

Ep #20: How to Set Goals (and Actually Stick to Them!)



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With Your Host

Carrie Holland, MD, CPT

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You are listening to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast, Episode #20. If you know there is more out there for you, and find yourself asking, “Now what?” Let's set a goal.

Welcome to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. If you're balancing career, family, wellness, and some days sanity, you are in the right place. This is where high achieving, busy working moms get the tools they need to eat, move, and think. I'm your host, physician, personal trainer, and Certified Life Coach Carrie Holland. Let's do this.

Hey, how are you? What's new? What's good? What's good here, is that we are going to talk about setting goals. I'm just going to start by asking you this very simple question; what is your goal? What are you working on, right now?

And the reason I ask is this, I work with women who have spent the first part of their lives setting and going after goals. These women, they are fierce; they got the grades, they did the work, put in the time and straight-up grit to be successful. And then, even though they've checked all the boxes, they often come to me and say, “Now what?”

They've achieved some pretty serious goals early on in their lives, and they're at a point where they are grinding, and know that there is more, but they're not sure what to do next. So, I give them space to brainstorm and really answer their own question; now what?

Often, what it comes down to is setting a goal. If you've made serious strides in your career and aren't sure what's next... If you are super successful in your career but you feel exhausted... If, in the pursuit of personal success, you've stopped taking care of yourself... If deep down, you feel that there is more out there for you, either personally, professionally, or both, we can manage all that.

It happens by managing your mind, setting some goals, and then going after them. And if you're wondering why this matters, consider this, change

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doesn't happen by chance; you cannot will change to happen. Instead, serious change happens by setting a goal and going after it, hardcore.

And too often, I hear this; I'm too old. I'm too busy. I have kids. I have responsibilities. What about the finances? Let me offer, those are thoughts that will stop you before you even start. If you know that you are meant to do and be more, it starts by getting really clear on what you want, and then going after it.

It is exciting. And, it is also terrifying. And, it is how you evolve into your next best version. I want that for all of you. It starts by believing that it's possible. So here it is, this is what we're going to talk about today: We're going to talk about, "Why bother?" Why bother setting a goal, whatever it is?

We'll talk about why we're resistant to setting goals, and how to get around that. The inevitable self-doubt that comes up once you set a goal, and how you deal with it. And then, practically speaking, how do you set a goal? And then, what do you do with it from there? So, let's go.

Why bother setting a goal? So, as I was reflecting on this podcast episode, I started thinking back to some of the goals that I set for myself this year. They are all over the map and include; learning to swim, racing a triathlon, starting this podcast, nailing a talk at a big conference, and reading as many self-help books as I could get my hands on.

As I thought about these goals, I realized something important, it's really not about the goal itself. It was not about getting through the triathlon; it was who I became in that process. I had to get over my enormous fear of swimming in open, green water, my total disdain for freezing cold water, and my fear of getting attacked by seaweed. And when I did all of those things, you can bet a nickel that I stood just a little taller.

When I made a goal to give a talk at a big conference, I had to get over my fear of; what if people think I'm too much? What if I can't find anything to

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say? Which is not generally a problem for me. What if there is a heckler in the audience? What if they hate me? And when I finished that talk, and walked away feeling like a different person, I realized that it was not the talk itself that changed me. It was all of the preparation, and the reflection, and the practice, that made me walk out feeling like *Beyoncé*.

So, here's the thing, achieving the goal is one thing. And your goal itself, once you get it, is most definitely worth celebrating. But on a much deeper level, it's who you become in the process that is worth way more than the goal itself. This year has been a tremendous year of growth for me, in so many different ways. I credit it to setting and going after goals.

Truthfully, I'm just getting started. Here is a really important point to note; reaching any of your goals is not going to make you happier. The point is not about the goal, and I encourage you to really think about this. Whether your goal is to lose 15 pounds, run a 5K race, quit your job, start a business, become a writer, become an artist, whatever your goal is, you're not going to be any happier once you achieve the goal.

So, really let this sink in. I get a lot of pushback on this, but I think it's so important to understand. I see this all the time. So, as an example, I will start to work with a client and she'll start losing weight. And in that process, she's not any happier. Or, she'll start a new job and still not be any happier than she was at her old job, that she swore was making her miserable.

Or maybe, she'll finally get back into running after a decade long hiatus while she was busy raising kids and working full time, but she's not any happier. And, none of this surprises me.

So, here's why, achieving the goal itself is not going to make you any happier. Achieving the goal is simply changing your circumstances. So, remember, your circumstances are neutral; your weight, your job, your relationship, all of those are circumstances. They are not responsible for your feelings.

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Your thoughts are what cause your feelings. So, again, let's go back to the order of operations here. Your circumstances are neutral. And those are what trigger your thoughts. Thoughts are the meaning that you give to your circumstances. And it's your thoughts about your circumstances that produce your feelings. Which drive your actions. Which, ultimately, produce results. It's in that order; always, always, always, okay?

As a reminder, you can choose to be happy with yourself at 180 pounds, just as you can choose to be happy with yourself at 160 pounds. You can choose to be content with your current job, just as you choose to be happy in your new job.

I just saw this, in real time. I had a client who recently changed jobs, she said over and over again how miserable she was, and how her boss was terrible, and it was a toxic work environment. And if she could find a new job, things would look up.

Sure enough, within a few weeks, it was the same story, but in a new job setting. We had to really work to see that her thoughts were what were making her miserable, not her work environment. And, that is not an easy thing to do. But once you come off autopilot and really look at your thoughts, you'll start to notice it.

We are often taught to believe that if we change our weight, our job, our clothes, our friends, that will suddenly find happiness, but that is not it. Your thoughts are what will make you miserable, sad, happy or satisfied. The thoughts you choose to think, that ultimately become your beliefs, are what will make you happy or miserable.

The idea behind having a goal, whether it's to lose weight, change jobs, is not to make you happy. I learned this in my coach training, and I love this idea. You have all the capacity for happiness, right now, here, today. We think that having a ton of money, or a new job, or a different relationship, or a thinner, more muscular body will make us happier.

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But that is looking for external solutions to solve an internal problem. So, remember, happiness is an inside job; it starts in your thoughts. And if you're thinking, "Well, what the heck, then? Why should I bother setting a goal if I can simply choose to think happy thoughts and be just fine the way I am?" Okay, so first, that's missing the point.

If you're walking around just telling yourself, I'm going to be happy, but you're not really feeling it in your bones, you're just saying words to yourself. So, that's why I get really cautious about having mantras. You can say the words to yourself, for sure. But you cannot fake yourself out.

You have to go all-in on practicing your beliefs, and really feel them, the good and the bad, in order to make serious change. If you really and truly want to feel happy or satisfied, you have to truly believe that it is possible for you. And you do that by deliberately choosing thoughts that make you feel happy or satisfied; you can't fake it.

And second, here is why you set a goal. Okay, so go with me on this for a second. You are put here on this earth for a finite amount of time. And in this short blip of history that you are here, what do you want to do? What gifts do you want to bring to this earth, to your friends, to your family? What value do you want to bring to the world in the short time you've got here?

Imagine what awesomeness you can share with other people by stretching yourself, setting a goal, and then going after it with serious tenacity. And in that process, become the next best version of yourself. How cool would that be?

So, it does not matter that you're in your 40's, or you're starting to gray, or have kids, or an established job with a paycheck; that does not matter unless you let it matter. Imagine what it would be like to see all of the cool things that you are capable of now. So, just humor me and really imagine it for just one second.

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Imagine blowing your own mind with all that you can accomplish. I have had the privilege, this week, of talking to people that are at the top of their game professionally, and are considering starting a yoga studio; going all-in on their acting and screenwriting career that started out as a side project, becoming a director for medical missions, and starting a nonprofit for animal rescue.

And, you know what I told every single one of them? Go for it. Our world needs people like this. People who are excited, and passionate, and maybe have done a thing or two already, but know that there is more out there to do. And to that, I say, "Let's go! Game on! Let's do this."

And, that is why you set a goal; fitting into the outfit, or the padded bank account, or the new title on your resume, or your name in the credits. Those are all secondary. It's the value that you bring to the world, and who you become in the process, that's where the money is at, literally.

So, hopefully, now that I have convinced you why it is important to set a goal, let's talk about why you might be hesitant to do it. I see this often. I will have someone tell me she doesn't want to name a number of pounds she wants to lose, or she doesn't want to set a date for a race, or name her dream job, or share her big crazy dream.

This is why; this is true for most every goal I can think of. When you set a goal, you are naming something that you don't yet have. And often, that stops you before you even start. When you actually give yourself the space to dream, and think about what you really, deeply want, by nature, you are creating a contrast. You have to think about what you want and contrast that with what you currently have.

That can be really uncomfortable for some people. By setting a goal, you are putting it out into the world and making it known your desire for something that hasn't yet happened. And, you don't yet have any proof that this goal of yours is possible.

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When we give ourselves the time and space to dream big and get clear about what we really want, often it is met with the harsh reality of what we don't yet have. So, if you tell me, I want to lose 10 pounds by January, there it is. You've just told me something you want that you don't yet have. Or, if you want to quit your day job to become a coach, speaking from experience here, it brings into light what you do not yet have, and that does not feel good.

So, go back. Imagine you've made the decision that you're going to lose 10 pounds. And once you do this and put it out into the world, that is when the self-doubt comes in. The second you declare your goal, your brain will go bananas on you, and offer all the reasons you cannot achieve the goal.

You've never lost the weight before. What if you get hungry? You have to get through the holidays, and you know how you are around the Christmas cookies after you've had a glass of eggnog. This is gonna be way too hard for you. Why don't you just buy bigger clothes and call it a day? Etc. etc.

Meaning, when you set a goal, your brain is going to then shed light on all the reasons that you won't be able to achieve it. All the limiting beliefs that are preventing you from moving forward will most definitely be unearthed. And then, your brain will sneakily offer up your current status quo as a just fine place to be.

Because remember, your brain loves comfort. It loves the familiar, even if that familiar is making you miserable. So, when you set a goal, your brain is most definitely going to wig out on you, and suggest you stay right where you are. I'm sharing this because I've felt it myself. I've seen it in my clients, and it is inevitable. However, if you're prepared for this, you can show your brain who's really in charge.

Okay, so, how? You know where I'm going; you pay attention to your thoughts, and you feel the feelings. You feel the doubt, you feel the anxiety

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in your chest, and your heart racing at the idea that it might be hard, and you practice feeling it.

You can even tell yourself; alright, this is what doubt feels like. I'm going to allow it. I'm going to receive it. I'm going to keep moving forward, because on the other side of this doubt is serious confidence. This process most definitely does not happen on autopilot. So, recognize that self-doubt is a normal part of the goal setting process.

It is your brain protecting you from feeling icky as you change. And if that self-doubt wasn't there, you'd have already achieved your goal a long honking time ago. So, instead of getting all irritated, you can thank your brain for trying to protect you with all that self-doubt and suppose reasons that you can't.

And instead, choose to have an unflinching belief in yourself. Fueled by the intense desire behind whatever change it is you're looking to make. You are human, you are going to have doubt. In order to move through that doubt and on to confidence, you have to be very intentional and practice thinking in a way that makes you feel confident.

The sooner you claim ownership over your self-doubt and keep going, the sooner you will be on to achieving your goals. So, how the heck do you do this? Once you've truly owned and felt the self-doubt that comes with setting a huge goal, then what?

Then you trade in your old, negative self-limiting beliefs and practice thinking differently. So, here's something I want to offer you, your brain is going to continue thinking, whether you manage your thoughts or not. So, when it comes to stretching yourself, and setting and achieving your goals, you've got to be onto yourself, and manage your mind, and be very intentional about how you're thinking.

So, here it is, we're going back to confirmation bias here. If you decide to believe that you will be successful at losing 10 pounds by January, and you

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truly believe it and feel it in your bones, and allow the self-doubt to come up, but you go and do it anyway, there you are. Now, you're onto something.

What you believe, you will find evidence to prove correct. Your mind is always looking for ways to prove your thoughts true. If you choose to believe that you are capable of sticking to a meal plan in order to lose weight, you will do it. If you choose to believe that weight loss is not possible for you, you will not lose the weight. Either way you slice it, you will prove yourself right. So, what do you want to prove here?

This is true for any goal; if you choose to believe that you will always live in a body that is not capable of exercise, you are right. If you choose to believe that you can absolutely do a couch-to-5K, you are also right. If you choose to believe that you are doomed to be stuck in your current career until you retire, you're right. If you choose to believe that there is so much more out there for you to do in this world, you are also right.

And, I love this. You really are just one thought away from serious, amazing change. And again, to be clear, this is about alignment. You are not simply thinking happy thoughts, and imagining rainbows and unicorns overhead. No, this is about finding a way of thinking that feels not only real and believable to you, but ultimately lights a fire under your booty to get to work and make some things happen.

And, there it is. There's your litmus test. How do you know you really believe in your ability to achieve the goal? You take action. It's like a double check; if you really believe that you are capable of losing the weight, you will take action and eat in a way that results in you losing weight. If you truly believe that you are capable of starting a business, you will form your LLC, you will determine your offer, and you will market yourself.

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Whatever action you take or don't take reflects whatever you are believing; it is a very clean process. And, I love how this works. Again, it is a double check. So good.

What else do you need? When you set your goal, whatever it is, get really clear on why the goal matters to you. Why do you want to lose the weight? Why do you want to run a 5K? Why does starting a business matter to you? And then, do yourself a favor and list out all of the reasons. Here's the thing, the more reasons you have for this goal, the better.

Imagine losing those 10 pounds. What will happen in that process? What kind of clothes will you wear? How will it feel to run around with your kids? What will you be able to do then, that you can't do now? What are all of the reasons that this goal matters to you?

And truthfully, it does not matter what those reasons are. The only thing that matters is that this goal, and your reasons for going after it, are compelling to you. There is no one here you are answering to, other than yourself. So, make sure that this goal really matters to you, and list out all the reasons it does.

Here's why; once you name the goal, and you have started seeing and feeling the associated self-doubt, and go after it anyway, you're going to run into roadblocks. There are going to be some stumbles along the way, you can absolutely bet on it.

And often, it's when things get hard that our inclination is to turn around and say, "Yeah, maybe things actually are okay just the way they are. Maybe being 10 pounds heavier is not so bad. Maybe being in this stinky job for the next 25 years isn't such a bad thing, after all."

No, no, no, no. And I bring this up because I see it all the time. When things get hard, that is all the more reason to be crystal clear on all the reasons you're going after this goal, in the first place. You have to want the goal

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more than you want the drama that comes with it, or your brain will talk you back into the status quo in a heartbeat.

You have to be ready and willing to get through the really hard stuff. Knowing, that on the other side of the hard stuff is your next best version. Otherwise, when it gets hard, you will stop. So, start visualizing; imagine what it's going to look like when you're 10 pounds lighter, or what it is going to feel like as you run through the water stations at your 5K, or what it is going to feel like when you send your first networking email or open yourself up for business.

Feel it, visualize it, own it, let it sink in, because this is your new reality. You are leaving the old one behind, now. And, here it is, this is where we start with the end in mind. If you have not yet read *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, please do; your world will open up once you read it.

I love Stephen Covey's amazing advice in this regard, start with the end. Imagine you're at your goal; you are 10 pounds lighter, you ran your race, you have a successful business. Start there. Feel it, imagine it, visualize, and from that place, look backwards and answer this really important question; what did it take to get there?

So, I will do this with clients and sometimes it's a challenge, because it requires getting very tedious and nitty-gritty. When you've got a big goal in mind, you don't leave things to chance and ambiguity, okay? You have to get really clear on what it is going to take in order to lose the weight, do the race, find the job, start the business. Whatever it is, start with the final product and work it backwards.

And, first and foremost, write it down. This is essential. If this is something that really and truly matters to you, and you're going all-in, for the love of Mary, write it down. Get it outside your brain, outside your imagination, and put it into words, on paper.

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Then, let the negativity, self-doubt, and fear come up. Allow it to be there. Remember, you knew it was coming; you are ready for it.

And then, you make your plan of action. This is the how. What did you have to do, in order to lose those last two pounds? And then, the middle five pounds? And, the first three pounds? Get super clear on what it is going to take to get to your goal.

So many people skip this, and this is when I see people spin in confusion, overwhelm and frustration. Because they think by simply setting the goal, that by putting the goal top of mind, then it's going to happen. But your brain needs direction. It needs you coming at the goal with a clean, managed mind, tenacity and action steps to keep you moving forward.

And know this, you may not have every single step lined up. And I say this all the time, it bears repeating here, you learn the how by doing; there is no one right way to do anything. There is no one right way to train for a race. There is most definitely no one right way to lose 10 pounds. There is no one right way to change careers or certain business.

So, when you create your action steps know full well that these steps are your best educated guess, based on the information you have available to you. Those steps may very well change and be refined over time; be firm, but be flexible. Meaning, you've got to have a plan. You need to have defined action steps, in order to keep you moving forward.

I mentioned in a previous podcast about this, set a result goal. Instead of saying, "This week, I'm going to work on my second career," try this. "By this Friday, I will have made a list of all my skills, attributes, and passions. By next Friday, I will have reached out to five different people who are doing something that I would love to be doing."

Do you see the difference here? "Working on it," tells me nothing. Result goals, tell me what you are producing. And as you do these, and as you try things out and gather information, you may need to adjust your steps. And,

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that's okay. This is also part of the process; have a plan, but be flexible enough so that you're taking the right kind of action, that is moving you forward.

As you do this, you will continue to pay attention to whatever fears and doubts come up. If, as you are planning to lose 10 pounds, imagine what it will feel like, if and when, the scale doesn't move for a few weeks at a time. What are you going to do? How will you respond? What will you say to yourself?

This is one of my most favorite things to do in goal setting with clients, is looking at obstacles and strategies. And it is so important to do this, because when you're going after something, rest assured you're going to encounter some obstacles along the way. So, we got to be ready for them.

For every obstacle you encounter, name your strategy. If on your path to losing 10 pounds by January, there are multiple holiday parties coming your way with loads of alcohol, and yule logs, and Christmas cookies to deal with, what is your strategy? How are you going to manage that? Are you going to bring a salad to your work potluck, so you've got something to eat? No matter what, get extremely clear on how you're going to bust through your obstacles.

You may need to do this exercise multiple times along the way. As you move forward towards your goal, you may uncover obstacles you didn't even know existed. So, don't avoid them and don't ignore them, instead get very intentional about how you're going to address them.

This process of looking at obstacles and strategies, this is a game changer. And so often, it gets overlooked. But when you have a clear plan for dealing with roadblocks, you can keep moving forward. Don't underestimate the power of this process.

So, here it is, this is how you set some goals. This is my request to you; if you don't have a goal, set one. This comes from my own desire to see

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what's possible for you. And my own experience, finding out what's possible for me. I thought that once I became a physician and started working, and had a partner, and a family, and a house, that was it; all done.

But I did that, and despite having all the things I thought I wanted, I kept coming back to the same question, “Now what?” Because I got really honest with myself and answered my own question, I answered my “now what”.

I opened up my world; I became a coach. I get to work with the best people and help them answer their own “now what” and then, we go after it together by doing this exact process that I've outlined today. If you are not done yet, and you are wondering for yourself “now what,” answer the question.

Do you need to take better care of your physical body? Do you need to pursue a hobby or a passion? Do you need to find a different career that feeds your soul? Whatever it is you decide, the process is the same. It all starts by setting a goal. Allow yourself to dream. Make the almighty decision. Write it down, and allow all the ick to come up. Get clear on, make peace with, and then toss aside all of the limiting beliefs and self-doubt, that keeps you from moving forward.

Make a plan, starting with the end in mind, and then take action. And remember, it is not about achieving the goal; that's secondary. It's who you become in this process, that makes it all worthwhile. So, go after it. Get clear on your goals, and I'll catch you again next week.

If you like what you've been hearing, please review the show. I would love to get your feedback and ideas. Your suggestions have inspired episodes and will help me make the show better for you. And, share this podcast with a friend, text a show link, share a screenshot, or post a link to the show on your social media. And, be sure to tag me @CarrieHollandMD on either Instagram® or Facebook®, so I can follow along and engage with you.

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This is how we get the word out to other working moms who want to feel strong, inside and out. If you know someone who wants to feel better, or eat and move differently, but she is too tired or too busy, it is time to change things up. And you know, making that change starts with how you think. And that, is what we do here on the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. I'll see you next week.

Thanks for listening to *Strong as a Working Mom*. If you want more information on how to eat, move, and think, so you can live in the body you want, with the mind to match, visit me at CarrieHollandMD.com.