

## Goal-Free Living by Stephen Shapiro

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**S**uccess and happiness are unarguably our Holy Grails, but the standards taught to find them are all wrong. We have been brainwashed into believing that the only way to achieve this elusive combination of success and happiness is through setting goals. This is simply not true. In fact, goal-setting is often the shortest route to discontentment. Fifty eight percent of those I surveyed say that they are consciously sacrificing today's happiness in the belief that achieving their goals will bring fulfillment. Sadly, 41 percent say that each goal achieved brings little, if any, satisfaction, despite all the hard work. So, what do they do? They set another goal. This creates a perpetual cycle of sacrifice and disillusionment. What is the solution?

After interviewing hundreds of people and surveying thousands I discovered that the most passionate, creative, and sometimes wealthiest people live free from the burden of traditional goals. Instead, they have mastered the rare skill of enjoying "now" rather than delaying gratification until the future.

Goals are not inherently bad, but many individuals have an unhealthy relationship with their goals, distorting this potentially helpful tool into a surefire recipe for failure. Why?

- Quite often, the goals we chase are not our own. Fifty three percent of those I surveyed feel that they are living their lives in a way that satisfies others more than themselves. Whose life are *you* living?
- Goals can cause you to lose your peripheral vision. When you focus on your goals, you are cutting off potentially greater opportunities from emerging.
- Goals set you up for failure, say 74 percent of those surveyed, conceding to disappointment and dissatisfaction when they are unsuccessful in achieving their goals. In fact, 92 percent fail to achieve their New Year's resolutions. That is a lot of discontentment.

Goal-Free Living is liberating. It opens new possibilities typically hidden from sight.

We often associate goals with our career. While that is a big aspect of our lives, Goal-Free Living applies to all areas of life, from dating to business.

- **Dating.** When you are on a date, do not worry about the next date. Instead, just enjoy the other person's company . . . for that moment. You will come across as being more genuine and less desperate, and ironically, this increases your chances of getting that second date.
- **Vacationing.** When on a vacation, instead of planning every minute of every day, try venturing out into an area not in your guidebook. You may discover some hidden gems. You will feel less hurried and more relaxed. Isn't that what a vacation is all about?

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- **Meetings.** When you attend a business conference, stop focusing on what you will get out of it and how you will use it. Rather, concentrate on just being there and soaking in as much as possible. Incredible opportunities show up when you are unburdened and blinded by myopic goals.

When you are doing something, ask yourself “Why am I doing this?” If you have a reason—other than just to be there—then you may have a goal. While it is quite acceptable to have a particular interest in an outcome, do not let that specific focus become so dominant that it blinds you to other opportunities.

How does one embark on a more goal-free life? During my travels around the world and after hundreds of interviews I discovered eight secrets for living goal-free.

1. Use a compass, not a map—have a sense of direction (not a specific destination), and then “meander with purpose.”
2. Trust that you are never lost—every seemingly wrong turn is an opportunity to learn and experience new things.
3. Remember that opportunity knocks often but sometimes softly—while blindly pursuing our goals, we often miss unexpected and wonderful possibilities.
4. Want what you have—measure your life by your own yardstick and appreciate who you are, what you do, and what you have . . . now.
5. Seek out adventure—treat your life like a one-time-only journey, and revel in new and different experiences.
6. Become a people magnet—constantly attract, build, and nurture relationships with new people so that you always have the support and camaraderie of others.
7. Embrace your limits—transform your inadequacies and boundaries into unique qualities that you can use to your advantage.
8. Remain detached—focus on the present, act with a commitment to the future, and avoid worrying about how things will turn out.

For each of these secrets, there are a number of tips for implementing the concept. Here are a few you can try today.

- Set “themes,” not “resolutions”—rather than set a resolution (i.e., a goal), choose one word to describe your next year. Choose something that is bold and inspires you. Instead of losing 10 pounds, you could choose “health.” “Relationships”—in the broadest sense—may work better for you than “finding a boyfriend.” Any word will do: “grace,” “adventure,” “serenity,” “play.”
- Use “could do” lists rather than “to do” lists—“to do” lists tend to be draining as they are the things you feel you must do. “Could do” lists contain those things that you want to do that inspire you. They keep

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possibility in front of you. Keep your list of “could do” items large and your list of “to do” items small.

- Change your filter. One creative way to “seek out adventure” is to make believe you are another person—an artist, a musician, or a doctor. It doesn’t matter, as long as it is someone other than you. When you live your normal day standing in the shoes of someone else, you will see things you have never seen before.
- Appreciate the whole spectrum of life. Create contrasts to help you appreciate where you are right now. Sleep in a tent and sleeping bag versus always staying in a five-star hotel. Volunteer for a charity. Take the bus to work. Eat at a greasy spoon diner. Swap jobs with someone with a less glamorous assignment for a week. Experience the whole spectrum of life.

The origin of the word “goal” comes from the Old English word for “obstacles” or “a hindrance.” In order to achieve a goal, you must work hard to overcome these barriers and roadblocks. Conversely, the origin of the word “aspiration” is the same as the Latin word for “spirit” and “inspire,” which means “to breathe into” or “panting with desire.” Barriers or inspiration. Which would you prefer?