

Purpose

Direction, goals, focus, vision

“We must overcome the notion that we must be regular . . . it robs you of the chance to be extraordinary and leads you to the mediocre.”

Uta Hagen

Suppose you have a friend who lives in the Springhill Housing Development somewhere in your city, and one day you tell him that you'd like to visit him. You know that you've seen a sign for the development in the eastern part of your city, so you set off in that direction. Without any specific instructions, you search for two days along main roads until finally you find a sign for the Springhill Housing Development.

You drive into the development and discover that it contains over 600 homes. After another two days of knocking on doors, you finally get lucky and locate someone who knows your friend. Of course, by then your friend has grown weary of waiting for you.

You probably would never do anything like this. It doesn't make good use of your time, and it doesn't win any points with your friend. Instead, you'd ask him for directions before you left home. Your friend would describe signposts to watch for along the way. You'd know to take I-15 to the Valley Hill Shopping Center exit, go left four blocks, turn right at Lexington (the corner with the Mom & Pop Gas Station), travel through two stoplights, and so on until you reached his home.

Although the idea of setting out on a journey with no directions seems hard to believe (and silly

besides), some people live their lives this way. For example, suppose that you want to be a chemical engineer someday. You have a vague idea that being a chemical engineer is somewhere out there in your future. You might know the general direction to go in, but if you don't know any of the signposts along the way, you might wander indefinitely and never achieve your goal.

What are some of the signposts on the way to becoming a chemical engineer? First, you'll want to know what kinds of classes to take in school. If you don't take some chemistry and math, you'll have a longer and harder road to travel. You should probably do your best to earn good grades, since that will help you get into college. To finance your college education, you may need to work summer jobs, save money, and apply for scholarships. You'll need to do some research to discover the best colleges and universities to apply to and what kinds of scholarships might be available to you.

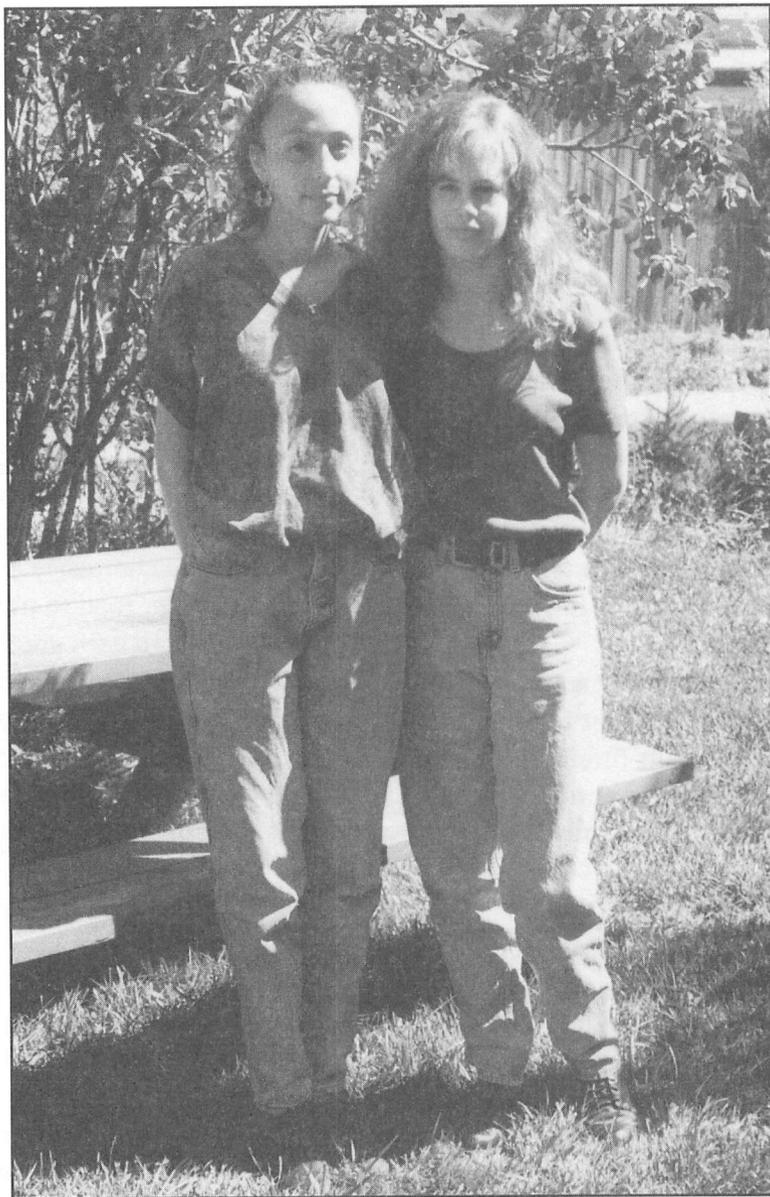
Thinking about and planning your future will help bring your dreams into focus. When you concentrate on something important to you, it usually becomes clearer and stronger in your mind. When you ignore something, it often becomes weaker and more indistinct.

What if you don't know what you want to be? That's okay. You can still find general signposts to help you go in positive directions. You can still do all kinds of wonderful things in your lifetime. It's also okay to change your mind and your direction as you journey through life. But you can achieve things

practiced the piano every night after school, and as soon as she got her driver's license at age 15, she drove an hour and a half to her piano lessons. She maintained an A average at Taos Junior High, participated in the science fair, and tutored kids at an elementary school.

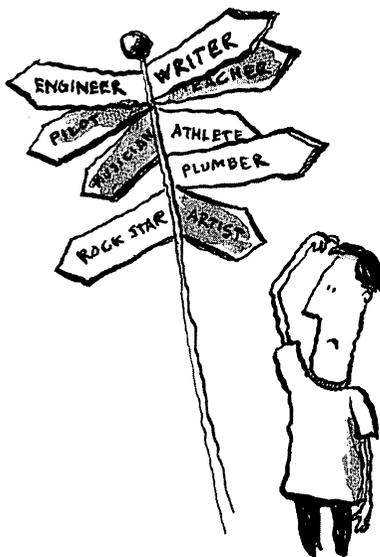
She even helped a shy first grader who had a problem asserting himself with other kids. While

tutoring him, Christine taught him how to play games such as "Duck, Duck, Goose" so he'd feel more confident about joining groups. She also participated in the student senate, was a member of the honor society, and got involved in other activities as well. But she kept her weekends for fun—something she still tries hard to do. As Christine says, "You can be a problem solver without being boring."



Rita Trujillo (left) and Christine Sargent

faster and easier if you plan far ahead, and some things take a long time to reach—and require many signposts and steps along the way.



Finding a Purpose

“We are told that talent creates its own opportunities. But it sometimes seems that intense desire creates not only its own opportunities, but its own talents.”

Eric Hoffer

You might think of “what you want to be” (or “who you want to be”) as your *purpose*. Purpose is very personal. It’s that special something inside of you that you want to develop and pursue. Purpose gives your life meaning and enables you to make a contribution in your own unique way.

How can you find your purpose? You might start by asking yourself “What do I like to do most?” You have special talents that make you what you are. You can do things that nobody else can do, or do them in ways that nobody else can duplicate. When you match your talents with a need, you can find a purpose. Here are more questions to ask yourself as you think about your purpose and what it might be:¹

¹ If you completed the Self-Portrait on pages 12–13, you might want to look back at it now. Some of your responses contain clues to your purpose.

- ? What are my talents?
- ? What’s easy for me to do?
- ? What’s hard for me to do?
- ? What are my interests?
- ? What do I do in my spare time?
- ? Who needs me or my skills?
- ? What do I dream about?
- ? Who are my heroes?
- ? What kinds of people do I like to be around?
- ? Do I like to be around people?
- ? Do I like to be around animals?
- ? Would I rather be outdoors or indoors?
- ? What things do I *dislike* doing?
- ? What things worry me?
- ? What things would I like to see improved?
- ? How would I design the ideal future for my town, city, country, or world?

You might want to jot down some responses to these questions in a notebook or journal.² Look back at your responses from time to time. Are there more questions you might ask yourself? Can you develop your responses further and go into more detail? If you’re *purposeful* about your purpose, you should find it becoming more clear as the months and years go by.

Setting Goals

“Goals determine what you’re going to be.”

Julius Erving

The signposts and steps you follow on the way to your purpose are your *goals*. Setting goals is a skill you can learn. Here’s how to do it:

1. **Get ready to do some serious goal-setting.** Here are four things you’ll need:

- some uninterrupted quiet time
- someplace where you can think and work comfortably
- something to write with
- something to write in or on.

² See “Empathy,” pages 88, 89, and 92, for journaling resources.

Take a walk, find a quiet corner at the library or your school media center, or go to your room and hang a “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door.

2. Set your long-range goals for the next 10 years. Write down all of the things you’d like to accomplish during this time. Keep your purpose in mind. Your long-range goals should support your purpose.

Example: You like being around animals. One of your long-range goals might be to work as a veterinarian. So you write down “To work as a veterinarian,” “To have my own veterinary practice,” “To find cures for diseases that affect animals,” and “To attend a college or university that has a program in veterinary medicine.”

3. Prioritize your long-range goals. Number them in order of their importance to you. Then look at numbers 1, 2, and 3. These are your Top Three long-range goals. Congratulations!

Example: Your Number 1 long-range goal might be “To have my own veterinary practice.”

4. Set your medium-range goals for the next 3–5 years. Write down all of the things you’d like to accomplish during this time. Include details. Keep your purpose AND your long-range goals in mind. Your medium-range goals should help you achieve your long-range goals. They’re related!

Example: You write down “To find out which colleges and universities offer the best veterinary medicine programs,” “To get a part-time job working for a veterinarian,” “To read as many books as I can about being a veterinarian,” and “To learn more about running a business.”

5. Prioritize your medium-range goals. Number them in order of their importance to you. Now you have a Top 3 list of medium-range goals. You’re making real progress!

Example: Your Number 1 medium-range goal might be “To find out which colleges and universities offer the best veterinary medicine programs.”

6. Set your short-range goals for the next year or two. Write down all of the things you’d like to accomplish during this time. Keep your purpose AND your medium-range goals in mind. Your short-range goals should help you achieve your medium-range goals.

Examples: You write down “To ask my guidance counselor about veterinary schools,” “To interview veterinarians about their education and what their work is like,” “To search the Internet for veterinary schools and ask for copies of their catalogs,” and “To check out a book from the library about being a veterinarian.”

7. Prioritize your short-range goals. Number them in order of their importance to you. Now you have a Top 3 list of short-range goals. Good work!

Example: Your Number 1 short-range goal might be “To check out a book from the library about being a veterinarian.” (Guess what: This is something you could do today. *Taking action on your goals is what makes them happen.*)

8. Record all of your Top 3 goals in a notebook or journal and date them. Check your lists often to remind yourself of your goals—once a day or once a week. Whenever you reach one of your goals, check it off and write down that date in your notebook.

9. Revise your lists as you reach your goals. Whenever you reach one of your top goals, choose another one to replace it.

10. Revise your goals as needed. Things change. People change. You’re changing right now. Don’t be afraid to look back at your goals and start over if you need to. What’s important is to *always have goals.*

You might be thinking that goal-setting seems too hard or complicated. Remember that it’s a skill, and learning any new skill takes practice. If you want to play the piano, you have to practice. If you want to make the swimming team, that takes practice, too. Improving your score on your favorite video game is something that comes after hours of practice. Isn’t it worth it to practice a skill that can shape your whole life? One that you’ll use again and again throughout your life? After all, you’ll always have things you want to achieve and accomplish.

Here are just a few of the good things that come from being a goal-setter:

- ✦ You feel more independent. You’re not waiting for someone else to decide your life for you. You’re doing it yourself.
- ✦ You feel more capable. You’re not waiting and hoping for things to happen. You’re *making* them happen.

- ✦ You feel more in control of your time. You can look back at each week and know that you've accomplished something. This frees you to have more fun!
- ✦ You feel more confident that you'll eventually fulfill your purpose. Remember, goals are the steps that get you there.

You might be thinking that goal-setting seems too simple or easy. How can making lists have such a powerful effect on your life? After all, you're just writing down a bunch of words! But before you decide that goal-setting isn't for you . . . *try it*. Look around for other goal-setters and talk with them. (TIP: Successful people and high achievers are usually goal-setters.) Then promise yourself to follow this process for at least three weeks. By then, you'll have a good idea of whether it works for you. If you don't like this process after three weeks, you might try it again, and then again, because it can help you to focus your energy in finding and fulfilling your purpose.

Many young people (and adults, too) have a general idea of where they might like to be in 5, 10, or 20 years from now. But they don't have the discipline to do the *daily planning* that enables them to accomplish the "little things" on the way to achieving their long-range goals. If you can train yourself to do this—and you must *do it for yourself*—then you'll be on your way to fulfilling your purpose.

You create your own future in your mind. Vision comes before doing. Goal-setting helps to make your vision come true.

"The victory of success is half won when one gains the habit of setting goals and achieving them. Even the most tedious chore will become endurable as you parade through each day convinced that every task, no matter how menial or boring, brings you closer to fulfilling your dreams."

Og Mandino

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that . . .

① You're a talented musician, a top scorer on the soccer field, plus you're very interested in medicine. How might you decide which is the best career or direction for you to choose? Give reasons.

② One of your friends is suddenly given the opportunity to attend a day-long leadership workshop out of state. Unfortunately, she already has a music recital scheduled for the same day, and she sent out invitations several weeks ago. So she (reluctantly) decides to skip the leadership workshop. Do you think she might ever have another opportunity like that, or does "opportunity knock" only once? Do you think your friend made the right decision? Why or why not?

③ The mayor of a city has made a plan for the city's future direction. Her plan includes developing a large park as a business area, which would lead to economic growth the city needs. When the mayor's plan is made public, many people protest. They think that the park should be left alone. Should the mayor follow her plan for the city, or should she listen to the people? Explain your answer.

④ You go to a sleepover at a girlfriend's house, expecting that it will be an all-girls party. When you arrive, you discover that your friend has invited boys to spend the night, too. You don't want to be a party-pooper, but you're not comfortable with boys sleeping over. Should you ask your friend to tell the boys to leave? Should you stay at the party and keep quiet? Should you go home? What might you do in the future to avoid similar problems and misunderstandings?

⑤ You're confused about your future, and you have no particular vision of what you want to be someday. Is that okay? Should you do something to plan your future? Or should you just let it take care of itself?

Activities

INTERVIEW PEOPLE WHO DO interesting things. You might do this on the telephone, by letter, or by email.³ Broaden your own interests by interviewing people who do things you don't know anything about. Write up your interviews in a notebook and share it with your class.

KEEP A SCRAPBOOK of newspaper articles about people who do unusual or interesting things. You might look for articles about people with unique jobs, unconventional hobbies, or anything else that catches your eye.

SEARCH THE INTERNET to learn more about your interests and hobbies. Use a search engine like Yahoo, Hotbot, Excite, or Altavista. (If you don't know how to use a particular search engine, read the tips or Help section.) Bookmark any sites you find that you want to visit again in the future.

CHECK IT OUT



Yahooligans! Hobbies Links

http://www.yahooligans.com/Sports_and_Recreation/Hobbies

Links to sites about collecting, crafts, gardening, kites, magic, pets, puppetry, and more for kids.

EXPAND YOUR INTERESTS BY VOLUNTEERING.⁴ This is a great way to learn new things, meet new people, and serve others. Check with your school, community center, place of worship, local United Way office, etc. to find out what opportunities are available to you.

GO MUSEUM HOPPING. Visit museums around your city. Look for different things you might be interested in. Do any of them relate to your purpose? Do any of them inspire you to do some goal-setting?

Variation: Visit museums on the Internet. Many have their own Web sites with virtual exhibits. You might start by going to <http://www.yahoo.com> and doing a search for "museums."

³ Get in touch with famous people with help from *The Kid's Address Book*. See "Choice and Accountability," page 32.

⁴ See "Empathy," pages 81–82, for guidelines on how to volunteer.

TRY TO FIND AT LEAST THREE good reasons for studying math in school. Why learn math if you're interested in things that don't have anything to do with math? Does math do anything special for your mind? How might it help you to focus on problems and find solutions? Set goals? Find a purpose? Write your reasons and thoughts in your journal.⁵

Variation: Try to find at least three good reasons for *everything* you're studying in school. Why learn about history? Science? Literature? Health? Geography? What else?

PLAN GOALS FOR THE FUTURE of your country. Suppose you're a member of the President's cabinet and you're able to plan goals for the future of the United States. Write at least five goals you think the U.S. should head towards in the future. Justify your goals. (If you live in a different country, plan goals for your own country.)

CHECK IT OUT



The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

When you finish writing your goals, consider sending them to the President. You can do this by mail, through the White House Web site (if your Web browser supports forms), or by email to:

president@whitehouse.gov

GO ON A SCAVENGER HUNT around your neighborhood or community. Look for interesting things around you. Does anything you see give you an idea of a direction you'd like to follow?

HAVE A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE. Encourage your family to accompany you to a symphony, ballet, opera or musical, or art exhibit to broaden your vision of things you might be interested in. Afterward, discuss your experience—and plan the next one. You might want to consider getting a family membership to an art museum, science museum, or children's museum in your area.

GO "MENTOR SHOPPING." If you have a strong interest in something, seek out a professor, a teacher, or community member who is involved with your interest.

⁵ See "Empathy," pages 88, 89, and 92, for journaling resources.