



Authentic and Appropriate Goals

Your goals will determine your means and how you feel about what you achieve.

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“Only goals that take us outside our comfort zone enable us to rise to the occasion. The rest just leave us standing still.” — **Michael Hyatt**, former publisher, now life coach

Looking for Good Ideas

The subtitle of Steve Magness’s book, *Do Hard Things: Why We Get Resilience Wrong and the Surprising Science of Real Toughness*, (Magness 2022) put me off. Anyone with the temerity to bolster their claims with “real science” has fumbled at the starting line. Real science creates confusion, not certainty. This kind of false advertising is more likely due to the publisher rather than the author.

I don’t really read these books word for word. I skim looking for things that stand out and don’t annoy me. I’m on the lookout for evidence and alert to hearsay and fabrications. The authors of most popular

books are figureheads with weak ideas. The writing is done by text editors. Much of what you'll read is skillfully aerated filler.

This is what I've learned from the publishing industry: there's enough money to be made that publishers maximize each phase of book production by delegating it to separate teams. The authors' original ideas, if there were any, are softened, sexed-up, inflated, air-brushed, and diluted. Once you're aware of this, you'll understand why current works in every genre seem so much alike.

Books produced for popular readership tend to be repetitive and sophomoric. They're obviously written by a group of people who want to sell to the largest audience. The fact that every popular book in the popular press is approximately two hundred pages should make you suspicious. These are factory farmed commodities.

Making People More Effective

I'm ambivalent about enhancing the performance of just anyone. Most people are not committed to any goal, and some people are working toward goals I don't support. I'm interested in high achievement in areas that are spiritual, intellectual, emotional, expressive, or creative.

When you work as a counselor you become aware that most of what people are working toward are not their own goals, but the goals they've been taught. Most people's psychological energy goes toward conforming to expectations and amplifying social norms. You may think you're advancing yourself as an individual, but who you are as an individual is largely determined by the role you've adopted, which has been selected from the roles you've been offered.

Most people are interested in achieving greater wealth, power, comfort, satisfaction, or security. These things don't require goals or values and they don't have limits, they just involve greater acquisition and they're based on a sense of lack. Achievement based on a sense of lack is achievement that's never fulfilled.

The aims of achieving greater power or comfort are actually expressions of emptiness that cannot be filled by getting what you want and avoiding what you fear. Money, power, and comfort cannot allay your long-term distress. They're built on constant need that has no plateau or sufficiency. Achieving more power or comfort will provide a temporary respite, but soon the fears of inadequacy and the sense of need will reestablish themselves.

Are You Evolving or Amplifying?

Evolving means change and innovation. Amplifying means collecting more and getting bigger. Mammals evolved themselves; the dinosaurs amplified themselves. The experiences are exclusive, you're either doing one or the other and they feel quite different. Most of us do not evolve but we're unaware of it.

If you have issues regarding your goals, book a free call on my schedule:

We confuse change with stability because they can both provide the same feelings of comfort. But change is exploratory while stability is conservative. In the first case you're going outside your boundaries while in the second case you're staying within them.

Some people make a display of their attitude in their dress and behavior, but presentations can be deceiving. As social media exemplifies, what catches our attention as being different is usually an amplified version of more of the same.

Improving performance requires having some confidence in yourself to begin with. If you don't respect your work, or yourself, then there's nothing for you to amplify. Both with my clients and with myself I look for what works rather than what doesn't. Doing less of what doesn't work probably won't improve your situation, it will just avoid wasting time.

Boundaries and Standards

There are many things one can criticize, and you should be aware of your shortcomings. It's worth considering if there are ways to improve, but not every goal fits within the greater context. I'd like to be connected to more people, but I'm quite disinterested in being connected with most people.

Boundaries are more like scales for weighing things rather than fences for keeping them separate. It's only at the extremes that you can draw a clear line, but the most important area is how you evolve the hazy boundary. It's more important to manage how you start and stop things than it is to make simple declarations in thought or action.

Your growth happens at the boundaries, not within the areas of your comfortable definition. The boundaries are areas where things are unclear, where you have to be perceptive, reflective, and engaged. This is where you find the conflicts between attraction and repulsion and you want that. Be suspicious of situations that appear too much of one or the other, those are stereotyped situations: pop psychology books and people sporting fashions.

Remember that what you think you need and what makes you feel comfortable do not come from you originally, they are what you've learned through interaction with your environment. Some of what you need involves growth, and some of the growth we need is individual and some is culture-wide. Some of what you need involves comfort and security because that's how you stay consistent and contained. Some of that is also unique to you, such as finding love, and some of it is social in nature, like collecting money.

Healing, Damaging, and Resilience

Healing others is a false notion since only you can heal yourself. More importantly, only you can know what healing means. Of course, healing to the norm is different from healing to regain your optimal

self. Allopathic medicine, diagnosis, treatment, and reform all work to move you to the norm. Each norm has a range and each of us falls differently within that range.

Staying within your maintenance range is good, but staying within your existing potential is bad. That may sound overly judgmental, but in matters of one's spirit I think it's important to be judgmental. This is one area where it's never a good idea to be stagnant, inert, and undiscerning. To be "nondual" in spiritual matters is to have no direction. To have no direction in spiritual matters is to be dead.

What is your notion of the spiritual? Is it something you feel in your heart, know in your head, sense in your body, or exists in some existential place beyond what you know? And when it comes to deciding what's practical, valuable, and virtuous, are you in agreement or in conflict?

Some of the healing we need relates to maintaining what's necessary, but even here you shouldn't be too sure. Comfort is relaxing and relaxation is necessary, but maintenance also requires constant stress and exercise. You learn to endure what's necessary and avoid what's too comfortable.

Avoid crutches, coping strategies, palliatives, antibiotics, and pain relievers because without the engagement with some level of stress and discomfort you lose the ability to protect and provide. You need some level of discomfort to maintain yourself as physically and mentally fit. You learn to reframe this discomfort as an exercise, game, or challenge and so to engage rather than avoid it.

What Is Appropriate?

Mountaineering taught me a lot about what is and isn't appropriate. For most people, most of the time, the level of discomfort that's typical in mountaineering is neither wanted nor appropriate. I learned that for myself and so, eventually, I stopped. What was most useful was recognizing that I could both set that a level and endure the level I set. I learned to tolerate suffering, which is a useful skill, but that didn't mean the suffering itself was healthy.

Hypnosis can teach you to endure pain, but pain isn't something you should learn to endure. Just because you can endure it doesn't mean you should. It's important to recognize this in many of our efforts. We need endurance but we also need discernment. Tolerating pain and frustration will allow you to go further and, in that way, you might gain more clarity. But you need to be able to turn more clarity into greater insight. Never accept pain for its own sake.

I think of the archaic notion of Christian penitence that's partly a matter of focus and partly one of guilt. Mountaineering was an exercise in building focus rather than absolving guilt, though that may not be entirely true. Some extreme athletes have something to prove. That's a kind of guilt that drives many high achievers. It's not particularly healthy, it never finds permanent satisfaction, and by its repetitive nature it will grind you down. Focus is something you want to enhance; guilt is something you want to reject. Even if you're guilty, which you're usually not, you still want to redeem yourself through creation not contrition.

Authentic Versus Appropriate

I'm not interested in helping people generally; I'm interested in helping people specifically. I have no idea what Steve Magness thinks is authentic or appropriate, and I don't care what he thinks. As far as I'm concerned, the section heading in his book was all I needed to start thinking for myself. Whatever he has to say is just background rumbling.

I'm less curious about people, and more curious about what they're working to accomplish. Most people's rational, conscious presentations are typical and familiar. People are trained to present themselves normally so their unique issues are not obvious, often not even to themselves. It takes a certain kind of ESP to hear between the words in peoples' stories, and you find this information through inference, indirection, and allusion.

Just as Perseus could only engage the Medusa by looking in a mirror, we need mirrors to look indirectly at our deep issues. And it's not just you that needs a mirror to avoid being consumed by strong forces, I do too. Our strongest energies need to be diluted to a working level.

Your personal happiness may be important to you but happiness rarely leads to change, it's more an indication of an appropriate state. The pursuit of happiness provides no direction. Direction is found in avoiding suffering which means we need suffering to some extent. The trick is to transmute suffering into growth and, in that form, appreciate it.

What is authentic is what you need. What is appropriate is what you can tolerate and appreciate. Authentic provides direction while appropriate provides boundaries. You find what's authentic by looking deeply within yourself, into realms where you may need a mirror. What's appropriate, on the other hand, is right in front of your face, you only need to recognize it.

A person who is clear enough to have a goal will have a story and a purpose. I might share a sense of value in those things. If I can't relate then I won't be able to help. A person who lacks goals, story, or purpose needs whipping. They need to be whipped into a state of activity and agitation. This could mean inspiration or just enervation.

And This is Your Goal

It's possible to feel motivated without knowing what you're motivated for. This is the state of being child-like, of having energy and enthusiasm just because you do. And the reason why it's important to regain this childhood state is because your essential goals are always beyond your horizon.

You need to be motivated to do what you can't yet see. This requires a combination of simple enthusiasm for life and engagement with a sense of exploration for things that are greater than what you know. For a child, it's easy to feel called to go beyond your boundaries because your boundaries are so constricting, stifling, and arbitrary, but as adults we're miseducated to believe we've reached a plateau in learning, practice, and self-definition.

Adults are complacent both because they've learned to be, and because they've sold their life force to buy normalcy, security, and comfort. If you think you know your goal then you under appreciate yourself. From that position of low self-esteem will grow all sorts of mental weakness ultimately leading to lassitude and disconnection. If you make yourself irrelevant you will become irrelevant.

Your goal should be nothing more than provisional. It's just your current goal as you wait for a better one, a place holder like a compass reading. It helps you maintain a meaningful heading, but it points to nothing in particular. Your goal is a feeling of growth, and that's the feeling that guides you.

You don't want a goal that's reachable and you don't want a goal that's impossible. The best goal is not really a goal, it's just a sense of the path you need to follow. It should be a path you'll always want to travel at full speed. If you can't run, walk, and if you can't walk, then crawl. The goal doesn't change, only your posture does.

References

Magness, S. (2022). *Do Hard Things: Why We Get Resilience Wrong and the Surprising Science of Real Toughness*. HarperCollins.