

## **CHAPTER 8: SET GOALS THAT CREATE STRUCTURE**

Once a person defines success, the next step is to set goals that support that definition.

By defining success, a person starts the process of rebuilding. From there, he must engineer a series of incremental goals to achieve, with each one building on the last or working in harmony with the intended result.

A person may say that he wants a better future, that he wants to prepare for success, or that he wants to live differently. Those statements lack specificity.

- » If a person says he wants “a better future,” shouldn’t he provide some context?
- » What does it mean to prepare for success if he doesn’t define what that means?
- » What does living differently mean if he does not explain how he intends to live?

When we take time to clarify what we mean by defining success, we empower ourselves to set goals that can deliver the result. Our goals will change as we move through stages, because we will empower ourselves along the way. Goals translate intention into action.

After defining success, a person can set goals that lead him in the right direction consistently. Without goals, the person may come across as an individual who claims to want to succeed, but then comes with excuses on why he never makes it. Serious people want to see goals. They don’t want to listen to fantasies or excuses.

Goals give a person something to work toward, regardless of external circumstances. They show that his actions align with the future he wants to build.

### **GOALS REQUIRE DAILY ACTION**

A person may define success but still fail to make meaningful progress. For example, a person may say:

- » I want to develop a skill that will advance me as a candidate for the job market.

- » I want to find 10 people who will join my coalition of support.
- » I want to persuade people that I am more than what my criminal record suggests.
- » I want to live as the CEO of my own life.

Each of those statements may reflect a better way of thinking. But unless the person asks harder questions, the definition remains too broad to guide conduct. He should ask:

- » What exactly will I do?
- » How often will I do it?
- » What work will advance my commitment?
- » How will I measure my follow through and progress?
- » What evidence will show that I am serious?

Those questions should lead to the behaviors, habits, and deadlines that validate commitment. In that sense, goals bring order to what might otherwise remain only a good intention.

The prison environment makes it easy for a person to delay, react, or live with broad hopes that never turn into a plan. For those who refuse to take responsibility, prison can become the land of excuses, or the deadly condition of “it’s-not-my-fault-it-is.” When a person sets goals, he creates a structure that helps him use time more deliberately. He can own every decision he makes, becoming ruthlessly accountable.

## **GOALS LEAD TO INCREMENTAL PROGRESS**

With a sentence that would confine me for multiple decades, I understood that I would have to adjust my perspective. I could not dwell on the 45 years my judge imposed. Rather, I had to break the journey down, understanding the smaller steps I could take to make incremental progress.

Unless something changed, I would remain in prison until I was 49. In my view, I considered myself an unlikely candidate for employment. By projecting into the future, I could see the parade of horrors that might follow. As I stated previously, I accepted the likelihood that unemployment or underemployment could become distinct possibilities in my future. For that reason, I began thinking about steps I could take to use time inside productively. I wanted to increase the likelihood of

building financial resources. If successful, I intended to leave prison with enough resources to last at least one year, regardless of whether anyone employed me. As I began thinking more clearly about success, I organized my strategy around three broad categories:

- » I would educate myself.
- » I would contribute to society in measurable ways.
- » I would build a support network.

Those categories were not goals by themselves. They were areas of focus that helped me think more clearly about what I needed to build.

- » To demonstrate my commitment to education, I set a goal of earning at least one university degree during my first decade inside.
- » To show my commitment to contribution, I set a goal of becoming a published author within ten years.
- » To prove that I had a strong coalition of support, I set a goal of building relationships with ten people who could stand beside me and advocate for me through the journey.

Goals help a person take something large and break it into parts he can actually pursue. Since I understood what I wanted to accomplish during my first ten years, I could reverse engineer what I should achieve during the first five years, the first three years, and the first year. I could regularly assess whether my actions aligned with my plan or whether I needed to adjust.

## **GOALS BUILD CONFIDENCE**

The criminal justice journey leads to stress. A person facing charges may feel uncertainty about sentencing. A person preparing to surrender may fear the prison experience. A person in prison may feel trapped by routine, distance from family, and long periods of waiting. A person nearing release may feel anxiety about housing, employment, supervision, or reintegration.

When a person sets goals that align with how he defines success, he begins to restore confidence. The plan and the goals strengthen his ability to make decisions. He knows what he is trying to accomplish this week, this month, and in every stage of the journey. Today's goals will lead to new opportunities. That framework helps him keep moving, even when the pressures of prison feel difficult.

In that sense, goals convert uncertainty into structure. They help the person respond to the burdens of confinement more productively, in a self-directed way. If he develops his profile by recording the incremental goals he sets and achieves along the way, he builds a portfolio of assets that he can later use to advocate for better outcomes at every stage of the journey.

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## **GOALS SHOULD EVOLVE**

By achieving incremental goals, a person advances. He puts himself on the pathway to new opportunities. The goals should evolve as he moves through every phase of the journey. A person facing charges may need goals related to:

- » learning how the system works,
- » building a mitigation narrative,
- » organizing records,
- » starting a release plan,
- » and creating stronger routines before sentencing.

A person preparing to surrender may need goals related to:

- » preparing reading material,
- » planning a writing routine,
- » strengthening family communication,
- » understanding prison realities,
- » and entering confinement with a framework rather than confusion.

A person in prison may need goals related to:

- » reading consistently,
- » writing biography and journal entries,
- » creating book reports,
- » improving physical health,
- » building educational discipline,
- » and revising a release plan over time.

A person nearing release may need goals related to:

- » strengthening support systems,
- » clarifying employment strategy,
- » refining reentry plans,
- » anticipating obstacles,
- » and showing a record of sustained preparation.

Goals become useful when they fit the person's present reality. If a person chases goals that belong to some other stage while neglecting the work he should be doing now, he may waste energy and lose direction.

## **MEASURE PROGRESS / OWN THE RESULTS**

Your goals should support the commitment you made when you defined success. Make sure the goals you set align with that definition. Use them to answer questions such as:

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- » What exactly am I trying to complete?
- » What habit am I trying to strengthen?
- » What written record will show that I followed through?
- » What would count as visible evidence of progress?

For that reason, useful goals often include some combination of:

- » a time frame to complete,
- » a measurable quantity,
- » a routine,
- » a written definition of the intended result.

For example:

- » Write three journal entries this week.
- » Complete one book report every two weeks.
- » Revise my biography once a month.
- » Update my release plan every quarter.
- » Read for one hour each day.
- » Exercise for a minimum of one hour every day.
- » Build a reading list for the next three months.
- » Write a book report for every book that I read and publish the report on my profile.
- » Write letters to three people who may become part of my support network.

Those goals are useful because they make commitment self-evident. When a person can measure what he said he would do, he can compare intention with performance. Without that comparison, people often confuse hope with progress. That can lead to excuses, which does not advance the mission. Stay focused on the mission, which is to prepare for the next chapter of your life, regardless of what you're going through now.

By publishing on the profile, the person also builds a record that shows a commitment to being self-directed and intrinsically motivated. Each entry on the profile is time-stamped, creating a record that may lead to new opportunities. Such efforts align with living as the CEO of your life.

## **USE SMART GOALS**

One practical way to test a goal is to use the SMART framework. SMART goals are:

- » Specific,

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- » Measurable,
- » Achievable,
- » Realistic and relevant, and
- » Time-bound.

This framework works well because many people begin with goals that are too broad to guide daily conduct. A person may say that he wants to prepare for release, become more disciplined, or improve his life. Those goals point in the right direction, but they still need more structure before they can guide consistent action.

- » A goal is specific when it clearly identifies what the person will do.
- » A goal is measurable when the person can track whether he completed it.
- » A goal is achievable when it fits the person's actual circumstances.
- » A goal is relevant when it supports the larger definition of success.
- » A goal is time-bound when it includes a deadline or review period.

Consider the difference between these two statements:

- » I want to prepare for release.
- » Over the next 30 days, I will develop my personal profile by publishing eight journal entries, one book report, an update to my biography, and an update to my release plan.

The second statement gives the person a standard by which he can judge his effort. It tells him what he intends to do, how much he intends to do, and by when he intends to complete it. It also creates a written record that may later support self-advocacy.

SMART goals are useful because they force clarity. They require the person to think beyond desire and into execution. A person still has to choose the right goals and follow through with discipline, but the SMART framework helps him test whether his plan is strong enough to guide action rather than merely express hope.

I encourage people to create goals that connect naturally to the record they should be building with the profile. A person's goals should show up in:

- » biography updates,
- » journal entries,
- » book reports,
- » release plans,
- » and other written records that document growth.

For example:

- » If the goal is to build self-awareness, the biography should become more thoughtful and complete.



- » If the goal is to build consistency, the journals should show whether the person is following through week after week.
- » If the goal is to grow through reading, book reports should show what the person is learning and how he plans to apply it.
- » If the goal is to prepare for life after prison, the release plan should become more detailed, more realistic, and more useful over time.

This connection between goals and documentation is important for a simple reason. A written record allows a person to revisit his commitments honestly. It also allows others to see whether his preparation is real. That record may strengthen credibility with family members, mentors, case managers, attorneys, probation officers, or any stakeholder who wants to know whether the person is using time productively.

Once the person develops consistency, he can revise the plan, expand it, or increase expectations. In the beginning, it is better to build a small number of goals that can survive real conditions. If a person is serious, he should review his goals regularly and ask:

- » Did I follow through?
- » What got in the way?
- » Does this goal still fit the stage I am in?
- » What should I change?
- » What evidence do I have that the effort is real?

Review goals, compare progress against actual conduct, and adjust. That process helps a person become more self-aware. It also reduces the chance that he will continue telling himself a story about progress that the record does not support.

### **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**

1. What goals fit the stage of life I am in right now?
2. Which of my current goals are too broad to guide daily action?
3. How could I rewrite one of my goals so that it becomes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound?
4. What can I complete over the next week, month, or quarter that would show visible progress?
5. Which of my goals should become visible in my biography, journals, book reports, or release plan?
6. What habits do I need to strengthen if I want my goals to become part of my routine?
7. Describe three goals in SMART terms today that would help you create

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stronger structure in the stage of life you are living now.  
Defining success gives direction. Goals create structure. Once a person knows what he is trying to build and begins setting measurable commitments around that vision, he moves closer to living as if he is the CEO of his life.



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