

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF YOUR LIFE

"If you do not live the life you believe, you will believe the life you live."

Zig Ziglar

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

Aristotle

"Come, whoever you are! Wanderer, Worshipper, Lover of Leaving. Come, this is not a caravan of despair. It doesn't matter if you've broken your vow a thousand times. Still and yet again, come."

Rumi

Taking ownership of your life of course presupposes that you want to. If this seems like a daunting task, consider the alternative. If you don't live your life the way you want to, you'll be living your life the way others want you to, in someone else's script. In these times of uncertainty and volatility, the only safe future is the one that you make entirely yours.

We hear repeatedly how important goals are, but why is that so?

Setting goals and cultivating them creates a structure that supports us and propels us forward in taking ownership of what we want to create in and for our future. Once we identify something as a goal, we've already visualized that as a future we want.

The act of visualizing and affirming what you want sets a part of the brain, the Reticular Activating System, into motion. It then starts scanning the environment for that which you have now identified as important. Because of this, it's very important to have your goals be specific, detailed and time-bound. Otherwise, you may get only part of what you want or in a context that you don't want.

Since goals are a manifestation of our identity and our purpose, of what we value and aspire to, it's imperative to think about what you want your results to reflect and manifest. Goals must be anchored in that which is truly important to us – otherwise, they become a list on the refrigerator.

Sometimes it's helpful to envision the big picture first, and then work our way backwards into the smaller goal steps that are necessary to achieve the bigger picture. I find it helpful to periodically revisit a couple of questions as a check on how my actions towards goals are aligned with my vision and my values.

- *What values do my actions (or my company's practices) currently reflect?*
- *What kind of world do I want to create or help to create, for myself and others?*

Another powerful dimension of setting and cultivating goals is that in large part, the benefit of having goals is what we learn in the process of accomplishing them. Who we become in the process of achieving our goals is as important, if not more so, than what we actually accomplish in the goal itself.

Working with goals provides continuous learning and development, which is at the very heart of being able to take ownership of one's life. We get to learn not only about specific areas of endeavor, but also about life in general, what's useful and what's not, what works and what doesn't, how the pieces of the whole fit together.

Plus we learn about new things we want or need to learn. And we learn how to improve at learning. Goals serve as an engine for movement and momentum, and become the milestones through which we actualize and manifest our potential.

Because the learning occurs on multiple levels, you create a powerful multiplier effect towards both knowledge and wisdom when you set and cultivate goals.

Where to start?

First of all, if you haven't yet made a list of all your accomplishments in 2003, please do so now! Particularly, if you tend toward high standards and/or perfectionism, this task will give you a solid sense of how much you really did accomplish last year, and an awareness of what you can build on for this coming year.

A few safety tips:

1. In your year-end review and thinking about the new year, remember to consider all areas of your life – family and relationships, work/career, physical health, learning and development, financial health, and spiritual life.
2. Beware of setting goals to master areas that are not natural strengths for you – this takes a lot of energy and often isn't successful. It's better to come up with solutions to handle your weaknesses than try to turn them into strengths.
3. Often people have goals in mind but don't write them down. Write them down!!! This externalizes them and concretizes the structure of ownership. I used to be pretty lackadaisical about writing goals down until I learned that people who write their goals down are 80% more likely to achieve them than people who don't!
4. Don't discount small goals! We build habits of success one step at a time.

May 2004 be the year when you break out and break through to the hope, joy, self-care, contribution, mastery, expansion, and true well-being that is yours to have!