



1 February 2013

### Practical actions that support goal setting

1. Open a file or buy a notebook specifically for your goal planning.
2. Start by identifying around 3 goals that really matter to you. Define them exactly – make sure they are specific, realistic and measurable. Now you're ready to start!
3. For each goal, make a table where the heading of the first column is 'What will I do exactly and in detail?' The second column should be headed 'When will I do it?' Write at least 5 'implementation intentions' against *each* goal.
4. Now turn your mind to the likely obstacles that risk derailing your goal. Again for each goal, make a table in 2 columns as follows: 'barriers' and 'tactics'. Complete this in as much detail as you can.
5. Finally, review everything you have written and add even more detail where you can see any gaps.
6. As a guide, the research shows you will need to spend around 2 to 3 hours on this written planning. But the latest studies all show the same thing: the method really works! Why don't you get started? There's no time like the present...

## GOAL SETTING THAT WORKS!

### *Goal setting: facing the facts!*

The beginning of a new year is a time when we often review how we feel our lives are going and set goals, both personal and professional. But, as we all know, it's also a time of broken resolutions, dropped commitments and quietly buried goals! The truth is most people's attempts at goal setting don't work.

However, this cold, hard fact doesn't mean we shouldn't bother! Considerable research confirms that we're much less likely to achieve the things that matter to us, if we just have some vague ideas, wishes or day dreams about what we really want.

If you're like any of our UGM coaching clients, you want to set goals that matter to you and you want to know how to do it, so you can give yourself the very best chance of success. In this newsletter we'll share the most up-to-the-minute research findings from around the world on goal setting. Then, in two future newsletters, we'll explore vital related issues about visualising success and mobilising willpower to get your goals over the line. Taken together, these three newsletters will give you a superb practical plan for 2013, just like the ones we design with our coaching clients.

### *Goal setting research a huge and growing field!*

We're assuming you already know that defining your goals is the right place to start. For many years now, we've known that goals need to be specific, realistic and measurable. But even so, the researchers saw that this didn't seem to be enough. Even utter conviction didn't seem to cut it! In fact, it seems there's virtually no link between the strength of someone's intention and the likelihood that they will make the changes they need in order to reach their goals. Someone who feels desperate to find a much more fulfilling job is no more likely to succeed than someone who is only slightly motivated! Wow! So let's take a look at what does make a difference. To do this, we've chosen four exciting studies published in peer-reviewed journals in the last couple of years. UGM clients are already using these findings to great effect and we feel sure you will too.

### *How to move from intentions to implementation*

A ground breaking study begun at the University of Sussex, UK, took two groups of women who shared the same goal of wanting to lose weight. All the women were given sound advice on diet and exercise and after two months they came back together to see how they'd managed with their goals. On average, those in Group 1 each lost a couple of kilos. But the women in Group 2 lost double. Imagine if you were able to double the results of your effort towards a goal – or perhaps get there in half the time. We think you'd be interested! What exactly did the researchers teach Group 2?

It turns out that those in Group 2 got something extra. They were shown how to make a specific type of plan, called by psychologists an 'implementation intention'. Essentially, they had to detail explicit action plans about exactly how and when they would take the steps they needed. One key finding was that such plans must be written down – it wasn't enough even to tell someone. It seems that writing down specific steps makes our commitments more real. The box at the side will give you the instructions Group 2 got.

### *How many 'implementation intentions' are enough?*

This question was taken up by Amelie Wiedemann and her team in Berlin. By the way, Wiedemann is widely regarded as the world's foremost expert on the psychology of goal setting. In one of those studies that scientists call 'elegant', the Berlin team divided 478 volunteers into 6 groups. The first five were told about the theory behind 'implementation intentions'. They were asked to write down one of these 'what and when' action plans, with Group 1 writing one intention, Group 2 two intentions and so on. But Group 6 members were not taught about implementation intentions. Instead, they completed several questionnaires related to their goals. When the researchers followed up, they found that it was only the groups that had generated 4 or 5 of these 'what and when' plans that achieved their goals. So the message is – *identifying one step isn't enough.*

### *What about when you strike obstacles?*

Here a study neatly demonstrated that we all need a contingency plan or 'coping intention'. Realistically, we're going to confront obstacles along the way. Researchers found that even if not all obstacles can be predicted (life is life!), thinking ahead about the most likely ones prepares us to overcome them.

### *How much planning is enough?*

Finally, with all this talk of detailed planning, you'd be right to ask: just how much of it do we need to do? A team at McGill University in Canada decided to examine this. They took 100 students who were performing so poorly they were at serious risk of being thrown out of university altogether. Half the students spent a full two and a half hours writing about their goals and implementation plans – in the way outlined here. The other half spent the same amount of time writing about their abilities in a positive and confident way. Four months later, the researchers found that the students who had been taught this systematic detailed planning method all improved considerably – not one was in danger of being thrown out. But the students who'd been asked simply to think positively showed no improvement.

The right kind of planning pays dividends when it comes to goals you really care about!