set in concert with one's values and interests; a goal that that is important to ("means something" to) the one that sets it.

If "meaningful goals" are lacking in the literature, then "dreams" are most certainly lacking as well. In common parlance, a "dream" is a goal that one is strongly interested in achieving. Dreams may have varying degrees of correlation with one's values, and one does not necessarily believe that a dream is achievable. What does exist in the literature, however, is the notion of interests and values (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Price, 2005), the notion that a goal that one is interested in is easier to achieve than a goal that one is not interested in. Since dreams are goals which one is highly interested in attaining, it follows that one can achieve one's dreams by effective goal setting – if the dream is

coherent with one's values. It is for that reason that this paper will consider "meaningful goals" as the means which one uses to achieve their dreams.

The Three Centers of Meaningful Goals

Within the martial art lineage "Gyokko Ryu Koshijutsu", there is a concept of "three centers of combat" (personal knowledge): the center of one's self, the center of one's opponent, and the center of the conflict. The martial artist is expected to be aware of these three centers at all times, for no one center gives enough of the picture to achieve an acceptable result. This concept generalizes well to goal setting, for in setting goals one must always consider one's self, the goal, and the environment or situation involved in achieving the goal; all three considerations must be present in one's goal setting if the goal is to be effectively attained.

Self

It seems evident that before one can create a goal based on interests and values one must know what one's interests and values are. Another important item is that one must keep one's priorities in mind (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Franken, 2002; Singer et al., 2001; Cox, 2002; Price, 2005). Appendix A contains the "Interests Worksheet" and the "Priorities Worksheet", which have been designed for this purpose. Once one has a good idea what one's interests and priorities are, one is better prepared for effective goal setting.

Another important thing to keep in mind is "where you've been". One's past accomplishments inform the present in several ways. Past accomplishments can be representative of one's interests so one should take these into consideration. Also remembering one's

accomplishments helps to enhance one's self-esteem (c.f. Cox, 2002) and may help one to realistically assess one's capabilities.

Of course, "can be representative of interests" is not the same thing as being strongly linked to interests. To ensure that this process aids in assessing interests and building motivation and self-esteem, one should note not only past accomplishments but the affect associated with these accomplishments as well. Questions such as "is this a rare accomplishment?" and "does this reflect who I perceive myself to be as a person?" should be involved in this reflective process if the intended result, aiding creating and maintaining effective goals, is to be achieved. Appendix B contains the "fond accomplishments" worksheet to serve this purpose.

Appendix C contains one method for aiding the goal setter in discovering their internal values system. This worksheet asks the user to "fill in the blank" when told "my ideal self is/has", concentrating on the internal aspects of their ideal self. The reasoning is that one's "internal ideal self" is a representation of one's values (c.f. Capuzzi & Gross, 2003), so by exploring this aspect one can explore one's values. It is important to note that there are other methods available to the licensed psychologist that may be more useful for the process, however those methods and tests cannot be reproduced here.

When used together, these worksheets can aid a person in ensuring self-congruence; one cannot honestly do these worksheets without taking an inventory of one's personal interests, values, and past accomplishments.

Goal

Koestner et al. (2002) list three reasons why "making a list of goals is often ineffective": structure, motivation, and planning. There may be too many goals, goals may conflict with other

goals or be ambiguous, or may be "set too far in the future to serve as useful behavioral guidelines" (Koestner et al., 2002). Goals must be specific, short term, and moderately difficult to be effective (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Karoly, 1999; Franken, 2002; Cox, 2002; Price, 2005).

Structure.

While there is ample evidence that goal hierarchy must be taken into account, there is not explicit consideration of what that hierarchy is – or should look like – in the literature (Price, 2005). While this paper cannot present a precise, definitive hierarchy it can present what is known from the literature in a hierarchical fashion in an attempt to capture the structure of an effective goal. For instance, coherencies and conflicts need to be taken into account, and long-term goals need to be broken down into short-term goals (Koestner et al., 2002) so this paper can present that information in a "linked" fashion to begin approximating a hierarchical structure.

The structure must also help ascertain that the goal is of "optimal difficulty" (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Franken, 2002; Singer et al., 2001; Cox, 2002; Price, 2005). Further for a goal may have three different focuses, all of which may be present in the same goal: process, performance, and outcome (Cox, 2002). A process goal is one that concentrates on improving a process involved in an activity, for example becoming a better batter; a performance goal is one that concentrates on improving one's personal performance, such as a batter with a goal to raise his batting average; an outcome goal is one where one strives to attain a specific outcome, such as "winning the championship". Because there is evidence that the structure of the goal must include two of these aspects to be maximally effective (Cox, 2002) the appendices present a goal as having three aspects or sub-goals: process, performance, and outcome.

The results are captured in the "goal structure evaluation" worksheet (appendix D). This worksheet requires that the user be specific in defining their goals; that the user evaluates the goal in relation to their other goals; that the user considers process, performance, and outcome; and that the final goal that is set be short-term and moderately challenging. It encourages long-term or very difficult goals to be broken down into "sub-goals". Koestner's (2002) concern about setting to many goals at once is captured in the "active goals" worksheet (appendix E).

Motivation.

Attempting a goal for the wrong reasons makes the entire process more difficult and much more likely to fail (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Franken, 2002; Singer et al., 2001; Cox, 2002; Price, 2005) and creates internal conflict (Koestner et al., 2002). On the other hand, self-concordant goals – those that are in harmony with the person's values and interests – produce the most effective motivation, creating much more energy for the person to draw on (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

The "motivation and coherence" worksheet (appendix F) has been created for this purpose. The motivation portion asks the user to list their reasons for wanting to pursue a given goal and then choose which fits best: "Exciting/Enjoyable", "I feel that it's Valuable", "If I didn't I'd feel bad (or not gain a reward)", or "Because I have to". These four correspond to extrinsic ("because I have to"), introjected ("if I didn't I'd feel bad (or not gain a reward)"), identified ("I feel that it's valuable"), and intrinsic ("exciting/enjoyable") types of motivation (Koestner et al., 2002; Franken, 2002; Singer et al., 2001; Cox, 2002). The research is clear that identified and intrinsic motivation provides the most effective impetus for attaining one's goals (c.f. Koestner et al., 2002), so this exercise helps one to determine the nature of one's motivation.

In the case that no single reason stands out, the user will need a means of determining the nature of the motivation, so a mathematical process has been created. It is important to note that the math involved (simple addition) is not intended to be scientifically accurate; rather it is to be an aide to the person using it to help determine the nature of their motivation. If the form were to be computerized, for example, these results would become much more accurate; however there is also the question of how much good this extra accuracy would do. If one is not certain of one's reasoning this may be a demonstration of internal conflict. It is hoped that by assigning numbers the user will gain clarity as to their overall motivation.

The congruency worksheet does a similar thing for values and interests, paying special attention to conflicts that arise. The literature suggests that internal conflict lessens the effectiveness of goals (Koestner et al., 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), so this worksheet has been designed to help the setter identify any values-based conflicts that may need to be resolved.

If the motivation is neither intrinsic nor identified, or if conflicts arise with values and interests, one can determine that the goal is not likely to be efficiently followed. One should reconsider this goal, however it will often not be necessary to discard it altogether. Sometimes the goal can be reworded to eliminate these issues, and if this is the case then the goal-setting process may continue. If not, the goal setter must make a choice between eliminating the goal and accepting that he or she will not be able to efficiently follow it. Alternatively the user may decide to change his or her motivations, values, or interests however the techniques necessary to implement that choice is beyond the scope of this paper.

Planning.

Koestner et al. (2002) stress that planning is critical to effectively pursuing a goal. "... People often fail to develop a specific action plan for how they will attain their goals. Thus they fail to specify when they will initiate ... and how they will ensure their persistence in the face of distractions and obstacles" (Koestner et al., 2002).

They suggest that one should create implementation intentions, a specific plan for automating the responses necessary for achieving one's goals. Because having automatic responses decreases the number of decisions that must be made there are less opportunities to falter in the pursuit of one's goals (Koestner et al., 2002). "Action initiation becomes swift and efficient and does not require conscious intent because the direct control of one's behavior has been passed to the environment" (Koestner et al., 2002).

Unfortunately their example, a professor that wishes to drink eight glasses of water a day, lacks the level of detail required in daily life. The fictitious professor has an action plan for how to drink eight glasses of water in normal conditions, at work at his desk, but the plan makes no mention of the complexities of real life. What does he do when he is in class? How about when he is at a conference? What if he has a side business that requires regular travel? How does he plan to do this at home?

Martial arts have faced a similar problem since the day of their inception: how does one train the novice to "expect the unexpected" and deal with it automatically? Within the military there is a well-known maxim, "no battle plan survives initial contact with the enemy", yet they are known for their extensive planning and preparation. Properly defined automatic responses are required by the nature of combat because there is not time for thought. Those that must think about their responses very often wind up dead.

Similar to the way the modern military "over plans the wrong thing", martial artists generally rely choreographed forms to teach the principles of combat in a way that grants automaticity. No martial arts instructor believes that their students will encounter the exact situation that the form shows; yet they use these forms anyway. The reason for this is an Asian concept known in Japanese as "Shu Ha Ri". Roughly translated as "hold, break, leave" (Wikipedia, 2005; Fox, 1995), this concept has application in a wide range of subject material.

One example is that of the computer programmer (Wikipedia, 2005). The novice programmer needs explicit direction – a solid form to follow – or they cannot get anything done. As the novice progresses he or she begins to learn the patterns behind what they are doing they can more easily identify which pattern that they have used is appropriate and they begin to automatically use these patterns. As they continue learning they eventually learn the principles of "good software engineering" and come to understand that the patterns themselves are only examples of these higher principles of programming. At this point they can leave the patterns behind and use the principles to guide them to the correct answer automatically.

The way that martial artists (and the modern military) practice "Shu Ha Ri" is to practice as many different possibilities as they can think of with the intention of internalizing the principles being sought. While the literature does not directly apply these principles to the topic of goal setting, it has been claimed that this can be an effective method of automatizing the behavioral principles needed to attain a given goal (Price, 2005).

Unfortunately there is no direct support for the explicit use of "Shu Ha Ri" in goal planning; however there is abundant evidence that extensive planning is needed (Koestner et al., 2002). Because of this lack of evidence, the "planning" worksheet (appendix G) does not go into detail about the principles of "Shu Ha Ri"; rather it was created with planning and circumstances

in mind as suggested by the literature. The worksheet asks the user to create an action plan. Then the user lists all of the obstacles that he or she can think of, with any alternatives for that step which can be used to overcome the obstacle. It would be preferable to create a worksheet for this step that explicitly uses the "Shu Ha Ri" principles in planning, however more research in this area is clearly needed before that can be presented.

Feedback (Cox, 2002; Price, 2005) is also addressed in the planning stages. In particular the user is asked to plan a weekly time to consider their goals and they are encouraged to keep a log of their progress towards the goal if appropriate.

Environment

Environmental concerns – the situation and circumstances that surround the goal – make a great difference in efficiently attaining the given goal; how much control one has in bringing the goal to fruition is critical. The planning worksheet mentioned above (appendix G) has the additional effect of forcing the user to consider environmental variables during the "alternatives" stage.

Summary

This paper presented the results of a project where the author created a methodology for setting and maintaining "meaningful goals" as a means to "realize dreams" based on what is known in the literature. A definition for "meaningful goals" was presented along with a methodology that considers "three centers" of achieving goals: the goal itself, the person setting the goal, and the situation or environment of the goal. No attempt was made at considering creating goals for groups, though the material presented here should be useful for that purpose as well.

There is still much research to be done in goal achievement, especially in the "planning area". In particular, the Asian concept of "Shu Ha Ri" should be examined from a scientific perspective to see if it is applicable to creating "principle based" automatized plans that would enable the goal setter to create complex automatic behaviors to aid in goal setting.

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Appendix A

Interests and Priorities Worksheets

Instructions: Using the interests worksheet (below), make a list of everything that you are interested in – no matter how little you are interested in it – leaving a little space to the left of the item. Be sure to include ideas that you do not necessarily believe that you can achieve – the point of this exercise is not to create goals, but to gain a greater insight into your own interests. GFI's ("Get Fired Idea", an idea that is so outrageous that it would get you fired if you seriously suggested it at work) are important to this process, so if you think, "I'd love to be a starship captain and explore the Milky Way galaxy!" write it down! You never know where these kinds of ideas can lead you.

Remember: this list is dynamic. If you think of something when you're "done", write it down! If you see patterns emerging, make a note somewhere and continue with your list, and don't be afraid to use more than one line for an interest.

Then go back and examine your list. For each item, ask yourself "how interested am I in this?" Rate these items on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "barely interested" and 10 being "very interested" and mark your rating down in the left hand column. Once you have a number in the first column, look at the list you've created. Are there any patterns or higher-level interests that emerge? Is there a way to group the things that you are most interested in (the 9s and 10s)?

Using the priorities worksheet (below), list your top ten interests or interest groups in order of priority; that is, if you had to choose between them which interest or group would you choose?

Priorities Worksheet

<u>Priority</u>	<u>Interest or Interest Group</u>
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____

Appendix B

Fond Accomplishments Worksheet

Instructions: Using the "list of fond accomplishments" worksheet (below), make a list of your "fond accomplishments". A "fond accomplishment" is an accomplishment that you can recall with some sort of "fondness". Being in the Olympic games, an accomplishment that seems to be a positive representative of you as a person, or an accomplishment that brings positive (self-esteem building) memories to mind are all examples of "fond accomplishments".

Once you achieve a goal, you should add this to your list of "fond accomplishments". Keep this list handy; it is an objective record of where you have been and may come in useful when things get difficult. It's a good idea to review it occasionally to remind yourself how far you have come.

Fond Accomplishments Worksheet

Accomplishments

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Aspect 1: What is the process that you wish to improve with this goal? What method(s) or general activities do you wish to improve (i.e. "Batting")?

Aspect 2: What is the performance that you would like to attain with this goal? Be sure to be as specific as possible (i.e. "Run a mile in less than five minutes").

Aspect 3 (optional): What outcome do you wish to attain with this goal?

Appendix E

Active Goals Worksheet

Instructions: Pick two or three short-term goals identified above and list them below. Be sure to only list two or three – concentrating on too many goals at once is a sure way to not achieve any of them. Be sure to be specific and to refer to a filled out goal evaluation worksheet for the goal.

Currently Active Goals

Goal 1:

Goal 2:

Goal 3:

Appendix F

Motivation and Congruency Worksheet

Instructions: Using the motivation worksheet below, make a list of all the reasons that you want to achieve this goal. Alternatively if there is one over-riding reason you do not need to make the list – you can evaluate that reason. Then pick one of the following that best describes that reason: "Exciting/Enjoyable", "I feel that it's Valuable", "If I didn't I'd feel bad (or not gain a reward)", or "Because I have to". For each "Exciting/Enjoyable" write the number "4" in the rating column. Write "3" for "Valuable", "2" for "If I didn't I'd feel bad (or not gain a reward)", and "1" for "Because I have to" write "1". Once you have generated a list of reasons, circle the three reasons that are the most important to you. If one reason stands out above the others at this point (or if you are evaluating a single reason) then look at the number associated with that reason. Otherwise add up the "rating" numbers to get the total. If the total does not add up to 9 or higher for three reasons, or to a 3 or 4 for a single reason, you may need to reconsider the goal.

Next fill out the congruency worksheet (below). Write the title of your goal in the space provided and then write down all of the interests and values (see appendix A) that this goal corresponds to. Then, in the space provided, write the word "congruent" if the goal is in line with the interest or value or the word "conflicting" if it is not.

Next you should examine the congruency worksheet for instances of "conflicting". If there are a lot of conflicts then you may need to reconsider the goal. If there are only a few conflicts then try to determine how important these conflicts are and if there is something you can do in planning about them.

If you need to reconsider a goal, go back to the Goal Structure worksheet and examine it based on the conflicts that you have just identified. Is there a way that you can reword, or restructure, the goal to avoid these conflicts? If you cannot remove the conflicts in some way, seriously consider giving up the goal – these conflicts will hinder your progress, and in sufficient number they may even prevent you from attaining it. If you choose not to give up the goal make sure that you include these conflicts in your plan (below).

Appendix G

Planning Worksheet

Instructions: Once you have decided on a goal, you will need to plan how you intend to reach it. When, where, what, and how must all be addressed in detail, and alternatives will need to be created for when obstacles arise. In the worksheet below create your plan in detail under the "action plan" section, listing all of the action steps you believe are needed to achieve the goal. Create your plan in such a way that it becomes a habit that you can follow automatically. A baseball player may plan an action step, for example, to practice batting for at least one hour a day beginning at 6pm.

Once you have created your action steps ask yourself "what could go wrong? What could prevent me from following through?" In the "alternatives" section, list the obstacles that you may encounter and your plan for dealing with the obstacle. Be sure to include external obstacles (i.e. "travel") as well as internal obstacles (i.e. "confidence").

Include times for feedback in your plan as well. You should set aside a regular time to review your goals and your progress towards those goals. If your goal allows it, keep a log or journal to track your progress. Don't be concerned if you need to re-evaluate certain portions of your goal – rework whatever worksheets are necessary. Also be sure to track your accomplishments as you work on this goal, and to review your accomplishments whenever you feel the need.

Planning Worksheet

The Action Plan:

Alternatives

Action Step

Obstacle

Alternative