

Strategic Goal Setting

by Linda Rohrbough

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I feel an obligation to adhere to the tradition of goal setting at this time of year. But being a no-nonsense kind of gal, I want to put a new spin on this topic by tackling strategic goal setting.

I'm sure you don't need to hear another lecture on what you should be doing. We've all heard about creating realistic, achievable objectives because those are the kind that encourage you and will actually take you someplace. And we all know how to divide the task of writing our novel into chunks and divide the chunks down into daily tasks. But what I'm talking about is strategic goal setting which is doing more than one thing at once, killing two birds with one stone, so to speak.

Basically, most of the advice on setting objectives for yourself assumes you know yourself and your writing habits. Strategic goal setting gets you into reality about what you're actually doing as opposed to what you think you're doing. This involves the simple but challenging task of measuring.

At the advice of writer friend Jodi Thomas, I got myself a cheap stop watch at Wal-Mart. It's only clicked on when I am *actually writing*. Not when I do all the other stuff I'm tempted by like e-mail, browsing the iTunes store, or Googling something from an infomercial. Jodi said I'd find I spend surprisingly little time writing. She was right.

By tracking my actual minutes and seconds writing, it was on my mind more when I wasn't writing. I also noticed I got a significant quantity done in that small amount of time, which I found very encouraging. I don't live with the stop watch now, but it's still on my desk in plain sight.

Another tool I adopted is the weekly goal sheet. It's a combination of one my writing buddy uses and ideas I got from www.MargieLawson.com. I keep mine electronically (no hard copy). At the top, I have reminders of the important tasks to accomplish that week. Next is a table with four columns and seven rows. The first row has the headings. Column one contains the six days of the week I work, the second has my "winner" goals, the third column my "super star" goals, and the last column is my "maybe" goals.

I write in the goal and estimate when I'll start and finish the work. I record what I did and the actual time spent at the day's end. Here's an example taken from a Monday:

DAY	WINNER (I do these every day, no matter what. Like my Yoga. Just do it.)	SUPER STAR (I fit these in once the WINNER goals are complete.)	MAYBE (I may get to these or not.)
MONDAY 11-14	Edits band book proposal, Answer e-mail Projected: 10am -2 pm Actual: edits 2-5pm, e-mail 5:30-7pm, goals set 7:30 -8pm	Start edits band book proposal Projected: 1-2pm Actual: 8-10pm	Talk to Lizzie, Review FOD research Projected: 2-5pm Actual: Not done

As you can see from the sample, I learn a lot about myself doing this exercise. And it forces me to evaluate what goals will keep me headed the direction I want to go. My objective is to fill out the goal sheet on the Saturday before the coming week and record what I did each day.

What really happens is some weeks I accomplish filling out the goal sheet on Saturday for the next week. Others I don't get to it until Tuesday or Wednesday. And I may look at it two or three times a week, instead of at the end of every day. There have been times I didn't do a goal sheet at all.

Now you can imagine that if I don't do the goal sheet perfectly, I don't do the goals perfectly either. And you'd be right. But since starting these sheets six months ago, despite what I can only call failures, I've been more than twice as productive as I was before.

Measuring is strategic because it gets you to know yourself better, helps you set realistic goals, and therefore, makes you more productive. I feel better about my missed objectives because I now I count failure as part of succeeding, as odd as that sounds. It makes me take a look at what I'm doing and moves me toward my writing goals.

I encourage you to make measuring part of your strategic goal setting. Make yourself a chart and record your progress. You'll be glad you did.

Sidebar:

Strategic Goal Setting Involves Measuring

1. Get a stop watch and only start it when you're writing
2. Set goals weekly for each day's work. Track what you plan compared to what you actually do. (You may e-mail Linda@PCbios.com and ask for a complimentary blank Microsoft Word 2003 version of the goal sheet.)
3. Remember, failure is part of succeeding.

BIO

Linda Rohrbough has been writing about the computer industry since 1989 and has more than 5,000 articles and five books to her credit. Her work has been honored three times by the Computer Press Association. She has an agent for a non-fiction book she's writing with her doctor, has finished her first techno-thriller novel, and is working on a second novel. Visit her website www.PCbios.com.