

Why Your Brain Needs A Goal



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With Your Host

Natalie Bacon

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Welcome to the Design Your Dream Life Podcast, where it's all about designing your life on your terms. And now your host, Natalie Bacon.

Hey there, friend. Welcome to the podcast. Merry Christmas if you're listening to this in real time. It is two days before Christmas. And I just want to remind you that the Grow You holiday annual pass is available until Christmas day. So you have two more days to get it. I really believe that this is a way for you to give to the woman in your life in a really thoughtful way, knowing that gift giving can come from a place of generosity and intentionality, and you can give personal development in a way that really helps someone transform their life and take this work deeper.

It doesn't just have to be a consumer item wrapped as a present under the tree. I know personally, and for so many clients, who've told me this gift has meant so much to them and really is their favorite. Something that they remember, and that they're so, so grateful for. So you can find that over at nataliebacon.com/annual-coaching.

Today, I want to talk with you about why your brain needs a goal. So about this time of year, we are all excited about goal setting, and myself included. But I want to take a step back with you and explore what happens in your life when you don't set a goal. You may not realize this, but it's not just a luxury that is trendy to do. It's not just something that I think you should do if you naturally just like goal setting.

I actually think that everyone should set a goal. Now, depending on the season of life you're in and your own personal desires, the type of goal you set will be unique to you. But I think that it's valuable for every single person to set a goal. And I want to tell you why in this episode.

So first I want to talk with you about your brain without a goal. So if you don't set a goal, your brain is going to do these five things that will negatively affect your life. So your brain seeks pleasure and avoids pain. And so, how this applies to goal setting if you don't have a goal, in the moment, you're never going to choose the thing that serves you most in the

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future. You're always going to choose what's immediately more pleasurable. And that often has a negative consequence.

So in the moment, your brain wants the sweets and it wants to scroll on Instagram and it wants to watch Netflix. So if you don't have a goal, you no reason, you have no thought that maybe I shouldn't do these things. Maybe I should choose my future instead. Maybe I should choose the long-term pleasure and contentment. Your brain just won't do that. It's always going to choose that immediate pleasure, which is typically the false pleasure, if you don't have a goal.

The second negative effect is that you're going to create more of your past if you don't have a goal. So your brain has all these pathways made up from your experiences in life. And it's so much easier for your brain to pull from those experiences and create more of the same.

So for example, if you made \$100,000 last year, it's much easier for your brain to think, I'll probably make \$100,000, maybe a little more next year. It requires no effort for your brain to think that because it has evidence that that's what you know how to do. If you set a goal, and if you do it in the way that I teach you, you're going to set goals that require so much more of you, that allow you to really create the life that you want.

So if you want to create a life where you make \$500,000, you can do that, but you have to set that goal. And the way that you really do that is by setting the goal but by also knowing that what you're putting at stake by not sending a goal is that dream life that you want, is that extraordinary life. So just know that without a goal, your brain is always going to pull from what you've experienced in the past because those are the neural pathways it defaults to. It's just easier for your brain to do that.

It's like if you're driving on a road and you are headed somewhere, your brain is always going to take the road that it knows will get you there versus a different route. The different route might even be faster, it might be more scenic, there might be a lot of benefits to it, but your brain just would never do that if it already knows a different way. So you just want to be aware of

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that and know that the way to break through from repeating your past is to acknowledge that that's what's happening, and then to set a goal from your future.

The third negative effect that happens when your brain doesn't have a goal, is that it's always going to be focusing on what's wrong. So if you are a perfectionist and you have a tendency to overuse that trait, what will happen is you might be really good at your job. Let's say you're an editor. So you're really good at your job. And all throughout the day, you are scanning for what's wrong. Your work requires you to do that and you're actually really good at it.

The problem is when you get home from work, when you take off that editor hat, and you put on the wife and mom hat, you no longer need that perfectionism. You don't need to be scanning for what's wrong and that the toys are out of place or that the house isn't perfect. And if you don't catch your brain doing this and you don't set a goal, that's how you'll show up and you won't even realize it's happening.

And so, yes, become aware of it, but also set a goal because then you sort of won't even be interested in looking for everything that's wrong. You'll be like, "Oh yeah, that used to bother me and it doesn't anymore because I have more pressing things to tend to like my big goal."

I see this happened all the time, particularly with moms. So this goes to number four of your brain without a goal. You get consumed with other people's problems and also what's going on in the world. So I can't tell you how many lovely mamas in Grow You I've coached on this, who have reached a point where their kids are maybe starting school and their thoughts are so consumed with their kids in a way that they're sort of ready for a little bit of space and a little bit of me time.

And the number one suggestion I give them is to create a goal because on default, especially with newborns where you really, really need to be that way, right? Survival of the baby depends on it. But as the kids get a little bit more independent, if your brain is still so obsessed with kind of their

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thoughts and their feelings and their life, it can actually leave you feeling a little bit self-abandoned, a little bit lonely, a little bit stressed, a little bit overwhelmed. And if you create a goal for yourself, those things that bothered you kind of tend to fall away. That's been my own experience, right? It's not just for mamas. It's also for everyone.

Let's say you're married and you're used to being really obsessed with your husband being here and all be all, right? And you really want to start being a little bit more independent and creating your own life in a way, right? And not just for yourself, but also for your marriage. You can do this in a way by setting a goal that you really care about, because then you're not so obsessed with other people's business, which you can't control, right? You can't control his thoughts or feelings or actions. You can just control yours. So if you create a goal, it gives you something to focus on in a really, really productive and fulfilling way.

And the last sort of thing that happens to your brain without a goal is that it indulges in emotions that don't serve you. So your brain has so much mental chatter going on. I just did that episode, so if you haven't listened to it, go back and listen to it. So your ego's constantly talking to you nonstop. It's trying to protect you, and there's nothing wrong with this, but you'll be able to redirect that chatter so much more easily if you have a goal.

And the result of that is that chatter creates feelings that serve you. So without the goal, you end up thinking thoughts that lead to self-loathing, overwhelm, that self-pity in a way where you think it's your circumstances that are creating those emotions, but really it's your thinking. And if you have a goal, it's so often just completely cleaned up without even having to do the other thought work, right?

So for example, instead of going the gym and working out, you may find your brain talking you out of it, blaming your circumstances for why you're not losing weight and why it's a bad idea to go to the gym because nothing will change. That's why I think setting a goal can be so much more powerful than just trying to start a habit. When you have a goal with a deeper why, you don't listen to that mental chatter. You say, "I see you, brain. That's all

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right, we're going to go anyway." And then, of course, when it becomes a habit, even better.

So without a goal, you get consumed with other people's problems, you end up indulging in that short term gratification at the expense of your long-term desires, and you end up eating more of the past in your future when that's not necessarily what you want. So I want to suggest to you that setting a goal for this next year is one of the most powerful things that you can do in your life, because there are enormous positive effects of setting a goal, and I want to list five here for you that you may have not considered that I think a really, really the crux of why even set a goal at all.

And this leads into my past goals, right? So when I was preparing this episode for you, I dug up my old goals and, oh my gosh, I was so moved by them because I just saw how much I had hooked up my current self by setting goals. And none of that would have been possible. And so, I want to talk with you a little bit about that.

So let's start with the first positive effect of setting a goal. It gives your brain something to focus on in the future. So instead of feeling stagnant, like you're going to need that external, false pleasure to get that pleasure, you will keep creating your future intentionally from a place of abundance. So it's not, "I hate my body and I want to lose weight," it's, "I love my body and I want to lose weight."

And your brain needs something to focus on. If you don't direct it, it's going to focus on everything that's wrong in your life. And it's going to focus on needing pleasure. It's going to focus on all of those survival tendencies that it naturally has. So you can use your prefrontal and really get ahead of it and give your brain something to focus on. That's where it gets that dopamine hit, that your brain loves and wants so much.

And that is number two. You get a healthy dopamine fix instead of an unhealthy one. So your brain loves to think that it's winning. And not just any win, but new wins. So if you create goals consistently, your brain will get that dopamine fix it craves in a healthy way, instead of in an unhealthy

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way, say, from overspending or drinking a lot of wine, right? I get my dopamine fix definitely from goal setting. And I have to say it's one of the most rewarding ways, not just because of that dopamine hit, but also because of the effects, right? It's kind of like the secondary effects that it has in my life where I'm not out there drinking a lot of wine or relying on a lot of external, false pleasure. I just set goals instead. It really is that simple. And it really works.

The third positive effect of goal setting is that it takes you out of consumption mode and into creation mode. So instead of needing that external, false pleasure to feel satisfied, you create those feelings with your mind by creating and producing. So let me give you an example. So let's say that you are in the habit of buying to feel better. You're buying a lot of home decor. You're buying a lot of stuff for your kids. You're just spending and you're doing it in a way that it might not even be that you're over budget, but that can tell is an aligned with contentment, right?

When you buy it contentment, there's not this urgency, there's not this dopamine hit. You are really thoughtful about your purchases. When you're buying to feel better, it sort of feels bad in a weird way, right? It might feel good and then it feels bad. So that's being in consumption mode. It's not just consuming with money, it's consuming with food, right? Overeating. You can consume in a lot of ways.

When you get out of that consumption mode and you go into creation mode, you start producing. And I can't tell you how much better this feels for you personally, and how much more contentment you'll create. Again, I've seen this with moms who start side hustles. So instead of spending a lot, they will just shift that energy to producing and creating. And now they're creating jewelry in an Etsy shop, and all of that energy is going towards that shop instead of sort of trying to consume to feel better.

I experienced this when I started my business, I used to shop in a way that was over budget and it really felt like it was coming from scarcity. And now I shop really from a sufficient, abundant place. I am never over budget. I do it in a way that really serves me. And it's not the majority of my time, right?

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It's not like work, family and shopping. It's work and family and health and all of these other things, and whatever I'm consuming is aligned with my values and my future and my goals.

And when I'm producing, I'm getting that positive feeling of creating. If you've never done this before, try it. Set a small goal and focus on it. You will notice how good it feels in a very different way than consuming. So just kind of start to be aware of how you feel when you consume and how you feel when you create. It will be very different.

The fourth effect that's so positive is that when you set a goal, you increase or self competence so much, you really blow your own mind with what is possible. Now, of course, I'm assuming that you are setting goals in the way that I teach, really from your future and not from your past. If you do this, you start to see that you are so capable of so much more than you ever thought possible.

I love looking back at my goals and that I was the creator of all of it. And truly believing and knowing that I would take creating and earning it over being handed at 100% of the time because of who I became on this journey, because of the self-confidence I now have, because I really created did something I thought was impossible. That is so fun.

I experienced this also when I became a lawyer. It's like, "I'm a lawyer. What?" Right? I'm sure you've experienced this at some point in your life where you have this shift after you've accomplished something. And I think that we get into our thirties or forties and we stop doing that. We stop setting the goals. There's no reason for that. Just because society hasn't laid them out for us does not mean we have to stop it all. We can absolutely be the creator of the rest of our life. We have so much more life to live.

The fifth positive effect of goal setting is that it's so much fun. So I think that the purpose of setting goals is not so that you can prove that you are better than, or so that you can prove you're good or worthy. It's just for you to enjoy your life and have fun and increase your experiences while you're

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here. That is really, really fun. So you're not better when you achieved the goal. I know this sometimes sounds a little bit discouraging and sometimes clients will say, "Well, then why set the goal?" Because it's fun, right? Why not? Because of all the reasons that I've listed, because you will increase your self-confidence. You will transform who you are. You will stop focusing on everything that's wrong in your life. You will start creating from a place of abundance and blow your own mind. That is so much fun.

Sometimes I'll have clients who have a problem that their spouses are not goal-setting. And I remind them that someone who doesn't set goals isn't a worse person. So you're not better because you set goals. Setting goals is for you. If husband doesn't want to set goals, that's his loss. Totally okay. We can still love husband. He doesn't have to set goals. It's fine. You're the one who sets goals.

And this is where you can really start to have a lot of fun and create a lot of focus and intentionality in your life. And when you do it from this place, even when you fail and miss the mark, it doesn't become wrapped up in your identity. You're like, "Oh, that way didn't work. Let's try a different way," versus, "I needed to achieve this goal in order to prove that I am worthy and lovable." This is like the deeper work of it that's so worth it, I'm telling you.

You hook yourself up when you set goals. You hook your future self up. I look back at my goals and I realize how much my past self has hooked up my current self. So what has your past self hooked you up for now? And what are you currently hooking up your future self for? I am so grateful that my past self hooked me up. And I look back at my goals and I am a little bit amazed. This is awesome, right?

I was looking back at my 2014 goal and it was to start a blog called Finance Girl. And it was to get a corporate attorney job. I was in litigation at the time. In 2015, my goal was to pay \$2,700 a month onto my student loans and quit practicing law. 2016, my goal was to pass the CFP exam and write an ebook. 2017, my goal is to make 10k a month in my business. 2018, my goal is to start dating and prioritizing a romantic relationship. 2019, my goal

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is to pay off my student loan debt. In 2020, my goal is to make 500k in revenue.

And I look back in 2014 seems so long ago. I look back at the last six years, five years and think, wow, I was a totally different person. And I love that person and I'm so grateful that she set goals right at that time. Thinking about \$2,700 a month under my student loans, that was a lot. Starting a blog seemed impossible. Passing the CFP exam seemed impossible. Meeting someone seemed impossible. And I have all of these things now and I've achieved all of these goals, but they didn't happen instantly.

And they didn't even happen the first try. I failed the CFP exam the first time. I went through a really bad breakup. I wanted to pay off my debt earlier than I did. But it's okay. I don't rush to my goals, even though I set timelines for them. So if I miss the mark, it's, "Oh, I missed the mark. Let's see what happened. What went wrong? What went right? What are we going to do differently next year? Let's double down." I love this so much.

If you have not written down your goals for the past 12 months, and you have not written down your goals for the next 12 months, come into Grow You so I can help you see what's getting in your way, so I can help you get clarity, so I can help you set a goal so that when you're looking back at your goal for 2021, or your goal for whatever month or year it's in when you're listening to this, you can look back and say, "Thank you, past self, for setting the goal. Thank you for hooking me up. Thank you for making the experience of life so much more fun with a goal." I will see you inside Grow You. Have a very Merry Christmas. Yes.

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