



By Jeff Jones
Business Editor

Seeing Opportunities

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ailing to plan is a plan to fail” is an old adage that many people live by and consider to be a great source of wisdom. A question often asked in interviews is where the candidate sees themselves in five years. New business owners are often asked for a business plan outlining what their speculative operation will produce financially in five to 10 years. The part of the equation left out of all these scenarios is, “if you could cast a perfect vision where everything and everyone did just what you expect...”

We are coached to make plans, to set goals and not let anything stand in our way, but that advice is not always sound and is seldom realistic. Just to test the point, how many of you reading this are exactly where you planned to be five or 10 years ago? Few of us are. Depending on the day I was contemplating my future, I would have been doing several different things at this point in my life, and writing a column for a magazine wasn't one of them.

I want to be clear that there is nothing wrong with goal setting. I would say the opposite is true because making the progressive steps towards achieving a goal is a valuable attribute in helping one improve and achieve. Goal setting is worthwhile in allowing us to make subtle improvements and to dream big dreams, as long as the goal has measurements that are realistic and manageable.

In “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” author Stephen Covey lists one of the habits as “begin with the end in mind.” Simple, yet deep in the idea that we should have a sense of where we are going before we take off. Few of us have started a trip with absolutely no idea of where we were going because at the least, we typically have the idea of returning home. However, notice that Covey doesn't say “begin with the end in mind and the end is all that matters.” The idea is that a highly effective person will have an idea, a concept, a dream of where they are going but it is not always cast in stone. Things happen, situations change, people come and go and we cannot foresee every one of those contingencies that might throw our plan off track. In fact, there can be dangers in being rigid in reaching one's goals. It has the potential to leave you depressed, angry or frustrated and to do the same with those around you who are subject to your plan going awry.

The balance for hardcore goal setters is found in seeing opportunities. The concept of enjoying the journey is not new, but is often overlooked in our hyperkinetic world. It is easy to be so singularly focused on the destination that we miss opportunity after opportunity to enjoy the progress we are making—even opportunities that might lead us to a different but better result. Our planning cannot take into account what might present itself to us along our path, and our failure to be open to finding opportunities limits us to only what we can imagine, leaving out all the possible outcomes we never thought of. It's quite possible we all know someone who has achieved success beyond what they ever imagined, and I'm guessing their business plan didn't include the sentence, “We will accomplish more than we can imagine.”

An openness to chance, to surprise, to catching a break, to opportunity allows us to do more than we imagine on our own, while challenging us to adapt to changing conditions and think on our feet. Enjoying the journey just might take you down a road that will be far more rewarding than any plan you could ever create.

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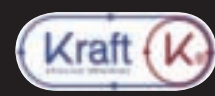
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