



## Episode 17 - How to set goals in a way that actually works

Welcome to this episode of the managing your smart mind podcast with Master Certified Coach Else Kramer, a.k.a. Coach Kramer.

This week I'm diving into goal-setting. And it's a topic I used to absolutely hate. Because I couldn't figure it out.

I thought I was the only person on earth who just sucked at setting goals and going after them, and that everybody else had the secret, was doing it right.

Well, then I became a coach. And I learned that, first of all, most people do not even **set** goals. And second, **even more never achieved them**.

And that's not because they're stupid, or because they suck, it's because they're going about it the wrong way.

**So in this episode, we're going to look at setting goals in a way that works with your brain, and your nervous system.**

A way that actually helps you instead of hurting you.

So first, I'm going to explore some ways in which smart humans abuse goal setting in a way, and I will tell you how to spot them and check if that's what you're doing.

But first of all, let's get clear on definitions (remember, I'm a philosopher).

### **What is a goal and why set one?**

The dictionary defines it as follows:

“The object of a person's ambition or effort; an aim or desired result.”

In other words, a goal is something we work towards.

Which is very interesting, right? This actually gives us a great first question to ask ourselves:

### **What are we working towards?**

When we look at our lives, what are we actually working towards?

Is this our goal? Are we working towards our goals?

Or are we actually working towards something which we don't even want?

And honestly, a lot of people are, right? So check in with yourself.

Look at the things you're doing in your life.

Does this actually take you towards where you want to be? And if not, this is a reminder that you need to reevaluate your priorities.

## **But why set goals in the first place?**

Why not just coast?

Why don't just live right and be present within the moment? Why set goals in the first place?

Well, there's a very good reason.

If you don't, your brain is always going to prioritize short term pleasure.

Your brain's goal, it's actually at odds with some of your goals.

And your brain's goal is for you to feel good right now, and to minimize glucose consumption.

So in other words, it wants you to do all the things that feel good in the moment, and to avoid all the things with unpredictable outcomes, things that are new, scary, etc.

**If you don't set goals, you will always prioritize feeling good in the moment, that's just your default.**

And that usually means a lot of comforting consumption, consuming information, social media, entertainment, food, alcohol, etc.

You will be busy, maybe even very busy, doing lots of things, consuming lots of stuff.

You may even feel like it's very productive if your way of consuming is sort of your preferred mode is learning new things.

But your life will actually not expand, you will not grow. Although your body may.

You will actually be stuck in stasis.

And that's something for smart humans that is very depressing and an exhausting way to live.

Or just sort of going on running circles, getting dopamine hits.

But always, you know, staying where you are never going outside your comfort zone.

So we humans need to set goals not even because there are things we want to achieve, although of course there is that.

**But because we need to take charge of our brain, we need to manage it. So we can take charge of our future.**

Who do we want to be in the future?

Where do we want to go?

We need to decide, instead of just leaving it up to our brain, which means that we will just basically become an expert at Netflix, and eating whatever it is we like to eat.

**And then of course, there's always the added bonus of growth, when we set goals, learning new things, stretching ourselves becoming stronger, more resilient, and the excitement of doing something we didn't know we were capable of.**

And if you haven't set goals in a long time, I'm just going to remind you that this is a pretty amazing feeling, it is so good. It is much better than watching that next Netflix series or eating that bag of crisps.

So you must set goals to manage your mind. But it's also a lot of fun, and very rewarding.

And you want to bear that in mind for when the going gets tough because it's also not easy to go after your goals.

## **So why then do so many people not set goals or, if they do, never achieve them?**

Well, as I said, this is because they go about it in the wrong way. So here are five ways in which people screw up goal setting, so you can not do it and get it right.

### **Five ways to screw up goal setting**

#### **1. Using it to get a quick dopamine hit**

A lot of people use goal-setting as a distraction, for a quick dopamine hit.

They use it to get away from a 'now' they don't particularly like - it becomes a destination in itself, instead of a path.

When you spend time thinking about the perfect job, the perfect villa by the sea, the perfect body, you feel great - in the moment.

In fact, it feels so good, you could do it all day!

But if this is where it ends, you're being goal-abusive.

You're using goals as a drug to feel good right now (this is what your brain prefers, remember?) instead of as an instrument for growth.

So if you notice you spend a lot of time fantasizing about goals, maybe even buying new notebooks (raises hand), signing up for classes, but never ever taking any action, this is you.

And this can create a negative spiral where you dream about a goal, notice you don't take action on it, and then start dreaming about a different version to again take you out of a painful present.

So discomfort - goal fantasy - dopamine hit - low after dopamine wears off - discomfort - goal fantasy - etc.

If you're on this merry-go-round, get off, right now.

There are much better ways to get your dopamine - this just creates a negative spiral.

## **2. Using it to be mean to yourself**

The other way people abuse the concept of goal setting is by using it not to grow, but to SHRINK themselves.

You have decided there is a lot wrong with you and you set goals to FIX them.

You use your goals to reinforce your feelings of insufficiency, of not being good enough, etc.

You set a big, massive, incredible goal, and then use the gap between you and the goal as a reason to beat yourself up.

These goals are usually pretty out there. Like someone who wants to go from making 10K a year to 30K a month.

Or from having a house or office which is a complete mess to a minimalist totally decluttered interior.

And I'm not saying these things are impossible, but if you simply use these goals to beat yourself up for not being there yet, you are abusing the whole concept.

Now how you know you're doing this is because your goals will feel heavy and awful.

And you will want to take ZERO action on them.

Not because they're hard or scary - because they make you feel miserable.

They're meant to - you think that somehow if you make yourself feel bad, ashamed, guilty, you will finally start taking action.

Sadly, this, again, is a negative spiral of increased self-hatred and undermined self-confidence.

If this is you, you need to make your goals smaller and kinder so you can rebuild self-trust.

And you want to honour and celebrate yourself at every small step along the way.

### **3. Not being specific on your goal**

The third way in which people get goals wrong is by not being specific on what they are going to do to achieve their goal.

Or by not even having a specific goal.

Here are some examples of non-specific goals:

I want to travel more.

I want to lose weight.

I want to learn how to manage my time better so I feel less exhausted.

I want to have more money.

I want to have more fun, or energy, or both.

Sounds nice enough - but it's also completely vague.

For one person, traveling more could be three extra weekends away this year.

For another it could mean ten week-long trips to another country or continent.

If you're not specific about your goal, how will you know what to do about it, and also: how will you know WHEN you have achieved it?

Never.

So you have to make your goals as specific as possible.

I want to DO/HAVE exactly X BY this date. => specific

I want to make 100K by the end of August so I can take three months off to travel the world.

I want to lose two inches around my waist in three months so I can be more healthy, have more energy, live longer.

I want to have found or created a job I love with an income that I love even more by November.

In the next three month, I want to learn how to schedule in a way that allows me at least 1 hour of free time on weekdays, and four hours on weekends.

#### **4. Not making them juicy**

Let's look at the examples I listed earlier again:

I want to travel more.

I want to lose weight.

I want to learn how to manage my time better so I feel less exhausted.

I want to have more money.

I want to have more fun, or energy, or both.

They're not very juicy, are they?

And by juicy I mean: compelling, desirable, enticing enough to get you to overcome the necessary obstacles to achieve them.

Now this is relatively easy - all you add is: so I can - and then finish the sentence.

I want to... so I can => juicy

I want to have more money so I can

- Spend more time traveling
- Take better care of my family



I want to travel more so I can

- Feel inspired and excited
- Learn from other people/cultures
- See amazing art

I want to lose weight so I can

- Feel more energized
- Stay alive longer
- Learn to surf

Find the juice behind your goals - this is also known as your WHY.

You absolutely need this to keep you going when the going gets tough.

## **5. Not committing**

The final ingredient people usually skip is turning goals into commitment

If you keep saying 'I want to travel the world' you will keep wanting to travel the world.

Once your goal is specific and juicy, it's time to commit.

This is very simple: you change from

I want to => I am going to.

Wow.

Do you feel the difference in your body when you say this out loud?

It's a whole 'nother level.

You need to commit to your goal to give yourself a chance of actually achieving it.

## Recap

So here's a short recap on how to get goalsetting right:

1. Avoid using goal setting to get your dopamine fix; make sure it's grounded in reality, even if you like your goals to be very ambitious
2. Same for goal setting to make yourself feel awful about where you're at - stop doing this
3. Make your goals extremely specific
4. Make them super juicy
5. Commit

Is this it?

No, not quite.

**In the next Episode I'll talk you through some other essentials like how to create an action plan and love, rather than hate, yourself all the way to your goal.**

But for now, start with these first steps.

Think of your goals, check whether they're legit (as in: no quick fix and/or self-loathing instrument), make them specific and super juicy, and commit.

And buckle up for the next Episode, where I'll show you how to make them actually happen.

If you want help in setting juicy goals that work for you and your brain, I can help. DM me on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#) to learn how, or send me an email via [podcast@elsekramer.com](mailto:podcast@elsekramer.com).

Thank you for listening to the Managing the Smart Mind Podcast, until next week, bye!