

# **Most People Aim At Nothing In Life... And Hit It With Amazing Accuracy**

**By Dr. Tony Alessandra**

There's an old saying: "Most people aim at nothing in life . . . and hit it with amazing accuracy." It's a sad commentary about people, but it's true. It is the striving for and the attainment of goals that makes life meaningful. Lewis Carroll stated this point beautifully in Alice in Wonderland:

ALICE: Mr. Cat, which of these paths shall I take?

CHESHIRE CAT: Well, my dear, where do you want to go?

ALICE: I don't suppose it really matters.

CHESHIRE CAT: Then, my dear, any path will do!

No matter what kind of traveling you're doing, whether it's through life or across the country by car, if you don't know where you're going, you'll never know if you've arrived. Taking just any road will leave your fulfillment to chance. That's not good enough.

People who have no goals feel emotionally, socially, spiritually, physically, and professionally unbalanced. This can only cause anxiety. People who have goals are respected by their peers; they are taken seriously. Making decisions that affect the direction of your life positively is a sign of strength. Goals create drive and positively affect your personality.

## **The 3-Percent Solution**

Time magazine reported on a national survey several years ago that only 3 percent of those surveyed had written personal goals; 97 percent of the people had no goals at all or had only thought about them. They had not committed their goals to writing. Interestingly the 3 percent who had written goals were found to have accomplished much more than any of the 97 percent.

## **Stepping-stones to Greatness**

Achievements come from awareness, which starts with evaluating your strengths and weaknesses in the light of your current situation. You then expand your beliefs (assumptions) to accept more goals for yourself. This leads you to set plans and expand your actions to eventually achieve your goals. The model for this process is:

**AWARENESS > BELIEFS > GOALS > PLANS > ACTIONS >  
ACHIEVEMENTS**

One step leads to another. After an achievement, you reevaluate yourself and find that each new feather in your cap makes you feel capable of accomplishing more and more. Your beliefs (assumptions) then expand, making more goals possible. The effect gains momentum and grows like a snowball rolling downhill. In this way, greatness is achieved through small steppingstones.

## Rules Of Goal Setting

Most people, when asked, "What are your goals in life?" say something like, "To be happy, healthy, and have plenty of money." On the surface this may seem fine. As goals leading to actions, however, they just don't make it. They don't have the key ingredients necessary to make them effective, workable goals.

**Your goal must be personal.** This means your goals must be uttered with sincerity. It must be something you *want* to do rather than something you think you *should* do. Know your reasons for having the goal. Whether you want to achieve something for status, money, or good health is secondary as long as you want it badly enough to work hard for it.

**Your goal must be positive.** Try not to think of green elephants! You can't do it. It's an automatic response to think of the thing you're told not to think about. This is because the mind cannot *not* think of something when told to. We tend to focus on ideas and actions from a positive framework. When you think a negative thought such as, "I will not smoke today," your mind perceives it as "I will smoke today." You end up thinking more about smoking than if you phrased it differently. "I will breathe only clean air today" is a statement that serves the same purpose and is more effective.

**Your goal must be written.** Writing a goal down causes effects that are a bit difficult to explain. It does, nonetheless, prove effective. Written goals take a jump in status from being nebulous thoughts (which you didn't care enough about to bona fide entities on paper. Perhaps their being written serves as a visual reminder and thus continually reconfirms their importance. Another possibility is that they can be seen in the statement from the movie, "The Ten Commandments": "So let it be written, so let it be done." When things are "put in writing" they become official in our minds. A written goal strengthens our commitment to accomplish it.

**Your goal must be specific.** If you set your goal by saying "I will increase my sales next year," chances are you won't do it. You need to be specific to avoid the lack of commitment that comes with being vague. A more workable and motivating goal would be, "I will increase my sales next year by 10 to 15 percent. This revised statement has several advantages. It defines the increase that you are striving for as well as the range of the desired increase. Giving yourself some leeway is more realistic than expecting to hit your goal at exactly 15 percent.

**Your goal must be a challenge.** A goal must motivate you to work harder than you have in the past. It must move you forward. Set your goals just beyond your reach so

that you'll have to stretch a bit. The more you stretch, the more limber your goal achieving abilities will become.

***Your goal must be realistic.*** Everything is relative to time and space. What is unrealistic today may be totally within reason five years from now. For years it was believed that the fastest a man could run a mile was in four minutes. It was unrealistic to aspire to running any faster until Dr. Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile in 1954. Since then hundreds of runners have done the same. In any field, we never really know what the upper limits are. How, then, do we define realistic? For our purposes, the best definition must come from you and your values. You must ask yourself, "What price am I willing to pay to accomplish this goal?" You should always weigh the payoffs and the sacrifices involved before coming to a conclusion. Realistic is ultimately your decision.

## **Working Toward Your Goals**

Now that you know the rules for setting goals, you can apply them to the goals you set for yourself. Here's an explanation of each of the areas you need to complete while Working Toward Your Goals...

***Define your goal.*** Your first task is to determine whether your goal meets all the requirements of the rules listed above. If it does, then write it as clearly as possible at the top of the worksheet.

***Examine obstacles that stand in your way.*** This is a time to guard against negative assumptions and other self-defeating thoughts. Remember the definition of realistic. An obstacle blocks you only if you let it. You should also write down your innovative ways of overcoming obstacles.

***W.I.I.F.M.—What's in it for me?*** Why do you want to achieve the goal? What kind of payoff is motivating you?

***Plan your action.*** You need to carefully list the steps you will take which will bring you closer to your goal. The smaller the increments the easier they will be to accomplish. There is a German proverb that says, "He who begins too much accomplishes little." As the American Dental Association is fond of saying, "Don't bite off more than you can chew."

***Project a target date for your goal.*** State your deadline range, such as, "between March 15 and April 1st." Think carefully about the amount of time you need. Too little time will increase the pressure and frustrate you. Too much time may reduce your drive.

***Know how you'll measure your success.*** Goals should be described in terms of the final outcome of an activity rather than as the activity. This is part of being specific. Instead of saying "I will be running more in four to six months," you could say "I'll be

running three miles instead of two miles in four to six months." How will you measure this? Probably by having one-third more blisters on your feet.

## **VISUALIZING: WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET**

Visualization is an indispensable tool in helping people attain their goals. Olympic athletes have proven that visualization is an effective substitute for real practice. In visualizing your goals, you will live your accomplishments in your mind's eye. The more of the five senses you can involve in this exercise the greater your chances are of accomplishment.

Let's say, for example, that you want to be the Salesperson of the Year in your company. You know that each year an awards banquet is given during which a plaque is presented to the year's sales leader. You may choose to focus on this banquet for your visualization exercise. Here's what you do:

Make yourself comfortable, close your eyes, and relax. Slowly and systematically go through all of the five senses. Imagine what you would be experiencing at the banquet.

**Sight.** Imagine what you would see there. You'd see other salespeople and their spouses. Imagine what they are wearing. You'd see tables decorated and waiters scurrying about. You'd see the bar and people standing around talking. Keep going for several minutes.

**Sound.** What would you hear? You'd hear the chatter of people. You would hear laughter, the tinkling of glasses, and music from a band, people talking. You would also continually hear people coming up to congratulate you. Imagine that.

**Smell.** Imagine all the smells you'd experience. Women's perfume, food, alcohol, men's cologne, the smell of polyester suits (not yours, of course).

**Feel.** What would your tactile sensations be? You'd feel people rubbing up against you in the crowded room. You'd feel others shaking your hand.

**Taste.** Taste in your mind the champagne you'll be drinking. Taste the food you'll be eating. Experience the sweet taste of success! In advance!

Most importantly, imagine the exhilaration you'll feel when your name is called to receive the award! Take your time during this exercise and enjoy it. The more you can "visually" attend this banquet the more motivated you will become. (You might even learn something about the catering business!)

### **The Visualization File**

To aid in your visualization exercise, you might want to start a visualization file. This is an envelope or file into which you put pictures, clippings, letters, and other reminders of what it will be like to succeed. Your file should also contain letters or awards that you have received in the past. Anything that makes you feel good about yourself can be included in the file. It can then be used as a source of motivation and inspiration, especially if you begin to feel a little down or demotivated. We all need to be reminded of our past accomplishments once in a while. Be your own best friend— remind yourself!

## ROLE MODELS

Many people concentrate only on the goal they wish to attain. There's more to the picture. Successful people in every field have certain character traits in common. These common traits do not occur by chance, they are an integral part of goal attainment. It is worth your time to analyze the constructive characteristics of people who are now where you'd like to be.

One effective method is to choose role models. These are people to look up to and emulate. Your choices can include people who are dead or living as long as you are familiar with their personalities and accomplishments.

Harry Truman knew the value of role models. When he was in the White House he reportedly went into the Lincoln bedroom, looked at the late president's picture and asked, "What would Lincoln have done if he were in my situation?" The answers to this question gave Truman the insight and direction he was seeking. It worked because Truman felt Lincoln was a man worth emulating.

In choosing a role model, several things must be kept in mind:

1. **Keep them off the pedestal.** There is no doubt that you will choose people whom you see as being "above" you because of what they have accomplished. That's good. What isn't good is to put them on a pedestal, thereby making them larger than life. We are all human. We all have strengths and weaknesses. You must not lose this perspective on people. Putting them on pedestals only further separates you from them.
2. **Isolate their strong points.** You need to look at the person you wish to emulate and analyze the precise qualities he or she possesses which you need to acquire. Sit down and write out the characteristics that seem to encourage their success. Use concrete examples of their behaviors that you can adapt to our own situation. For example, if you admire a corporate executive, one of the many traits you might isolate is her policy of "early to bed, early to rise." Write out approximately when she does each and why. You can then do the same and know the reason why you're doing it.
3. **Remain yourself.** Quite often the tendency when admiring someone is to try to become his clone. People who seem to "have it all together" have done all the "work" for you. All you have to do is imitate them. This is a dangerous way to think because you are not working on your own personality.

In the final analysis, you are you. It is impossible to become exactly like someone else. And why should you want to? So remain yourself while you acquire new traits to help you achieve your goals.

Sometimes it is helpful to have a symbol or another person's virtues. This symbol will actually remind you of that person and his or her qualities. It can take the form of a picture, a possession (e.g., your father's pocket watch), or some abstract thing such as a rock. It will be useful as long as it makes the association in your mind.

## MENTORS

A mentor is someone you admire under whom you can study. Throughout history the mentor-protégé relationship has proven quite fruitful. Socrates was one of the early mentors. Plato and Aristotle studied under him and later emerged as great philosophers in their own right. Mentors are worth cultivating if you can find one. The same cautions hold true here as for any role model. It is better to adapt their philosophies to your life than to adopt them. Be suspicious of any mentor who seeks to make you dependent on him. It's better to have him teach you how to fish than to have him catch the fish for you. That way you'll never starve.

Under the right circumstances mentors make excellent role models. The one-to-one setting is highly conducive to learning as well as to friendship.

## The THOUGHT DIET

The *thought diet*, developed by my friend and colleague Jim Cathcart, is a tool that you can use on a daily basis to help you become the person who will achieve your goals. It breaks down goals into daily actions that are bite-size and easy to do. By showing you the steps along the way, the thought diet will keep you from being overwhelmed by your lofty goals.

### Thought Diet Action Plan

On your thought diet card, write out the "minimum daily standards" which you will perform every day to move you closer to your goal. Be specific.

The following are some examples of minimum daily standards:

- **Mental:** I will spend 15 minutes every evening doing visualization exercises.
- **Physical:** I will do at least five push-ups and ten sit-ups every morning.
- **Professional:** I will read something related to my career for at least 15 minutes before going to bed.
- **Financial:** I will keep a complete record of every expense and financial transaction.
- **Spiritual:** Each day I will do a good deed to help someone less fortunate than I.

- **Family:** I will relax over dinner and enjoy a meaningful uninterrupted conversation with my family.
- **Social:** I will take time during my coffee breaks in the office to chat with co-workers.

## **Inspiration and Motivation**

Read the thought diet card twice a day until everything becomes a habit. Once you've developed constructive habits, you can move on to new goals and behaviors. Fill out a new card and practice the new challenges every day until they become habits. In this way, you will painlessly move closer and closer to your goals.

The dividends reaped by investing in yourself are unlike any other found in the financial world. When you clarify your values and set goals in all the major areas of your life-- mental, physical, family, social, spiritual, professional, and financial-- the right roads appear in front of you like mirages in the desert, yet they are real. Choices become infinitely easier to make because you are aiming at something specific, and you've taken a giant step toward hitting your goals...with amazing accuracy.

### **ARTICLE TAGLINE FOR DR. TONY ALESSANDRA**

Dr. Tony Alessandra has authored 13 books, recorded over 50 audio and video programs, and delivered over 2,000 keynote speeches since 1976. If you would like more information about Dr. Alessandra's books, audio tapesets and video programs, or about Dr. Alessandra as a keynote speaker, call his office at 1-800-222-4383 or visit his Website at <http://www.alessandra.com>