

# The Complete Lawyer

Cover Blurb:

## **Use Your Long-Term Goals To Motivate You**

Without true goals you can have a fulfilling career, but your path will probably prove more difficult and considerably longer.

**By Anne Whitaker**



Anne H. Whitaker, vice president of Counsel On Call's Atlanta office, has more than 20 years of combined experience in coaching, consulting, marketing, law and education. In 1991, she co-founded In-House Counsel, Inc., a pioneering contract attorney placement company in Atlanta. Prior to entering the business world, Ms. Whitaker practiced real estate law in private practice for five years. She received her J.D., *cum laude*, from the University of Georgia School of Law in 1986, where she served on the editorial board of the Georgia Law Review. She is a member of the State Bar of Georgia, the Atlanta Bar Association, Lawyers Club of Atlanta, and Georgia Association of Women Lawyers (GAWL) and has created, chaired and spoken at numerous seminars for lawyers on career development and transition. She provides career development coaching for lawyers, is founding member and co-chair of the Atlanta Bar Career Management Committee, and is a licensed provider of the Highlands Ability Battery and other career-related assessments.

To contact Ms. Whitaker, visit [www.counseloncall.com](http://www.counseloncall.com).

## **Use Your Long-Term Goals To Motivate You**

**Find out what matters most to you, and you'll be guided to a more fulfilled and balanced life**

**By Anne H. Whitaker**

*"In the long run you only hit what you aim at. Therefore, though you should fail immediately, you had better aim at something high."*

—Henry David Thoreau

*This is the last in a series of eight articles exploring The Eight Critical Success Factors <sup>1</sup> necessary to create a Personal Vision for your life and career. If you are new to the series, you may want to take a look at the previous articles. (See TCL Volume 2: [Number 1](#), [Number 2](#), [Number 3](#), [Number 4](#), [Number 5](#), and Volume 3: [Number 1](#), [Number 2](#).)*

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What do you want to be, do, and have in your life? These questions are the adult version of “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Many lawyers I coach have been so caught up in the stress cycle that they don't know the answers. They have been busily getting things done on their to-do lists and meeting the goals that have been set for them by their law firms, their families, and others.

They are so busy, in fact, that they may not even realize that they are out of touch with what makes them really happy—the important, not-so-urgent goals that connect them with their true selves and give their lives real meaning and fulfillment. Knowing who you want to be and the things you want to accomplish and experience in your lifetime are fundamental to defining success your way.

### **Align Your Goals With Your Values**

I am sure you already know how important goals are. In fact, odds are that you're already a high achiever, which means you're probably very good at setting and meeting goals on a regular basis. That's how you made it through law school, passed the Bar Exam, and practice law. However, if you are like many of my clients, your existing goals and plans have nothing to do with your most deeply-held values; instead, they've evolved from the stress cycle you are in. The more closely you match your goals to who you really are and what you want out of life, the more they will help you create a life and career that bring you great fulfillment and meaning.

To see if you know your goals, ask yourself:

- Toward what end are your efforts directed on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis?
- Do you know where you are headed?
- If you do know, is it where you really want to go?
- Are the goals your own or someone else's?
- What do you really want to accomplish between now and the end of your life?
- Who do you want to become and are you in the process of becoming that person?

These are some of the most important questions you can ask yourself. Very often the reason people don't get what they want is simply because they haven't figured out what they *really* want. If you create clear goals that include the most important things about yourself and then keep those goals in mind when you consider opportunities, you can usually achieve what you are seeking. But first you need to be clear about how you define your short-term and long-term goals.

### **Categorize Your Goals**

Think of your goals as falling into three categories or levels:

- Big-picture, higher level, abstract goals. These include good health, security, love, and prosperity. They are similar to values. “Achieving financial security” is a big-picture goal.
- Intermediate goals. These specific goals support or connect to the bigger goals. “Saving money,” is an intermediate goal.
- Action goals. These are items on your “to-do” list that will help you achieve specific goals. “Creating a budget” is an action goal.

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You can see how these goals are connected and interrelated. Creating a budget clearly will allow you to save money, which will contribute to your sense of financial security.

But you may not realize how you can use your highest level goals as motivational tools. If, for example, your higher goal is to be physically and mentally fit into your 90s, you’ll be more likely to keep your action goal of getting up to run at 5:00 a.m. because you’ll think of it as an essential step in achieving longevity. Simply adding “running 30 minutes 4 days a week” to your daily to-do list without linking it to the higher goal doesn’t give you any motivation to follow through. Similarly, if you plan on making \$200,000 a year, drill down beneath the numbers to identify your true end-goal. What do you want to do with the money? Enjoy an active retirement? Provide for your children? Answering these questions will help you devise interim and short-term goals that you can keep.

The trick is to make sure that your action and intermediate goals lead you towards the more big-picture goals that really matter to you.

### **Identify Your Long-Term Goals By Thinking Backwards**

To start the process, identify your highest-level goals first, and then decide which interim and action goals will support them.

If you’re not already in touch with your most valued, big-picture goals, here’s an exercise to help you.

Pretend you are near the end of your life. Your loved ones are with you and you have the chance to look back over your life. Your grandchild asks you what you are most proud of, what you believe that your life has meant, and what you have accomplished. How would you answer? Ask yourself the following questions as if you are that older person:

- What has been most important to me?
- What gave me the most joy?
- Who have I been, what have I done, and what has meant the most to me?

- What kind of difference have I made in the lives of others?
- What has changed as a result of my having lived?
- What kind of compromises would cause me to be disappointed with myself?

Here's another exercise: make a list of any and all goals, big and small, you can think of—short-term, long-term, personal, career, family, health and fitness, financial. Without categorizing or prioritizing them, write down all the things that you love to do or would love to do, including all that you came up with in your “the end of your life” exercise.

Now, group your goals by category. You'll probably end up with a few large goals and many smaller goals, which you can group by sub-category. For example, you may have several subsets under “Financial Security” or “Health and Fitness.”

Next, look at the goals that aren't in a category and ask yourself:

- Is this a goal that I really want, or one I think I *should* have?
- How does it add to the quality of my life and my values?
- Does it inspire me? How does it challenge me to grow as a person?
- Does this goal limit me to what I think is possible for me to become or achieve?

Based on your answers, eliminate those goals that don't feel important or authentic.

### **Create Two Timelines**

Your next task is to plot your true goals on a timeline. Take a long piece of paper and draw two long, parallel horizontal lines leaving space for writing in-between. Label the top line “Career Goals” and the bottom one “Personal Goals.” (You can tape several pieces of paper together to give you more room, use poster board, or even create it in a document that can expand as you add to it. Be creative and use whatever method works best for you.) Once you have drawn the lines, write your current age at the beginning of both parallel lines, and put 100 at the ends. You can put hatch marks at ages 22, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80 as those are considered turning points by many people.

It's important to consider your life and career together. We often make the mistake of separating our life into compartments rather than considering it as a whole with overlapping and interdependent segments. The truth is, all of the parts of our lives are interwoven and affect one another; your career affects your family, your health, your finances, and your parenting—and vice versa.

Write your goals on the timelines, starting with your big-picture ones, and place them on the appropriate line at the age you want to achieve them. Then add the smaller, intermediate goals. Be creative—use colored pens, for example, or draw

pictures—to make the activity more real and enjoyable. Once you have added all your goals, you'll probably notice substantial time gaps between your age now and the date you have targeted to achieve the goals. Your next step will be to fill in those gaps with the necessary intermediate and action goals that will help you attain your long-term goals.

Make sure your intermediate and action goals are smart goals: make them specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based. If they are vague, fuzzy, or open-ended, they will not be as effective. For example, saying “I want to be healthy” is a big-picture goal that sounds like a value. How can you achieve this goal? Will you exercise? If so, where, how much, and how often? When will you start and how will you know you have achieved your goal? If you want to become healthier by changing your diet, ask yourself similarly specific questions.

### **Revisit Your Timelines To Modify Them As Your Life Changes**

Once you have completed your timelines, review them and notice where you have placed your career and personal goals. Are there any goals that you need to reconsider now that you can see how they mesh or conflict with each other? For example, one client realized she had put the personal goal “to have a baby” at age 35, the same age she hoped “to start a business.” Seeing this in black and white helped her realize how unrealistic it was; she ended up reevaluating her time frame for both goals.

As you continue to refine your Personal Vision, you will probably modify some of your goals, adding new ones, removing others. This timeline is a work in progress—a living document that you can continue to use throughout your life. Refer to it often, especially when making career and life choices. And don't be afraid to modify it as needed.

### **Setting True Goals Makes Your Life Easier And More Balanced**

What happens if you don't take the time to set your true goals? You might be able to have a fulfilling career and life, but your path will probably prove more difficult and longer. Or you might find you made unintended sacrifices that resulted in an imbalanced life. Having meaningful goals that keep you focused on what you want to create for your career and life will help keep your feet moving in the right direction and keep your life in balance.

Take some time during the next two months to examine your short- and long-term goals for your career and your personal life. Setting goals is like making promises to yourself, and that process alone can yield amazing results.

The next article will show you how to integrate all of the eight factors, including your goals, into your personal vision and how to uncover the possibilities for making it real in your life.

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## **RESOURCES**

1. McDonald, Bob, Ph.D., and Hutcheson, Don, E., *Don't Waste Your Talent: The 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best*, The Highlands Company, 2005.