

Erik Fisher and
Jim Woods

READY AIM FIRE!



A PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO SETTING AND
ACHIEVING GOALS



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A Practical Guide To Setting And Achieving Goals

By Erik Fisher and Jim Woods

15-minute read

Synopsis

Ready Aim Fire! (2014) is a step-by-step guide to setting and achieving personal and professional goals. If you want to accomplish more in life but aren't sure where to begin, it provides an accessible starting point for learning the art of turning dreams into realities.

Who is it for?

- Newcomers to goal setting
- High achievers who want to go back to the basics
- Anyone who could use some more direction in life

About the author

Erik Fisher is the host of *Beyond the To-Do List* – a podcast dedicated to helping people improve their productivity. Together with Jim Woods, a productivity coach, he's also written *Focus Booster: Have More Clarity Make Better Decisions Live A Better Life*.

What's in it for me? Learn how to start setting and achieving your goals today.

Let's face it. Most of us could use some help with setting and achieving goals – both in our personal and professional lives.

Sure, we have all sorts of dreams floating around in our heads. But it's one thing to vaguely wish you'd write a book, start a business, or learn how to play the guitar. It's quite another to turn that nebulous idea into a concrete objective, develop a realistic plan for achieving it, and then transform that plan into a reality.

Many of us have trouble even reaching the starting point of this process, let alone the finish line. But it's never too late to get started – and by reading these blinks, you're already taking the first step!

In these blinks, you'll learn

- what shooting a gun can teach you about goal setting;
- how to turn a not-so-smart goal into a SMART goal; and
- why Jim Carrey wrote himself a \$10 million check.

To set and achieve a goal, you have to get yourself ready, aim at a target, and fire at it.

Imagine you've got a gun and you're doing some target practice. How do you make sure you hit the bullseye?

Well, you don't just whip out your weapon, blast off a bullet, and hope for the best. First, you get ready – pointing the gun in the right direction. Then, you aim – zeroing in on your target. Finally, you fire – pulling the trigger and accomplishing the deed. It's a three-step process with a beginning, middle, and end.

Now, maybe you don't have any interest in becoming a sharpshooter – but the same three steps apply to just about anything you want to do in life.

The key message here is: To set and achieve a goal, you have to get yourself ready, aim at a target, and fire at it.

Of course, life is usually more complicated than firing a gun at a shooting range. Generally speaking, you don't have a single, predefined target with a big, red bullseye directly in front of you. Instead, you've got many different areas of life calling out from multiple directions at the same time: family, friends, career, health, and so on.

All of these areas are important, but you can't aim and fire everywhere at once. If you want to get ready to set a goal, you've got to pick one area to start with.

Let's say you settle on your health. Well, that narrows things down, but it's still pretty broad – encompassing

everything from your weight to the quality of your sleep. Now you've got to zoom in on just one thing, select it as your target, and take aim at it. That means finding a concrete objective and coming up with a sensible plan for achieving it.

For example, maybe you decide to get into shape by going to the gym. Now you've got a target to aim at – finally, it's time to fire! How? By putting your plan into action, sticking to it, and seeing it through to the end. To go back to our target-practice metaphor, you've got to “pull the trigger” by committing yourself to the task at hand – actually going to the gym and working out on a regular basis.

Of course, all of that's easier said than done – but don't worry. We're about to break the whole process down, step-by-step.

Get ready to set a goal by reflecting on where you are in life and how much free time you have at your disposal.

One of the biggest benefits of setting a goal is that it gives you a sense of direction. Without a goal, you're like a ship drifting around the ocean, hoping to bump into a desirable destination by chance. With a goal, you know exactly where you want to go – you can chart your course, make your preparations, and set your sails accordingly.

But it's not enough to just know where you want to go. You also have to know where you are right now. After all, to get from point A to point B, you must understand where both points are in relation to each other. That way, you can also tell whether you're capable of covering the distance between the two points.

The key message here is: Get ready to set a goal by reflecting on where you are in life and how much free time you have at your disposal.

It's nice to think you could do anything, if you just tried hard enough. But let's be realistic. You only have so many hours in a day, and most of them are already filled with responsibilities. Depending on where you are in life, you're going to have more or less free time, which will determine how big of a goal you can accomplish right now.

For example, if you're in college, you're in a much different place than if you're a working parent with two kids. You also have very different capacities and needs when it comes to setting and achieving goals. A college student might have the time and energy to stay up until 3:00 a.m. working on a side project. But an exhausted parent probably can't do that. He might have to wake up at the crack of dawn to take care of his kids before going to his job.

Depending on where you are in life, some goals may simply be out of reach. If you have a newborn baby, now

might not be the best time to start a business. But that's OK. You've got more pressing priorities at the moment, and you'll have more time to devote to becoming an entrepreneur in the future.

For now, just make sure you have a clear sense of how much time is available to you. This will allow you to set a realistic goal that fits your current needs and schedule.

Reflect on your priorities to start narrowing in on a goal.

Alright, let's say you've done some reflection on where you currently are in life, but you're still not sure what kind of goal you should set for yourself. There are many different things you want to do, in many different areas. Your savings account has barely grown in years. Your guitar is gathering dust in the corner of the room. So many things, so little time! You're not sure where to even begin.

Sound familiar? To one degree or another, that describes most of us, so don't worry – you're in good company. It's not always clear where your priorities may lie, but there are some simple things you can do to give yourself more clarity.

The key message here is: Reflect on your priorities to start narrowing in on a goal.

Your goals should reflect your priorities in life. But what are your priorities? It can help to sit down and actually write out a list of them. For example, one person's list might have "spirituality" at the very top, followed by "partner, children, finances, health, career, and hobbies."

Simple enough – but here comes the tricky part. Chances are, there's a disconnect between what you *think* your priorities are and what they actually are in practice. For instance, you may say spirituality is your top priority, but you spend most of your free time watching television. What does that say about where your priorities really lie?

Take a few minutes to think about how you're spending your time. Then check how it aligns with your list of priorities. To take this even further, seek out five friends, family members, or colleagues whose opinions you trust, and ask them what they think your top three priorities are. This can be a useful exercise because your perception of how you're prioritizing your time and attention might be skewed. Adding some external perspectives into the mix can provide you with a helpful dose of objectivity.

Compare the other people's lists with your own. Do you see any patterns? Maybe everyone listed your hobbies, but no one listed your relationship with your partner. In that case, your relationship might be the priority to

focus on first since it's the one you're neglecting the most.

Just make a note of this for now. At this point, you're still in the getting-ready phase, so you don't have to commit to anything yet. By the end of the next exercise, you'll be ready to take aim at a goal.

Assess your "wheel of life" to get a better sense of where you need to focus.

Picture a circle.

Now, take that circle and divide it into seven sections, like a pie chart. Label each section with a word from the following list: financial, spiritual, social, intellectual, family, career, and health.

These are the different areas of your life. Put them together, and you have your "wheel of life." In an ideal world, we'd always be paying equal attention to all seven areas of our wheel at the same time. But chances are, your wheel is out of balance right now. Don't fret. This next exercise is about identifying what sections are being neglected and figuring out how to restore the balance.

The key message here is: Assess your "wheel of life" to get a better sense of where you need to focus.

With seven sections to think about, we often end up neglecting one or more areas in our wheel of life. The resulting imbalance throws the whole wheel off-kilter since all the areas are interconnected. Consider health as an example. By neglecting your health, you might feel too tired to concentrate on reading, which affects your intellectual life too.

To get a better sense of where you should be setting a goal, assess the seven areas on your wheel, rating your satisfaction level for each on a scale of 1 to 10. Then reflect on why you've chosen each score, jotting down some notes. They don't need to be elaborate. With a 2 rating for health, you might just write, "Eating junk food and not exercising."

Next, take the two areas with the lowest scores and write down what would bring those numbers up to a 10. Again, with a 2 rating for health, you might write, "Lose weight, lower cholesterol, and gain energy." Remember, there's no need to craft an essay – you're just trying to pin down your thoughts with simple, concise language.

Finally, look for any overlaps between the two areas with the lowest scores. Maybe you rated your family life a 3 with a note to spend more quality time with your partner. In that case, having more energy by improving your health could also help with your family life. After all, it'll make you less prone to zoning out in front of the television when you get home from work.

An improvement in one area can create a positive ripple effect in others, so think about where you can focus your time and energy to make the biggest overall impact.

It's important to set a SMART goal – one that's specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Now you're almost ready to aim. But first, it's time to do one last bit of reflection. Review your notes on both your priorities and wheel of life. Does anything stand out as goal material?

If not, that's OK. Give it some time. See if anything comes to mind in the next 48 hours. And if the clock runs out and you're still drawing a blank, that's OK too. You can focus on your health as a fallback option. After all, it's something you can always work on, and it gives you a boost of energy in all other areas of life as well.

In any case, whatever you decide to focus on, the time has finally come to set a goal. And not just any goal, but a SMART goal.

The key message here is: It's important to set a SMART goal – one that's specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

Let's say you decide to focus on your health. Well, if you just say you want to "lose some weight," that would be pretty vague. Instead, a SMART goal would be: "I'm going to lose 10 pounds in 90 days by working out during my lunch break three times per week."

Notice how this is specific – it's not just "some weight," but 10 pounds of weight that you want to lose. It's a measurable goal; you can track how many pounds you're losing (or not losing) in relation to it.

It's also achievable. You're setting yourself a reasonable amount of weight to lose within a realistic time frame. Speaking of which, you've also made your goal time-bound. You've given yourself a deadline of 90 days and a schedule of three times per week during your lunch break.

As for the goal's relevancy, that depends on how it fits into your priorities and wheel of life. You should be able to see this by looking at your notes from the exercises in the previous blinks. Just make sure your goal is something that actually matters to you.

Finally, take a moment to write down your goal. A study by researchers at Dominican University found that people who wrote down their goals had a success rate of 61 percent, compared to only 41 percent for people who didn't. So give yourself an edge by putting your goal into writing!

Stay motivated by remembering the reasons you're pursuing your goal and by visualizing your success.

Alright, now you're ready, and you've aimed. That leaves just one thing left to do: Fire!

This is the moment of truth – the part of the process where you finally get down to business and prepare yourself to achieve your goal. To get to the finish line, it's going to take hard work and perseverance. There are no shortcuts here. But there are some things you can do to increase your chances of success.

One of the most important things is to keep yourself motivated. It's all too easy to lose your motivation when faced with difficulties, distractions, and setbacks. So how can you prevent this from happening?

The key message here is: Stay motivated by remembering the reasons you're pursuing your goal and by visualizing your success.

Remembering what's motivating you in the first place is the key to staying motivated. Why do you want to accomplish your goal? The more answers you come up with, the more reasons you'll have in your back pocket to keep going when things get tough.

With this in mind, try coming up with not one, not two, but *seven* reasons why you want to accomplish your goal. And like always, don't just think about it – write it down! List each reason as a separate sentence. For example, "I'm starting a business to secure my family's finances" and "I'm starting a business to help my customers." Put this list somewhere prominent so you can look at it whenever you need a motivation boost.

Need a further boost? Try visualizing your success. So, if your goal is to write a novel, go to a local bookstore and photograph the shelf you'd want it to appear on someday. Why? Because the human mind is highly visual. The more you can see your goal, the more your subconscious will believe it's possible, and the more motivated you'll be to work toward it.

The actor Jim Carrey did this when he was starting his career in Hollywood, back in the 1980s. He wrote himself a \$10 million check for "acting services rendered." He post-dated the check for Thanksgiving, 1995. Fast-forward to just before Thanksgiving of that year – he received news that he would be getting a big paycheck for his role in the movie *Dumb and Dumber*.

The amount of the check? \$10 million.

Make your goal manageable by creating a to-do list and establishing a routine for tackling it.

Imagine you're an author who wants to write a book. You open your computer to start writing your masterpiece – only to be confronted by a completely blank page. Now what?

You probably feel overwhelmed. To go from having written zero words to completing a 400-page manuscript can feel like an impossibly huge task.

Similar feelings can get in the way of completing any goal. After all, if the task seems too big and complicated to manage, why bother even trying? Now you're ready to give up before you've even started!

How can you prevent this from happening?

The key message here is: Make your goal manageable by creating a to-do list and establishing a routine for tackling it.

To get started, create a to-do list by splitting your overall task into a series of smaller subtasks. An author writing a book would have a list like the following: Develop an idea for the book. Write an outline. Compose a rough draft. Revise the rough draft – and so forth.

If you need help, try working backward. If the final step is to generate sales of your book, the step before that might be to develop a marketing campaign.

Next, refine your to-do list further by splitting each subtask into a series of sub-subtasks. Ask yourself, “Given my schedule, what is the minimum amount of work I can complete each day to feel like I’ve accomplished something and I’m maintaining my momentum?”

For instance, maybe each chapter of your book consists of a series of short sections, and you have time to write three sections per day. With that, you can then list out which sections you’re going to complete each day.

Once you finish refining your to-do list, you’ll have a day-by-day road map for achieving your goal. Now you just have to stick to that map. Establishing a work routine will help you stay on track. A morning routine might go like this: wake up, eat breakfast, read for 15 minutes, write for an hour, and take a shower.

But don’t stick to your road map if it’s not working for you. Remember, you can always adjust your to-do list as you go. If it turns out you can’t write three sections per day in the amount of time you’ve scheduled, you can scale back to two sections per day. The point is simply to find the amount of work that’s manageable for you. It’s OK if this takes some trial and error.

Seek out support from friends, family, and colleagues when you feel discouraged.

As you pursue your goal, you’re bound to encounter setbacks and challenges along the way. Ultimately, that’s a good thing because overcoming them helps you grow. But it can also be dangerous because it can make you feel like giving up.

To keep going, it’s important to keep your spirits high. Look back at the crossed-off items on your to-do list, and celebrate the progress you’ve already made.

Remember your strengths, and try to stay positive. Take a little break and watch an inspiring movie, listen to some upbeat music, or go for a walk.

Those are all things you can do on your own. But when the going gets really tough, nothing gives you a bigger boost than reaching out to other people.

The key message here is: Seek out support from friends, family, and colleagues when you feel discouraged.

When you feel like you’re at the end of your rope, a phone call or a face-to-face conversation with a friend can really help you work through a problem. But don’t wait until your darkest hour to reach out for help. Create a support network that can sustain you throughout your journey. Ideally, it should consist of three levels.

Level 1 is the person you can lean on the most for day-to-day support, like a partner, best friend, or parent. For instance, if you have children, maybe your partner can take them to the playground for an hour each day so you have time to focus on your goal.

Level 2 are the friends who can give you smaller doses of support. You could ask a friend to text you every couple of days. Another friend could call you once a week for encouragement and to check in on your progress.

Finally, Level 3 is a group of people who are pursuing a similar goal as you. If you’re a writer, you could join a writer’s group – or create one yourself. It doesn’t have to be a huge time commitment. Maybe you meet just once a month, in person or through video chat. By sharing your journey with fellow travelers, you can learn from each other’s experiences, commiserate about each other’s tribulations, and celebrate each other’s triumphs.

Remember: no man or woman is an island, and you don’t have to go on your journey alone.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

Setting and achieving a goal comes down to three basic steps: ready, aim, and fire. To get ready, you need to figure out what area of life you want to focus on. To aim, you need to come up with a SMART goal – a goal that’s specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. To fire, you need to stay motivated, write a to-do list, maintain a routine, and seek out support from friends, family, and colleagues.

Actionable advice:

Keep it simple.

Avoid the temptation to tackle multiple goals at once. You have a limited amount of time and energy, and

you'll spread yourself too thin if you try to "multitask." It's great to have other goals to pursue – just put them on the back burner for now. You can always come back to them later, once you've finished the goal you're currently working on. Knocking goals off one by one means you'll eventually accomplish them all; if you try doing everything at the same time, you'll potentially end up accomplishing nothing.

Got feedback?

We'd love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to remember@blinkist.com with *Ready Aim Fire!* as the subject line and share your thoughts!

What to read next: *The 10X Rule*, by Grant Cardone

Want to take your new practice of setting and achieving goals to the next level? Entrepreneur, investor, business consultant, and motivational speaker Grant Cardone proposes "The 10X Rule," which asks you to take whatever you're planning on achieving and multiply it by 10.

Think you need to make ten sales calls? Make 100. Ten times the ambition. Ten times the effort. And if all goes well, ten times the results. But how can you possibly pull off such a feat? To learn more, check out our blinks to *The 10X Rule*.