Every successful person or motivational speaker talks about the importance of having goals. It sounds easy, but setting and achieving goals requires some discipline in both thought and action.

How many times have you set a goal for yourself? How many times have you failed to achieve a goal? Now, think about someone you know who could be described as goal-oriented and always seems to be achieving goals. What is different about them? Successful goals move beyond an unrealistic declarative statement to be specific blueprints for how you will reach your final destination. Dreaming is fine, but if you don't have a clear plan of how to make that dream a reality, nothing will change.

Be clear about what is most important to you—Many people make goals based on something they think they might like or what they think they should do. Don't waste your time. Our commitments reflect what is most important to us. If you plan to be committed to achieving a goal, you need to be clear about your priorities and what it is you really want for yourself.

Think about it, how motivated are you when you are working towards something that you feel is a chore or that you have to do it? Now, how motivated and excited are you when you work towards something you love?

The key to being successful with the goal process is figuring out what value achieving that goal brings to your life. How will you feel? What will achieving the goal provide for you in your life? What value does it add to your life? Spend the time to get the clarity you need, because it is this clarity of what is most important that will carry you through the challenging times on your journey to reaching your goal.

Be specific but realistic—Dreams are big and broad; goals are specific. For example, if you say you want to lose weight, you are being too vague. However, saying you want to lose 10 pounds provides more structure, but saying you want to lose the weight in a week is not realistic. Saying you want to win the lottery is a dream and not very realistic. However, saying you want to increase your income or decrease your debt by a specific amount over the next five years is specific, realistic and provides a framework for creating your plan.

Write down your goal—A goal stuck in your head might as well not exist. You need to write it down and look at it often. An architect would never just start building a house without first making a blueprint; your goals work the same way. You cannot expect to get from point A to point B without having a clear, written plan for getting there. When you write down your goal, also write down what value that goal provides in your life so you don't lose sight of the clarity that led to the goal in the first place.

The key is to write your goal in the positive rather than in the negative; write your goal as moving towards something you want rather than away from something you don't want. For example, rather than saying "I want to get out of debt" try something like "I will improve my credit score by x points." This even works for weight loss; rather than saying you want to lose 10 pounds try working towards fitting into a clothing item or exercising a certain amount of time or eating a specific amount of healthier foods (which will all get you to your weight loss goal).

Create your plan-—Once you have your goal written down, you need to start creating a specific plan for achieving it; consider this your blueprint or roadmap. Break it down to what you can do each day to move towards your goal. Only you can decide how much time that is each day, but make it part of your life.

Ask yourself, "knowing that my ultimate goal is X, what does it look like this week or today so that I'm not wasting a moment along the way?" You need to schedule time for your goal just like other areas of your life.

Get support—Making a change and striving towards something take energy. Sometimes yours will be low. What kind of support do you need in order to keep you going towards your goal? Perhaps you need to simply tell some people and ask them to periodically check in with you.

Or maybe you need to post reminder notes around your house, in your car, at your desk. Maybe you decide your goal is big enough that you want to hire a coach. You know yourself better than anyone and what you need when that old part of you wants to quit; create a structure that will work for you so you are fully supported throughout this journey.

Determine your markers for success—How will you know you've achieved your goal, and what specifically will it look like? Okay, perhaps that was easy, but how will you know you've made

progress along the way? If your goal is to lose weight, think of it as ounces per day and making healthier decisions each day; did you eat one extra serving of vegetables or refuse an unhealthy snack today?

If your goal is to be more productive, did you get something done today or did you read a motivating book rather than watching television? If you can't measure your success, then try re-wording your goal. A good goal is one that allows you to measure your success and your progress.

Be flexible—Sometimes your original goal may not have been quite right for you. It may have been too small, or it may have been too big, vague or unrealistic. You can either beat yourself up because it's not looking exactly as you planned, or you can go back to your blueprint and make some revisions. The point is not to sell yourself short but to set yourself up for success.

Celebrate! Face it, incentives work. Determine how you will reward yourself once you've achieved your final goal. However, don't forget to reward your smaller success along the way. Give yourself credit for the successes; this will help keep you moving forward towards what is most important to you.