

MANAGEMENT

Goal Setting for a Prosperous Law Practice

By Kimberly Alford Rice

Goals provide long-term vision and short-term motivation, and help you to organize your time and resources so that you can maximize your concrete action steps. The following information will help you get started in your goal setting.

Quoting the great American industrialist Henry Ford, “Whether you think you can or whether you think you can’t, you’re right.” Studies show us that setting goals is a significant contributor to success in personal and professional life. Goals provide direction and purpose to our lives. Not only is having goals important to success, but setting achievable goals is important to reach your potential.

How To Set Goals

Before jumping ahead to tactics (the specific action steps you will undertake to accomplish your goals), the question “what do I really want to achieve” must be answered. The answer largely depends upon at what stage of your practice you find yourself. Whatever that may be, put

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a stake in the ground by declaring your goals.

While we advise that goals be realistic and attainable, you want to challenge and stretch yourself in the process. Be willing to extend a bit beyond your comfort zone. It does you no good to set goals that are beyond your realistic grasp, even with aggressive action steps to take you there.

The most productive way to state your goals is to actually write them down. Literally. There’s nothing like a good old piece of paper and a pen ... or, a keyboard and monitor, whatever the case may be.

What Next?

After honing in on your most important goals, the next step is to create a list of what steps you need to take to achieve them. This is the proverbial “where the rubber meets the road.”

By breaking down the goal, “expand my network,” you may want to consider the following action steps:

- Qualify who specifically I need in my network to increase my client base;
- Research to what business/professional organizations these individuals belong (think industry groups);
- Research local chapters of those targeted groups in your area and check event calendars; and
- Schedule event dates in business calendar and attend.

That is but one sliver of a “what next” action step. To outline a series of action steps to take in achieving a goal, continue to ask the “what next” question until you

have broken each action step into manageable tasks with a deadline by which you plan to have completed the individual task. By following this simple step-by-step process, you are well on your way to achieving your goals.

Stay on Track by Prioritizing

To make your action steps more achievable, outline a time frame, a way to track your steps further into smaller increments. For instance, instead of embarking on a yearly marketing plan, set smaller 90-day goals which may be broken down into monthly and even weekly goals.

As a lawyer coach, I am delighted when my clients approach their marketing plan execution in this manner, sending me their monthly goals and then updating me as they accomplish the steps needed to benchmark the goal. By these deliberative steps, I know they are committed to reaching their overall goals and our work together is valuable and worthwhile.

Sadly, many lawyers I’ve worked with over the years readily plan their billable work but do not take the same definitive steps to plan their nonbillable work. To paraphrase Harvard professor and business management advisor David Maister: “What you do with your billable hours determine your income, what you do with your nonbillable hours determines your future. Think of those nonbillable hours as investment time.” Seriously.

Step 1: Get Clear on What Your Goals Are
Begin by brainstorming poten-

tial goals. Think about what you want to accomplish in your practice, such as the clients you want to work with, the type of work you want to do more of, the lifestyle you'd like to enjoy. Remember, you can have more than one goal.

Once you have completed your list, think about and jot down why each goal is important to you and why you are motivated to achieve each goal.

Step 2: Draft Action Steps

This step is the "in the trenches" thinking wherein you outline specific steps you will take to accomplish each goal. Often, I brainstorm with my clients step-by-step on how to bring measurable results to each goal. We have found over the years, it is not so much that clients don't know *what* to do but rather *how* and *in what timeframe* to execute upon their specific action steps. In this step, it is best to be as specific as possible.

Step 3: Devise a Reasonable Timetable

Once you have written down your goals, why they are important to you (your motivation for achieving them) and the specific steps you will take, it is very important to write down the timetable by which you will dedicate your resources to accomplishing your goals. This is a crucial step in the goal-setting process.

I provide my clients with an "action plan worksheet" to facilitate the goal-setting process. It is essentially made up of four columns: "goal," "action," "role" and

"deadline." Clients can see at a glance what their goals are, the associated action steps and timeframe for accomplishment. It is a very effective tool to stay on track.

The best way to break each of the action steps into a reasonable timeframe is to plot them out into a weekly action plan, i.e., what you will do each week to bring you closer to achieving your goals. If you break down each action step into minute pieces, you will avoid being overwhelmed. You are more likely to accomplish smaller steps, which add up to accomplishing sizable goals, and which will make you feel better about the goal-setting process.

One of the pearls of wisdom I impart to clients consistently is the importance of developing a "marketing mindset" in their everyday practice. Instead of taking off your lawyer hat and putting on your marketing hat, discipline yourself to integrate marketing activities into your everyday practice. It's simple if you have broken down your goals into weekly action steps and you diary them on your calendar. This is how you balance your billable and nonbillable time — in disciplining yourself to execute on a daily basis just a nugget of your weekly action plan. Sometimes it involves no more than a phone call, jotting off a personal note to a client or reviewing a presentation outline. Small, simple steps taken every day in an incremental fashion will propel you toward accomplishing your greater goals.

Results in building a profitable practice often do not come in big, grandiose

actions but rather in the small and steady results which over time accrue into a solid practice.

As a part of devising a reasonable timeframe, you must make appointments with yourself just like you would for client meetings. This is important work that you are doing, so to be successful, you *must* honor yourself and the work you are doing. Due to the nature of a relationship-building business, there are some elements which you cannot control and that is no more evident than in fostering and nurturing professional relationships. It is only through consistent and persistent massive amounts of action over a prolonged period of time that you will reap rewards, so stay the course *even* when there seem to be few results. They will come.

Step 4: Execute, Execute, Execute

This is where your commitment becomes evident. Are you honoring your goals by staying true to your weekly action plan? Are you taking at least one simple action a day toward accomplishing your goals? Jot it down to stay on track.

Bottom Line

Clear goal setting begins with your decision of what you desire to accomplish. Then, it takes a detailed action plan to achieve your client development goals and the discipline and commitment to execute the plan. Not rocket science at all, but still a challenge for so many practicing lawyers. Get up and get going, today. ■

