

Leadership Barometer 123 Achieving Impossible Goals Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



Does your organization establish goals that seem impossible to achieve? If so, you are not alone. Many organizations go through a negotiation process with individuals and teams to establish annual performance goals.

Managers usually ask individuals or teams what is the best they can achieve in the following year. Then, just for good measure, senior managers tack on an additional 15 to 25% and set that as the target goal.

When employees learn to anticipate this markup process, they instinctively sandbag their initial offer to account for the anticipated bump by senior management. It becomes a game of cat and mouse to establish reasonable stretch goals, and in the end, the organization and its employees suffer.

A Better Process

I believe a better process starts with an understanding of what the entire organization needs and then breaks down individual and team performance goals that will ensure the organization meets its commitments.

Quite often, goals set by senior managers seem unrealistic or unobtainable, which has a significant negative impact on trust. This impact becomes amplified in times of scarce resources. When this happens, employees take on a fatalistic viewpoint that the team has no chance to perform up to expectations.

Team members hope they can achieve the goal, but deep down they don't believe it is possible. This creates a Pygmalion effect that almost guarantees a negative outcome.

The Importance of Believing

The truth is, you cannot "hope" your way to success. You must believe and expect success for it to become reality. When stretching for seemingly impossible goals, the most important ingredient is not technology, market size, manufacturing capacity, quality processes, sales force expertise, HR policies, or any other tangible enablers. The most important ingredient is **belief**.

This fundamental principle has been identified by philosophers and social psychologists numerous times throughout history. It seems that, through the ages, our civilization keeps discovering the same ideas. Here are a few famous quotations from historical figures you may recognize. Notice how they all say the same thing in different words.

Some Famous Quotations on Achieving Goals

Zig Zigler – "When you believe it, you will see it."

Earl Nightingale – "We become what we think about."

Henry Ford – "If you think you can, or if you think you can't... You are right."

Lou Holtz – "If you get people to believe in themselves, they will set bigger goals."

Maxwell Maltz – "What you believe will happen actually becomes physical reality."

Norman Vincent Peale – "The power of positive thinking: No success occurs without it."

Andrew Carnegie – "You will not be able to do it until you believe you can do it."

Napoleon Hill – "What the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve."

This list is just a small sample of available quotations with the same topic. The phenomenon of creating success by visualizing it already accomplished is well known.

Unfortunately, most teams in the working world have forgotten this time-honored wisdom. They wring their hands and lament that achieving the goal set out by management is simply impossible. Well of course it is impossible if they believe that.

Forget about how you will accomplish a goal; simply set out to believe that it will happen. There are many tools available that can help you accomplish the goal. Resolve to find the right ones for your situation. If you do that, you will achieve the goal in ways you could not possibly imagine at the outset. Unfortunately, it is easy to experience the pangs of fear.

The way out

The antidote is to teach individuals and teams to re-train their brains so that they drive out any thought of failure. Set the goal high, and then use all the power of mind over matter to make that goal a reality.

Experts like the ones above, have taught us that if we reiterate an affirmative statement that we not only intend to meet the goal but to exceed the goal and have fun doing it, then repeat that phrase in earnest at least twice a day for 30 consecutive days, we will actually bring forth vital energy that was unavailable prior to the new mindset.

We then have a moment of truth where we have the opportunity to examine what is holding us back. As we address these self-limiting beliefs, we can come into mental and emotional alignment and resonance with the affirmation. We become energetically congruent with the vision, and that brings forth powers that are truly amazing.

Having this resonance and congruity changes everything. Of course, a positive mental attitude is not the only factor that will allow us to meet difficult goals. We have to have a good plan, we have to execute well, we have to have high trust and great teamwork, we have to work incredibly hard, we must employ lean and six sigma principles, we need the right technology and resources, and, yes, we sometimes need some luck. We need to enjoy and really appreciate the thrill of doing it.

The truth is that by having the right frame of mind at the outset, we enable the other necessary elements to materialize in the physical world. When we expect and believe we will achieve the goal, sometimes the elements required to accomplish it materialize as if by magic. It is not magic; it is simply how the universe works.

I am not reporting anything new here, but I believe we need to reiterate it, especially at the end of the year when goals for the next year are being set. This is the time to create a new mindset that will allow you and your team to consistently reach or exceed seemingly impossible goals.

*Robert Whipple is also the author of **The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals and, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online.** Bob consults and speaks on these and other leadership topics. He is CEO of Leadergrow Inc. a company dedicated to growing leaders.*

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