

## Make Today Count

Excerpted from the forthcoming book,  
*Take Charge! How Leaders Profit From Change.*  
by Greg Bustin (Tapestry Press, Sept. 2004)  
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The year is now half over.

It's half time in the great game of business – time to catch our breath, assess our position and make any adjustments to finish the second half of 2004 strong. But this time of year also means that if we've not already achieved or made significant progress toward achieving the goals we set for ourselves many months ago, it will now take 100% more effort to accomplish what we said we wanted on January 1.

Did you make New Year's resolutions? Have you kept them? Or have you abandoned them? The *Journal of Clinical Psychology* says 36% of us break our New Year's resolutions by January 31. The study doesn't say where we stand after six months, but it's safe to say the 36% figure grows as the year flies by.

### Unleash the power of the present

Have you ever wondered what our most precious commodity is? It's time. Because once we lose it we'll never get it back.

Goals, of course, are about the future. But the first part of goal-setting -- and goal-getting -- is understanding, embracing and realizing the "power of the present." One reason most of us fail to achieve our goals is our failure to live in the "now," to unleash the power of the present. View goal-setting as a three-point plan:

1. Living in the now.
2. Being very clear about what we want.
3. Executing the plan.

Living in the now is critical because the past is over - we can't change it. The future is uncertain - we can't foresee it. The past and the future are illusions. Only the present is within our grasp and, God willing, it's the closest thing under our control.

By focusing on the present, we commit ourselves to change and to success. This attitude embraces the idea that if we act today and do the things that we commit to doing, we can succeed. "Successful people," said Earl Nightingale, "are willing to do the things unsuccessful people are not." Or consider Woody Allen's perspective: "90% of success is showing up."

### Clarity is key

Clarity is the second point of the three-point goal-setting plan, and there are three components to the discipline of clarity: Being very specific about what we want. Setting a deadline. Writing it down. Wanting to lose weight is a dream;

losing 10 lbs. by Labor Day is specific. Wanting to be rich is a dream; increasing your income by 30% by Christmas is specific.

Assigning a deadline to a specific goal helps make the goal more attainable. Deadlines are powerful tools. In our work with companies, we use a series of 100 questions to uncover opportunities, examine problems, gain agreement and set goals. The first question we always ask is: What do we want to celebrate one year from today? Because if you don't achieve your 12-month objectives, you can forget about your 3- and 5-year plans. It's healthy to dream, and we leave room for that as we work with companies, but we must be focused on achieving specific, concrete, doable, measurable goals.

Committing goals to paper (or disc) allows us to preserve our thinking and measure progress. Saying it isn't enough; writing down goals – whether they're personal goals or company objectives – requires discipline and increases the chances of success. What are we doing? Who's doing it? By when? At what cost? For what expected result?

Three of the most successful business leaders know the importance of committing goals to paper. Stephen Covey uses a four-box quadrant in which he places activities that are urgent but not important, urgent and important, not urgent and not important, and not urgent but important. Herb Kelleher makes two columns – "Must be completed today" and "Can be completed tomorrow/next week." Andrew Carnegie favored a list of items with the six most important items circled to be completed today. Sound simple? Try it.

### Just do it

Thomas Watson, the leader who turned IBM into a juggernaut, said, "The outstanding leaders of every age are those who set their own quotas and constantly exceed them." Here are five keys to executing your plan:

1. Limit yourself to three goals; when you achieve those goals, set three more. Stay focused.
2. Carry your goals in your pocket or make them a screen saver. Look at them every day.
3. Be intentional, do not procrastinate. Why put off what you can do today?
4. Hold yourself accountable. Remember, you have adopted an attitude of change. Your list keeps you focused. If necessary, a partner can get you back on track. Recalibrate if you must, but don't give up.
5. Celebrate victories.

The past is history/tomorrow's a mystery/Make today count. ■