

# Are Your GOALS Putting you in a Quandary?

1. Are you striving for unobtainable or vaguely defined goals?
  - a. Do you want to be healthy, wealthy, normal, good, popular, successful, loved, secure, etc? These seem to be worthy goals, but what do they mean? Take a few minutes to write down a specific definition for some of these words.
  - b. If you fail to define your goals in specific terms, how will you know if you have achieved them? For example, how will you know when you have achieved “success”?
  - c. Do you consider these goals in ‘either-or terms’? If you do not feel successful, do you consider yourself a failure, if not popular, then unpopular, etc.? Are you aware that possibilities exist in between these extremes?
2. Because the opposite alternative appears so unacceptable, do you feel that you **MUST** achieve your goal? Are you striving so hard that you become tense, unable to relax?
3. Are you becoming **FRUSTRATED**, because anything short of complete success (whatever that means!) is considered failure, or because anything short of complete “goodness” is considered bad, etc.?
4. Do you realize that continued frustration probably will lead to **DEMORALIZATION**—a “what’s the use” attitude, and from there, possibly depression?
5. This sequence—Idealization (Setting vague or unachievable goals), Frustration, Demoralization—was called the IFD pattern by Wendell Johnson in his book, *People in Quandaries*. Did you see yourself somewhere along the IFD sequence? Do you feel unduly pushed by yourself or by someone else?

**It may be time to check your goals.  
If in doubt, talk to your teacher, adult friend,  
or school counselor.**

## Teacher's Notes on Goals

In your class you may have students with at least one of four counterproductive views of goals: vaguely defined, unobtainable, "what's the use?", and goal-less. This exercise may well prod some of your students to examine their own positions and to set measurable goals that they are more likely to strive to achieve.

Distribute the "GOALS" sheet and ask the students to review it at home and to come prepared to discuss it the next day. Just in case students take the suggestion of speaking with their counselors, discuss this assignment with the counselors ahead of time, and provide them with a copy of the handout.

Discussion.

*Ask students to share their definitions of the goals such as happiness and success. If they had trouble putting those concepts into specific terms, ask them why the process was problematic. This will help them to understand about the use of vague or highly abstract words when describing their goals, and will help to motivate them to work for more specific goals.*

*What constitutes a vaguely defined goal? An unrealistic goal?*

*Will you recognize "success" when you finally achieve it?*

Example:

Ask your students to consider the following: Suppose you are doing poorly in school, and you decide to attempt to do better. What would you consider better? Can you measure it? Suppose your goal is to get all B's. That is measurable. But then there are subsets of that goal. What actions are you going to take to achieve that goal? *Wait for answers. Possible answers: "Do my homework. Pay attention in class. Participate in class."*

For another example, consider an 18-year-old male senior, standing 5'9", and weighing 135 pounds. His lifetime goal has been to play defensive tackle for the Philadelphia Eagles. What, if any, are the subsets of that goal? *Wait for answers. Possible answers: "Check out current players. Do I physically measure up? Do I have other talents that might make another position attainable? Can I prepare for it? If not, should I abandon that goal? Can I look at it as a dream from my younger days and set a different goal?"*

Ask your students:

*Do you look at your goals in 'either-or terms'? Suppose you were trying for all A's and you earned one B? How would you feel? Would it seem like the end of your world? If you don't at least feel disappointment, then perhaps your goals need readjusting.*

*Are you trying to reach your goals, or someone else's? How does that feel? Frustrating?*

*And what if you have no goals? Should you set some? Why or why not?*

*For some people, setting realistic goals and working to achieve them produces a great sense of satisfaction. Remind the student that goals can start out small, such as getting to class on time.*

*On the other hand, if you see yourself on the IFD slope, speak with your teacher, a trusted adult, or counselor. Nothing says you must travel that path alone. Go for it.*