

The
TOP FIVE

MISTAKES YOU'RE MAKING

IN GOAL SETTING

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INTRODUCTION

Now that you know what it takes to get what you really want, you need to know how to stay out of your own way.

Goal setting has been part of my life for decades. I've learned a lot over the years about the process—especially how to get it wrong. You can learn that way too, but what if you could shortcut all of the frustration and go straight to the finish line without tripping yourself up?

You can—especially if you avoid these top five goal setting mistakes



MISTAKE 1: LETTING OTHER THINGS TAKE PRIORITY

A goal is a priority. But just because you declare a priority doesn't mean it's your only one. The first mistake we make in goal setting is not recognizing our unspoken priorities.

We have many competing claims on our attention and time and some of these are extremely important.



FAMILY



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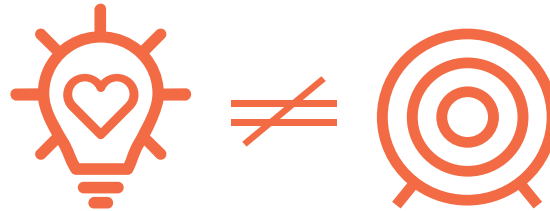


CAREER

If we fail to get clear about these and other claims and where they fit, it's almost certain we will sabotage our attempts to achieve our goals.

This is doubly true for procrastination—which is just a competing time claim that has no real or inherent value. It makes sense to organize our efforts around a regular date night, not Candy Crush. Clarity about our priorities and what they're worth to us will keep things in line and our attention focused on the outcomes.

MISTAKE 2: CONFUSING HOPE FOR GOALS



We all have hopes about life, deep desires for our future and what we yearn to see happen. It feels good to dream and imagine. But sometimes we let the good feeling that comes from expressing our hopes get in the way of working to see them realized.

This happens two ways:

1. We don't know the difference between a hope and a goal. A goal has a certain kind of anatomy that gives hope structure. We're satisfied by the feeling we have and think our hope is strong enough to stand on its own. But it's not. It's the specific features of well constructed goals that enable our hopes to come to life.
2. We're not disciplined enough to either do the work of constructing good goals or to see them through. We let the hope suffice for now, resigned to the frustration we'll feel later. I can't imagine making that trade any longer. My hopes are too important for that. I bet yours are too.

MISTAKE 3: NOT CONNECTING TO “THE WHY”

One thing researchers tell us about procrastination is that it happens because we don't connect to our future selves. If we have a fitness goal, for instance, but don't see our future self as the product of the choices we're making right now, then it's easier to put off the morning run till tomorrow or skip the trip to the gym.



The real issue is that we're not connected to our why—that's the broken link in our choices now and the results tomorrow.

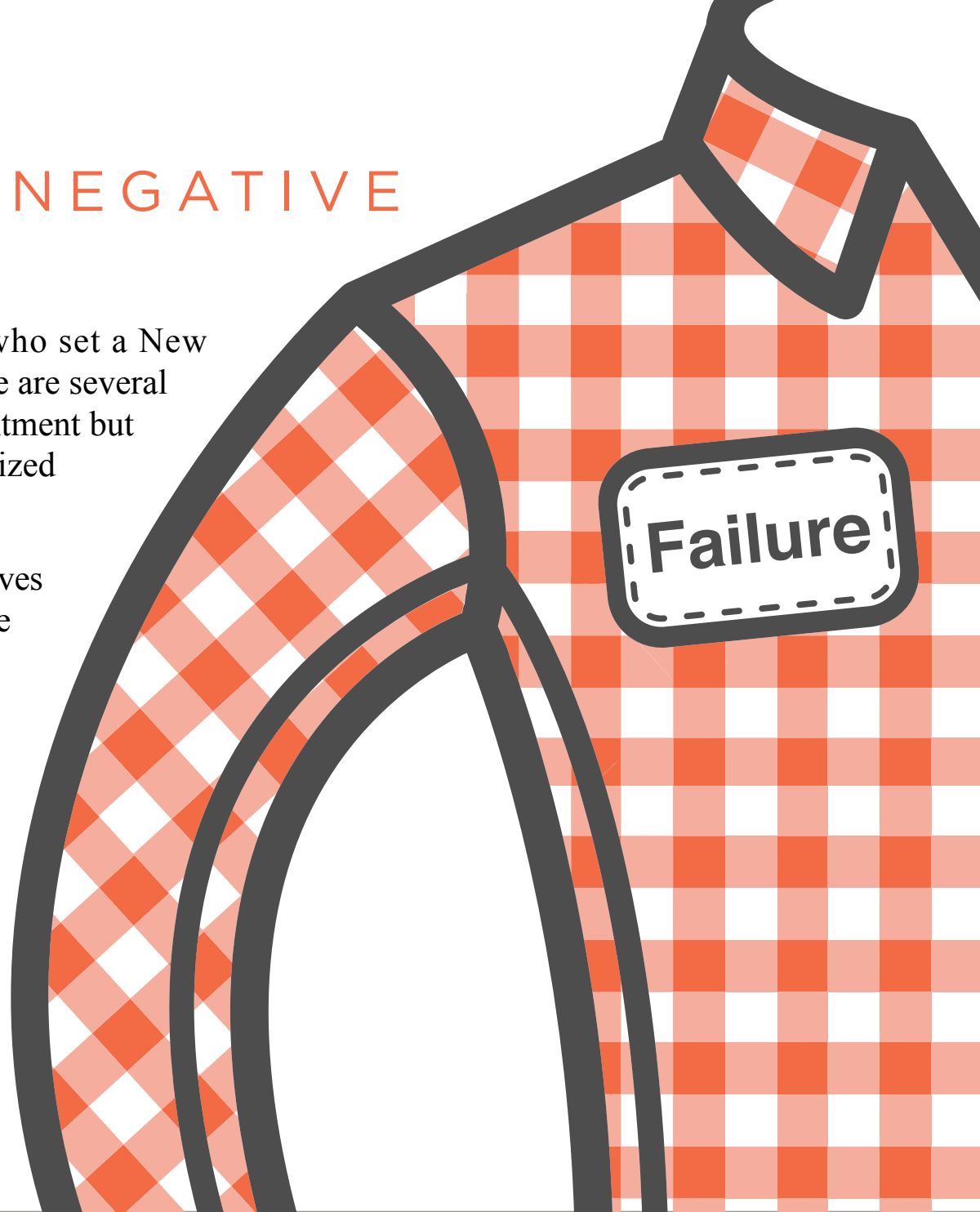
When we're connected to our why, we can see the connection between our future reality and our present decisions. That means it's vital to establish goals where we have a strong emotional connection to the outcome. We have to connect our agency today to the payoff tomorrow.

MISTAKE 4: BELIEVING THE NEGATIVE LABELS

You've heard the statistics: Most people who set a New Year's resolution blow it year after year. There are several negative consequences to this serial disappointment but one is taking on a false identity and an undersized sense of what's possible.

The more we fail, the easier it is to label ourselves as someone who can't win. Just as bad, we sometimes let others pin us with the badge.

But don't believe it. All of us have hardships, setbacks, and challenges in our past. But here's the reality. Negative labels are just an interpretation of the past. You're free to interpret the past differently. You're also free to see it as one chapter, not the entire story. As far as I know, the only person who can't win is the one who lets the label have the last word.



MISTAKE 5: NOT BELIEVING IN YOURSELF

Here's the one I think is probably the most important.

We tend to experience what we expect.

If we expect to fail, we'll likely fail. If we expect to win, we'll likely win. Why?

The philosopher Karl Popper called it the “Oedipus Effect,” and over fifty years ago sociologist Robert Merton coined the term “self-fulfilling prophecy.” The idea is that our predictions and expectations direct our actions, even if we're not aware of it.

Someone who thinks he can't keep a resolution is the kind of person who will cave more quickly. But at the same time, someone who believes they can achieve a particular goal is more likely to see opportunities where others don't, more likely to work a little harder when it counts, and more likely to persevere when others quit.



There's no guarantee you'll accomplish everything you desire, but there are several things you can do to dramatically improve your odds.

This includes taking the right steps, but it also includes avoiding the bad ones. And I'm convinced you can shortcut a lot of trouble by avoiding these top five mistakes.