

THE SCIENCE OF ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

The exciting news is that for decades goals have been studied by behavioral scientists and today there is a wealth of information regarding the behaviors that amplify the likelihood of achieving any goal. Here are four research-based strategies that have been scientifically proven to help you attain your goals.

1. Be Specific

Behavioral scientists Edwin Locke and Gary Latham examined 35 years of empirical research on goal setting. One of the conclusions from their meta-analysis was that ambiguous aspirations, such as “do your best” rarely inspire the behavior change necessary to achieve a goal. What works, the research shows, are goals that have clearly defined outcomes.

All of us want a better future, yet if we are not crystal clear as to what we want, it is doubtful that we will obtain it. Specific goals have an energizing function. It is hard to get excited about pursuing a nebulous goal.

Most importantly of all, a specific goal provides the mental clarity that allows the brain to more easily conceptualize the behaviors needed to obtain the goal. It is fine to create goals, but what really matters is that those goals influence future behavior. This is why goal specificity is so important; it fuels the behaviors that take a goal from a dream to a reality.

2. Create Action Triggers

For many, pursuing a goal is a frustrating endeavor. They confess that though they often start out with the best intentions, within a short period of time their self-discipline fades and they fail to realize the goal.

Yet, it does not have to be this way. Research which has delved into this topic has discovered why this occurs and what can be done to counteract it. The evidence suggests that self-discipline is a depleting resource that is heavily influenced by many factors. One of the best ways to strengthen your resolve to accomplish a goal is to use action triggers.

Action triggers are pre-loaded decisions that link a behavior with its environment. For instance, imagine that you want to begin going to the gym. If you were to create an action trigger of visiting the gym on your way home from work, you have connected the behavior (going to the gym) with an external reference (driving home from work). This will pass the control of the behavior to an environmental stimulus, which will also improve the likelihood that you will get in the habit of stopping by the gym every day on your way home from work.

Though action triggers are simple to execute they have been proven to have a profound effect on behavior. In fact, numerous studies have verified that participants who used action triggers performed an astonishing 74% better in the completion of a task.

3. Focus On Feedback

In the pursuit of any goal there are always unexpected twists and turns. Rarely do things go as planned. Successfully adapting to new obstacles and changing circumstances is a primary factor in achieving your goals.

The way to know how to best alter your course and propel yourself toward your goal is through feedback. Research confirms that receiving feedback that explains where you are in relation to a goal is the key to unlocking the path to success.

For example, in your pursuit of a goal you may notice that you are not making as much progress as you once were. As you analyze what is occurring you may realize that you need to change your strategy or exert more effort. How you respond to this feedback will often determine if you reach your goal.

4. Tell Others

There is one piece of advice that is prevalent within the scholarly literature on goals: “Tell others about your goal.” The research shows that when you publically announce that you are going to achieve a goal, you are actually more likely to attain it. The reason is because of the powerful psychological principle of consistency.

As human beings we want to have consistency between our words and actions. In addition, consistency is also a social norm, in that we expect it from others. As a society we look down on those who are inconsistent and often refer to them as liars, hypocrites or lacking integrity.

When you share with others the specifics of your goal you are leveraging the principle of consistency in your favor by creating a context where you will feel pressured to work towards the realization of the goal. Don't underestimate the potency of this motivator, as many will testify that it was the driving force that propelled them to push through obstacles and reach their goal.

Achieving any worthwhile goal will present challenges. Although, through utilizing the science in your favor you are far more likely to behave in ways that will move you closer towards what you desire.

About the Author

David Hoffeld is the CEO and Chief Sales Trainer of Hoffeld Group and is the author of the groundbreaking book, “The Science of Selling.” David has created a revolutionary sales approach based on neuroscience and behavioral science that radically increases sales. A sought-after sales thought leader and speaker David is a sales and leadership contributor to Fast Company and has been featured in Fortune, U.S. News and World Report, The Wall Street Journal, CBS Radio, Fox News Radio, and more. Learn more about David’s innovative, science-based sales strategies at HoffeldGroup.com.