

Roadmaps For Your Life

By Jean Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., WFS Founder

It sounds ridiculous to say that most of us know where we've been in our lives, even though some of us might rather forget it, or most of it. But we do know what has transpired in our lives.

It is even easier to know where we are, if not emotionally then certainly geographically and actually. We know what we are doing, even though we may not like what we are doing. We know our actions, and we know each day and how we will go through it, doing what we must do.

And then there is the future – where we are going. Do we know? Can we know? Or do we dread it so much, we put thoughts of our future out of our minds? Strangely enough, and sadly, most do.

Suppose you were going on a trip several thousand miles away from where you presently live. Would you ever start out on that trip without a roadmap? Yet of all the persons reading this article right now perhaps only a handful have a roadmap for their lives, have goals!

That's really what goals are – roadmaps for our lives, yet so few persons ever have any or seriously make goals a part of life. Oh, I don't mean goals that are vague, goals such as merely thinking, "Gee, someday I'd like to have enough money to travel." That is not a goal. That is a wishful dream... however, it could be transformed into a goal.

But thinking about it in such vague and wishful ways will not help it to come true.

Too often we let life just happen, wanting to be happy and dreaming big dreams. Few of us ever realize that none of that can happen without our making it happen. We don't just become happy. Nor do we accomplish or have in life that which we want merely by dreaming about it. We must have a plan; we must have realistic goals that we consciously set out to achieve.

How many times in my speeches and writings have I used the illustration of a picnic to make the point of planning? None of us would ever think to invite 15 people to come to a Saturday picnic without our doing some planning for it – what we will have to eat, what we must buy, what we must prepare ahead, and a dozen other small details we must attend to before our Saturday.

Just think of all that planning for one small event in our lives, a picnic. Yet here we have our entire life stretching before us to be lived, and we are never enough concerned to have a plan for it!

Are we so naïve that we believe our future will take care of itself? Or are we so dependent upon others that we believe they will take care of our future for us? Or don't we ever think about the days, weeks, months, and years to come?

Why are we humans like that? Do we believe that by not planning, we will live longer? Do we believe that we have plenty of time and we'll plan later? Or do we think that everything will be wonderful just by chance?

Too often we just let life happen, willy-nilly. And then we wonder why we are bored, why life is so unexciting. And then we feel restless and depressed. Often we then do something drastic. We overindulge in food, drinking, indiscriminate sex, or in various combinations of all three of these. And then we can spend another period of time licking our wounds, feeling guilty, and indulging in self-pity for the awfully dull life we lead.

If you have never tried goals in your life, then the best way to begin is by setting up daily schedules. Each night before bed, set your goals for the next day. Use pen and paper to draft the outline for your day. It might read something like this: pick up cleaning, call Florence, clean closet, rewrite resume, stick with 1500 calories on your diet, take a minute or two and lay out your three meals exactly. That will make the dieting easier. I even use a time schedule. I lay out my day in segments – that which I want to do in the morning, and whatever I want to do in the afternoon and evening. If I have to go to a store, I list exactly what I want.

Having a plan for each and every day prevents time from getting away from us. Otherwise, day after day rolls around and we are still saying, "One of these days I must get around to rewriting my resume."

Unless we actually plan to do those things which are not to our liking, we will continue to put them off. That is the difference between a person who is successful and one who is not. The successful person makes a plan to do what she would rather not do, then makes herself do it.

There is a bit of procrastination in all of us. Overcoming the urge to postpone that which we don't want to do is the difference between success and failure. Each time we are able to make a plan and we stick to its execution, we are that much stronger as a person. And there are rewards, because we feel good about having made ourselves carry out our plan. And this self-satisfaction never goes away, no matter how many times we follow our plan.

There are a few small tricks one can use to help with execution. I have learned that if I put those things which I hate to do the most at the top of my list, then I can relax for the rest of the day, because I have made myself do the things I like the least during the early part of the day. One of my pet dislikes is making phone calls. I am almost a rarity among alcoholics in that I didn't spend lots of time on the phone when I was drinking. I did spend some time, but I don't think as much as a number of other women I know. However, now I really dislike making calls and I don't exactly know why. There are times when I lose sleep over knowing I must make a certain phone call the next day. Of course, there is no way of getting out of it. Each of us has a certain amount of calls we must make within a week's time. So I plan to make mine as early as possible. If it were possible, I'd make all of my phone calls the minute I got out of bed. But I can't do that. However, I make myself place the phone calls as early as possible so that I can enjoy the rest of my day.

For each of us, that which is the most difficult will be quite different. But doing the most difficult as soon as possible each day will help you with your day's goals and it will be a great accomplishment in discipline, which brings about self-satisfaction.

After you master the daily schedule of goals, then move on to larger goals, make larger plans. Try a month, which permits you to use more imagination. Be sure to include some adventuresome goals, but not impossible ones. You might wish to include something you've been promising your children, like going to the zoo. Or include something you've been promising yourself, having your hair cut short.

Maybe instead of monthly goals, you would rather try seasonal goals. I think these are one of my favorites, especially if you take care of a house. My list for Spring is something to see: call nursery-man and find out how to get rid of the poison ivy before it gets started again; paint the porch railing, prune the apple tree, plant some summer flowers, plan the vegetable garden, clean the cellar, and so on.

The great part about the seasonal goals is that one can make use of cold winter days and engender hope that spring is right around the corner. Another nice thing about goals made for spring, while in the dead of winter, is that it makes one want to get with these projects. It acts as encouragement, so that when spring does come, we are ready to jump right into our spring projects.

Of course, our ultimate goal is to make a plan for our life, not just a single day. Making plans for each day is the way to begin but then we must move on toward other plans – plans for months, plans for seasons, and plans for years. We need to have a one-year plan, a two-year plan, a five-year plan, and a ten-year plan. And we need plans even beyond that. We think nothing of having a retirement plan, which concerns only money. What of us? Our hopes, our dreams, our wants and desires, our goals? These, too, must be formulated in order for them to happen. Otherwise they will simply remain as dreams... impossible dreams.

Although I had many problems when I first attended college, I found that when I really got with it, when I was ready to learn, I loved being in college and graduate school, because there was a plan. I knew where I would be in the next ten years. And that was curiously satisfying to me. It gave me a sense of security and it took away the pressure of having to make immediate decisions.

Our goals, our plans, can do that for us. They give our life direction, purpose, and a knowledge that we must work toward a certain point of accomplishment. Goals and plans provide us with security, for our lives do not seem meaningless and without direction or purpose. We begin to feel needed; we begin to feel that our lives have some value.

Few of us think in spans of five years, much less ten years, but we should definitely try to do so. Right now, ask yourself if you have ever specifically considered where you will be and what you will be doing ten years from today? Some will answer, "Oh, probably exactly what I am doing now – the laundry, taking care of the kids, looking for a job, and hoping the kids don't get into trouble."

How sad that is, how without hope, or direction, or without life. None of us were meant to live lives of abject servitude. For some, it serves as a cop out; for others, it shows total defeat of self as a person without hopes or dreams.

What is desperately needed is a plan, a goal, a dream, a blueprint for a better and more self-productive life. Each of us deserves to have the time to find the best in us and then to find the time to develop that best in us, even if it means learning how to wallpaper, first a hallway, then a room, then a whole house.

Never believe that you cannot set goals in your life because you have a family or because of this or because of that. Every one of us can set goals, can make plans, even though within those plans we must make a place for our responsibilities.

The time is now to plan more than picnics. The time is now to take a hold on life and to make a roadmap for where you are going. There is no one single plan. My room is scattered with plans of all kinds: plans for this summer, plans for next fall, plans for the next five years. I have a writing plan and I have a house-repair plan; and I have a personal plan that includes things I want to read, places I want to go, things I want to do.

We can have plans of many kinds. The important thing is to have plans of many kinds and then to stick to them. Never make your plans impossible and always make them as specific as you possibly can. Don't just write 'prune the trees.' Instead, write down the exact name of the trees and try to set a small schedule – like specifying "the first week in spring."

If your goal is to make a million dollars, it is rather impractical to simply write: "In the next five years, make a million dollars." This goal can't happen without some plan for it. There must be a specified way, one that is possible. The more specific we are about how we are going to put our plans into action, the better chance we have at succeeding.

Sometimes we will be adding to our plans as we go along. Perhaps you will write down only the best outline of what you wish to accomplish, but then your mind will start to work on this. Actually, you have set it into motion. Then, as your mind develops the execution of this, add the details to your plan, to your goals. By the time you get around to the time scheme you listed, your goal will be partially accomplished.

Goals will make your life exciting. Goals give your mind something vital to work on. Begin to see your goals as accomplished. See the end result and this will help you to work towards that end.

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Comments from Irene:

This article encompasses a number of ideas that really helped me keep in gear. In my early days of staying sober, I had no specific ways that I wanted to use to help me make a change in my thinking. The Thirteen Statements were there and I shared each week how the one had kept me on track. I read

Jean's book, Turnabout: Help for a New Life as well as other suggested readings. I read that book over and over from 1981 to 1986 until Goodbye Hangovers, Hello Life was published. Then the *Sobering Thoughts* newsletter came monthly. Added reading was imperative for me. I treasure all articles in the newsletter and have the 17 Volumes of *Collection of Sobering Thoughts* booklets by Jean. This article, from Volume 10, stirs up a further desire to keep changing and keep following the program and "make goals a part of life."

Jean suggests "a plan and realistic goals" to each one who has an addiction. She encourages us to not procrastinate and "put dislikes at the top of your list and relax." Further readings are a must for me. In her article on 'Wanting To Belong', Jean says, "Read, read, read." Her readings took me down my dusty road to the now smooth paved one in my life. For all her writings, I am truly grateful.

Comments from Shirley:

I realized when I read the article that is what I have done; I made roadmaps or plans. As Jean asks in the article, "Would you go on a trip of several thousand miles without a plan?" Not if you want to have a safe trip. Early in my recovery, my counsellor said I had to have plans so that I wouldn't be tempted to go to the liquor store or find some way to drink. Then I had trouble with the right balance of plans, I made some falls along the way because I tried to overdo, I wore myself out with all the plans, and I wasn't giving myself relaxing time. I worried so much that I set myself up to fail. Thank goodness that is a long way behind me.

Jean suggests that we think that we cannot set goals because of family or other things. We think there is no time for us. Well let me tell you, we are important. We have to be good to ourselves before we can do any good for our family.

My goals are important to me, first my continuing sobriety, my growth in the "New Life" Program, and my growth in the world. "I am what I think" fits this plan.

I really like the idea of goals that are more than one week in advance, the seasonal goals of gardening, holidays, painting, exercising. The holiday I wish to take, the next WFS conference. Then the long-term goals of where I retire, how much money can I put aside for comfort. The good things I can do to maintain a healthy life style.

And there are many goals we will make during our lifetime. We make roadmaps sometimes without thinking about it! Planning for tomorrow.

Look to the future and see that goals (roadmaps) will give you added happiness and satisfaction.