

Why Goal Setting Works

So, why does the simple process of writing out goals and visualizing their accomplishment, work? Although there are many theories about this, one that I have personally observed is related to what is called the “reticular activating system,” an integral part of every person’s brain and motivation process.

The Reticular System is the *attention center* in the brain. It is the key to “turning on the subconscious capabilities of our creative mind.” Many believe it to be the center of motivation. The Reticular Activating System determines what we pay attention to. In other words, it is the part of your brain where the world “outside” of you, and your “inside” world of thoughts and feelings—come together and meet.

Normally, our reticular system “screens out” the mass of information that is all around us. There is simply too much information for us to pay attention to. Anything that is not important at the moment, is “tuned-out.”

For example, when we are in the middle of a noisy crowd such as might be found in an airport or at a basketball game, we are not even conscious of the many different conversations going on all around us. However, if someone calls out our name or the name of a family member, we pay immediate attention and instantly “tune-in”. Our reticular system says that these names are important, so we are always ready to hear them.

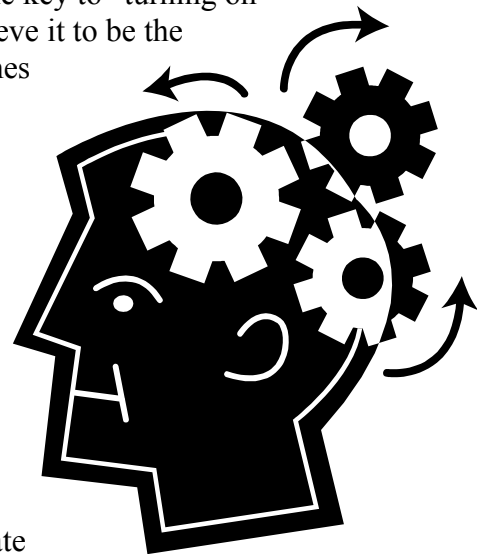
Goal setting is the process of telling your reticular system what is important to you, so that it lets in information that is important to the achievement of the particular goal.

The goal comes first...

Have you ever had the experience of setting a goal, but at the time—you had no idea whatsoever how you were going to achieve it? People who understand the inner workings of the reticular process, do this all of the time. They set specific and time limited goals (often bearing the ridicule of family members and friends) even though they have little idea of how they are going to accomplish them. Then, sometimes months or even years later, they surprise everybody and fully achieve the very goal that they had set out to accomplish!

How does this work? The answer lies in the “reprogramming” of our reticular system. When we set a goal, it tells our subconscious mind to be on the lookout for things, people, opportunities, or situations that will enable us to move toward our stated goal. It tells our reticular system what to pay attention to.

If you think back to times in the past when you experienced this process by setting a specific goal, you may have found that things began to happen (almost like magic) that carried you toward your goal. You may have unexpectedly run into people who could help you achieve your goal. You may have noticed resources that went previously unnoticed but all of a sudden, they were exactly what you needed to take you closer to your goal.



Or, you may have been more open to try new things or learn new skills that enabled you to move forward.

Then you see...

The bottom line is this: The most important step in moving forward in any area of life is first, to simply set some realistic goals. Don't worry if you don't have everything nailed down as to how you are going to reach the goals. "*The goal comes first, and then you see. You do not see first!*"

Because of the way we are all wired, goal setting triggers our internal (reticular) system to be on the lookout for the resources we need to achieve our goals. Once the goal is set, we begin immediately (through our creative subconscious mind,) to move toward its achievement.

For additional reference information concerning the topic of goal setting, please refer to the following authors and their resources:

Goals: Setting and Achieving Them on Schedule. By Zig Ziglar.

Goal Setting 101: How to Set and Achieve a Goal! By Gary Ryan Blair.

The Magic Lamp: Goal Setting for People Who Hate Setting Goals. By Keith Ellis.

Motivation and Goal Setting: How to Set and Achieve Goals and Inspire Others. By Jim Cairo.

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