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How to Reach Beyond Your Goals

By Nick Venturella, creator of the GrowLoop Journaling system

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Table of Contents:

- ▶ A quick introduction
- ▶ Why should you listen to me about goal setting?
- ▶ Let's be smart about your goals
- ▶ What's the alternative?
- ▶ Enter: Journaling
- ▶ A little of my own journaling story
- ▶ How I set goals and achieve them now
- ▶ How I use the GrowLoop Journal
- ▶ Your Turn

A quick introduction

First off, your SMART goals may not be so smart. This content is a bit about how to set goals, but it's more about, once you've established your goals, how to pursue achieving them without making yourself feel miserable.

Introduction:

- ▶ I'm a creative professional.
- ▶ Went to college for art and design.
- ▶ Got out of school in January of 2002 and initially made a living as a professional musician and freelance marketer doing primarily graphic design and copywriting work.
- ▶ As an entrepreneur, I learned how to apply marketing strategies and tactics. Soon I landed marketing-related roles in commercial real estate, nonprofit higher education, and most recently in the software industry.



Nick Venturella, GrowLoop Journal Creator

Why should you listen to me about goal setting?

Well, you shouldn't, if you're doing something that works well for you. You should continue to do that.

However, having worked for myself, nonprofit institutions and large corporations a common thread is that identifying goals and working toward reaching them is how forward progress and growth occurs for both organizations and the individuals who make them up.

Let's be smart about your goals

You've heard of SMART goals, right? They're Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time bound goals. But sometimes it's hard to meet your goals even if they're SMART goals.

What's going on when goals aren't met? What's the failure point?

- ▶ Goal is not clear
- ▶ Required too drastic a change to achieve the goal
- ▶ Metric to determine progress is not clear or not properly tracked to indicate needed corrections if off course

Psychology Today contributing author Ray Williams wrote an article in the Financial Post called, "[Why Goal Setting Doesn't Work](#)." The article talks about organizations that focus on intense stretch goals. These are goals that:

- ▶ Are too Narrow, which neglects non-goal areas (and let's face it, life happens)
- ▶ Can lead to unethical behavior - "Do or Die" complex...meet the goal at all costs
- ▶ Require big routine/habit changes that lead to resistance

Williams' article uncovered that if goals feel too restrictive, or to reach them will require a major change in your routines/habits, resistance will kill your motivation to achieve these goals. You'll be sunk before you start.

What's the alternative?

- ▶ Choose less grandiose goals
- ▶ Identify goals that can be broken down into smaller, more achievable chunks
- ▶ Concentrate on small wins more often

Identify smaller tasks that can be completed more easily, and potentially, more frequently. More small victories over time = big victory. This can reduce the psychological overwhelm that can occur when the actions to reach goals seem too daunting to even begin.

Enter: Journaling

I may be biased, but I recommend journaling as the vehicle by which to document goals, necessary actions, and your progress because it leads to self-awareness.

Capturing your goal on paper in a journal is a great start. However, it's when you consistently document your daily pursuit of the goal and express not only tasks and victories achieved but also the non-goal areas of your everyday life, that you create a self-guided feedback loop allowing you to become more self-aware - this is what I refer to as the GrowLoop.

Exploring those non-goal areas creates healthy subconscious think time - in my opinion, that's where a lot of growth occurs to put you in position to achieve your version of success.

A little of my own journaling story...

As a creative professional I kept a journal to work out ideas for my craft. My journaling was reasonably consistent, and I often identified goals in my writing. However, if I was down or depressed my motivation to journal and/or work on my goals diminished.

A couple of years ago I started working from home full-time, and here's what happened:

I got depressed from the isolation, but I found when I journaled about events I was grateful for in that day, or acts of kindness I provided to others that day, my mindset felt more positive and I was more motivated to pursue the tasks and goals I needed to complete that day.

I started journaling like this more regularly. The more I identified areas of gratitude the more I felt positive. The more I took daily action towards my goals and I documented those actions in my journal. Same with identifying victories towards my goals. The gratitude seemed to help me stay positive, motivated and productive.

Then I found articles that included Dr. James Pennebaker's research - a psychologist and leading expert on Expressive Writing. The research identified emotional/mental and even physiological immune health improvements as a result of keeping a daily journal.

That inspired the [GrowLoop Journaling system](#) - where you identify goals, document your daily progress by journaling, and within the daily journaling practice there are writing prompts to ensure you're taking action on your goals, documenting victories and documenting your gratitude and acts of kindness to help address and track your mood to inspire motivation and productivity.

How I set goals and achieve them now

I set fewer goals. Typically, one large main goal in a 12 month period. Too many goals leads to overwhelm and the likelihood that you won't complete any of them.

My goals don't always strictly abide by the SMART goal rules. My opinion is that it's a given that goals should be Attainable and Relevant...that leaves Specific, Measurable and Time bound.

By being specific about the goal, you should be able to understand and articulate what successfully reaching the goal will look like. In other words, understand how you will know when you've achieved your goal. That's likely where you'll uncover the best way to measure your goal. Being able to point to something quantifiable can be helpful (i.e. money earned/saved, time saved, or knowledge acquired). Certainly, it's important to have a time frame in which you want to reach your goal, so give yourself a deadline. I recommend 6 to 12 months.

How I use the GrowLoop Journal

- ▶ **Goals** - Write a couple brief sentences to serve as a goal definition at the top of the first blank journal page.

“I will be successful this year if I...” (be specific about what you want to achieve and why, how you will quantify your progress - measure it - and on what timeline - in this case, the year)

- ▶ **Daily Writing / Prompts** - Date each day's journal entry and write/reflect freely, but do make time to address the simple daily writing prompts to...
 - ▶ **[A]** Identify at least one **action** you'll take that day towards your goal
 - ▶ **[V]** identify at least one **victory** you achieved that day or the day before toward your goal as a result of an action
 - ▶ **[K]** identify one act of **kindness** you bestowed on someone else today or yesterday (no matter how big or small)
 - ▶ **[G]** identify at least one thing you're **grateful** for today

The above, are all tools you can use with any journal, not just the GrowLoop Journal.

However, in the GrowLoop Journal the prompts have point values associated with completing them each day.

That daily prompt score, along with your overall mood score (how you feel during/after writing), is tracked in the **Happiness Tracker** in the back of the Journal. This simply helps you easily identify trends in your mood and productivity over time. Ideally the more you journal and follow the prompts each day, the more you build positive habits to increase your confidence to fuel a happier, healthier disposition that allows you to be productive and reach your goals.

How I use the GrowLoop Journal (cont.)

- ▶ **Monthly Goal Progress** - Then once a month go back through the previous month's writings and write a summary sentence or two under your original goal statement in the beginning of the journal with the heading being the name of the month you're referring to.
 - ▶ This becomes an index of your monthly milestones leading to your goal fulfillment.
 - ▶ As you get several months worth you'll easily be able to see how on track you are and whether or not you need to accelerate your progress or potentially extend your deadline (if possible).

Your Turn

Want to find out if journaling to feel better *and* achieve your goals is right for you?

Simply pick up a notebook and use the prompts I shared in this ebook to get started. Do it for 30 days to see if it helps. If so and you want a more advanced version, pick up the GrowLoop Journal at [GrowLoop.com](https://www.growloop.com).

All the best,

-Nick