

The Power of Values in Uncertain Times

Now is not the time to stop setting goals — it's the time to start setting goals that feel right.

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The tumult of 2020 is finally behind us, but uncertainty persists for many people. Social isolation still weighs us down. Companies continue to downsize. Financial concerns compound. Surely we can't be blamed for putting our future goals on hold.

Tempting as that may be, such a pause is the wrong thing to do now, said Laura Bunch, a coach and program facilitator with Stanford's Career Management Center, who recently presented the seminar "Clarifying Your Values and Vision for a Fulfilling 2021" to alumni interested in resetting their personal and career goals. Re-evaluating the plan for your future, she says, is one of the best things you can do for yourself at this moment.

"Planning is challenging when you don't know what two months from now is going to look like, and for a lot of people, that becomes a barrier to allowing themselves to think about their future," Bunch says. "We need to understand that grounding yourself in your values and your vision is actually a powerful way to navigate uncertainty."

Unlike other goal-setting programs that focus entirely on the end result, a vision approach is especially effective because it first considers the personal values critical to an individual's happiness, then gives guidance on visualizing a future that incorporates those values.

Use these techniques to stay focused on your personal and professional journey — even when the path seems blurry.

Reconnect with What You Value

Most of us have spent the past year in a permanent reactive state created by the onslaught of challenges delivered in 2020, Bunch says. Revisiting your core values can break that cycle.

“Asking ‘What are my values? What’s meaningful to me?’ helps clarify who you are and what you want for the future,” she said. “It gives you back some control, and that can be incredibly empowering.”

Bunch suggests brainstorming your values by thinking about moments in your life that you recall as “peak experiences” — times you felt aligned, invigorated, energized, and connected. “Generally, when you’re having a peak experience, you feel completely alive and fulfilled, because your values are being honored,” she says. “For one person, it could be the first year they worked on their startup with two or three really close-knit founders, when there was a strong sense of mission and challenge. For someone else, it could be the time they gave a keynote speech at a conference and were viewed as a leader and recognized for using their voice.”

Share your experience with another person, or write the details that come to you, then find what values are reflected by that story. Narrow your list of values to the five to ten that most deeply resonate with you, and use a scale of one to ten to ask yourself well how you’re currently honoring each of those values. If personal development is a core value for you, and you feel that number is a three, odds are good that you feel unsatisfied with something.

Prioritize Those Values

Once you’ve identified your essential values, take steps both immediately and over the next year to encourage their expression in your life. If you want to boost your creativity, for example, seek out new knowledge that interests you in books, podcasts, or virtual classes, and see where your new insight leads you. Or consider beginning a blog where you could share your writing and ideas. At work, resolve to boost your curiosity by asking more questions without fear of looking stupid. Simply working to adopt more positive emotions — such as gratitude and inspiration — have been found to help broaden a person’s thinking, which allows them to see more possibilities and think more creatively.

Imagine Your Future

Our personal values can steer us toward the life we want, but getting there requires envisioning that future. Whether it’s visualizing a new job, the publication of your book, or a successful move to another country, imagining that success — in as much detail as possible — provides the focus and motivation necessary to achieve it, Bunch says.

“There’s a lot of research that shows that visualizing your ideal future is almost like preparing and training your brain to get there,” she says. “The goal is to allow yourself to be creative and unrestrained, and that effort can

focus either on a particular dream of yours or a full picture of what your life looks like in the future.”

The “WOOP” visualization technique can be an especially effective tool, because it allows you to visualize yourself overcoming inevitable obstacles as you imagine your eventual success.

W – Wish

I want to have a job I love.

O – Desired Outcome

I seek increased fulfillment and satisfaction.

O – Obstacle

Too often I avoid networking for fear of not being qualified enough

P – Plan

I will contact three new people a week and, by the end of the year, apply to one job that makes me feel uncomfortable. If I start to feel “not good enough,” I will take three deep breaths, stay present, and remember my wish.

Think Small to Go Big

Once you’ve identified your core values and envisioned your future, it may be time to take action on a goal, but you should resist the temptation to tackle everything at once. Rather, focus on micro-actions that break your effort into achievable bits. If the goal is to run two miles a day, for example, begin by laying out your workout clothes the night before and walking for ten minutes at a time. Then, congratulate yourself.

“A big part of realizing your goals is having the mindset of celebrating small steps and being your own cheerleader,” Bunch says. “If you don’t take action, everything remains theoretical. But if you move into action and have self-compassion, who knows what will happen? Your vision may evolve, your goals may evolve. But you’re moving out of reactivity and inertia, and taking action on goals that are aligned with what matters to you. And that’s what it’s all about.”

Source: https://www.qsb.stanford.edu/insights/power-values-visualization-uncertain-times?utm_source=Stanford+Report&utm_campaign=23ebb33454-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_03_10_04_18&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_29ce9f751e-23ebb33454-52338421