

Why Set Behavior Based Goals?

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Introduction

Each of us has a schedule. For some, this schedule is detailed and down to the minute. For others, the schedule is more haphazard with a few concrete plans surrounded by more indefinite periods of time. Nevertheless, we all have an idea of what we want to get done today, what we want to get done this week and what we want to get done in a month, a year or during the course of our lives.

A lot of our scheduling has to do with necessities. We have to be at work at a certain time. We have a client meeting tomorrow at 2. We need to pick up groceries after the kids have been dropped off at school. Most of our days are spent ticking off these kinds of life-sustaining tasks from our internal to-do lists. After all, we all have to work and we all have to eat.

Some of what we schedule is less urgent than the time we spend earning money to pay bills and purchase food. These are the parts of the day we put aside for ourselves. Some refer to it as personal time. This is where we exercise, meet with friends, read, enjoy hobbies, etc. These activities are not as immediately necessary as work and food, but they do sustain us in other, less tangible ways.

Finally, in our schedules, we have more tenuous plans. These are things that are not as definite as going to work, relaxing with a book or meeting friends for dinner. Instead, they are things that we would like to accomplish at some point in the future – next month, next year or during our lifetime. You might say that these more tentative plans are goals.

This is a book about goals and how to reach them. You see, most of us do have specific things that we would like to accomplish at some point. We'd like to lose weight. We'd like to see Paris. We'd like to learn how to fly a plane. However, for most of us, the process ends there. We don't lose the weight we want. We never get to Paris. The only time we fly, it's as a passenger. The idea is still there. It's penciled into our schedules. However, we never do what we need to do to make those tenuous plans become realized. That's a real shame.

Actually setting and then reaching goals is a practice that anyone can learn. It's simply a matter of combining programmatic steps with learned behaviors to produce positive and life-transforming outcomes. When you set the time in your schedule to do certain actions, you begin to develop a habit. The more you perform this action, the more natural it becomes and the more habitual. Eventually, it feels unnatural if you aren't performing the action as scheduled.

Over time the habit of doing the things that you need to do to reach the goal becomes as natural and as necessary as working or eating. In addition, as you begin to see the results of your daily actions, you feel good about yourself and how you've scheduled your time. This positive feedback provides a powerful incentive to keep at the task, doing what needs to be done, until the overall goal is finally within reach. In the end, it is your behavior that has changed and that change in behavior has allowed you to reach the goal that you set.

In this book, we're going to examine this process of using behavior-based goals to become happier, healthier and much more productive. We'll start by looking at the concept of behavior-based goals, learning what they are and why they are an important tool in a well-rounded life. Next, we'll look at behavior versus results. We'll learn how results are actually simply a by-product of everyday learned positive behaviors. Finally, we'll take a look at some tips and best practices that will allow you to implement the behaviors that can help you to more effectively reach your goals.

Getting to your goals is a journey and that journey requires that you keep moving. Behavior-based goals allow you to develop the habits that keep you moving in the right direction so that accomplishing what you want to accomplish becomes second nature. They say that a journey begins with a single step. One of the first steps you can take to a more productive future lie in the pages of this book. It's time to take that step. So, let's go!

What Are Behavior-Based Goals?

Reaching your goals requires more than simply setting an end point. Oftentimes, in the day-to-day bustle of our busy lives, the road that leads to that end point can be lost. When it is, you often end up wandering, sometimes taking steps towards your goal but more often ending up heading in the wrong direction. It is this “one step forward, two steps back” vicious circle that prevents most people from leading a productive life, one where reaching goals is a commonplace occurrence.

When you set your goals based on the behaviors required to reach them, you break the circular cycle that stops most people cold. Behavior-based goal setting is about doing the things that need to be done, on a daily basis, that keep you moving towards the end points that you have chosen. It removes the rigid focus on the goal and, instead, places it squarely on the actions or inactions that regularly prevent you from being truly goal oriented.

However, before we begin to take a closer look at the what and why of behavior-based goals, we need to take a step back and try and understand the reason that we set goals for ourselves in the first place. In order to do this, we need to begin by examining the basic building blocks of all goal setting, entropy and time.

Time, Entropy and the Reason We Set Goals

So, why is it that human beings set goals and make plans? Why do we have aspirations and ambitions? Why do we see where we are in life and visualize positive change? The short answer might be that because we are aware of the potential for change then change becomes desirable.

From the moment we are born, each of us begins a journey that is defined by change. When we become self-aware as children, we also become aware that life is defined by change. Morning changes to afternoon and afternoon changes to evening. The sun moves across the sky and shadows move with the changing light. Dark follows light and light follows dark in a regular and predictable pattern.

However, despite this regularity, today is not like yesterday and tomorrow will not be like today. Clouds move across the sky and weather changes. Rain turns into sun and vice versa. Over time, the seasons make themselves known. Summer merges into autumn. The colors of autumn become the cold of winter. Winter slowly relaxes its grip on the land and spring brings the promise of new life. The young green of spring is replaced by the heat and bounty of summer. And then, the wheel turns again.

We look in the mirror and see ourselves change as well. We grow from childhood into adolescence and, eventually, we become adults. As we grow, we also begin to see that underneath the regular cycles of the day and of the seasons, there is evidence of a more profound change occurring – a change that is permanent. One that will, in the end, affect us all.

We become aware of death. Once we are aware of death, we cannot look away. There comes a point where we clearly understand that there will come a day when we will no longer be here. For some, that is an unacceptable conclusion. Their egos cannot accept this ultimate Copernican reassessment of their personal universe. Far from being the center of everything, it appears that we are ephemeral. Despite our every effort, we will come to nothingness.

As we look around, we see evidence of this process everywhere. We see that others do indeed die. We experience the passing of loved ones. We see others dealing with their own losses. We begin to comprehend that millions of people every day come to the end of their personal journeys. In addition, it's not just people who are affected by the transitory nature of reality as we perceive it.

Over time, we begin to see the flux of change everywhere around us. Trees that were there in our childhood are no longer there. Buildings burn, collapse with age or are torn down to make room for the new. Old roads are replaced with new routes. What was once a quiet collection of houses on a leafy street becomes the parking lot of a mall, the runway of an airport or a high-rise office building. With time, each of these structures will also become obsolete and will themselves, in turn, be replaced.

It's not only people and the structures they create that are vulnerable to this never-ending process of change. If you wait long enough, the surface of the Earth itself will become altered beyond recognition. Mountain ranges will eventually be worn down to grains of sand and disappear. Oceans will rise and fall. The continents themselves will collide and pull apart, creating entirely new land masses. With time, the very ground upon which you stand will itself no longer exist.

Wait even longer and the sun itself will grow large enough to consume and destroy the Earth and then fall back, dim and become dark. All of the constellations in the night sky will dance into different positions that will be seen by no one. With enough time, everything that has ever been will cool, coalesce or drift apart. All molecular and atomic energy will slow to a stop. All will be dark and still and cold. Some of the ancient folkways of mankind foreshadowed this scientific fact.

For example, in ancient Norse myths, the gods were always battling against the forces of chaos, represented by the race of the giants. What the Norse gods built, the giants were always attempting to destroy. In some sense, the gods represented good and the giants represented evil. The gods were light and the giants were darkness.

A prophecy had foretold that no matter what the gods did, the giants would, in the end, overcome all their efforts. In a final battle, the giants would defeat the gods and throw down the tree called Yggdrasil which supported the world and time. This battle was called Ragnarok and it ushered in an age of endless winter.

So, why do the gods have to lose in the end? Why is everything, including each of us, in a constant state of change – moving from a state of organization to a state of disorganization? Why must everything die, fall, fade, break, rot and disintegrate into nothingness?

Well, the simple answer is because this seems to be a foundational principle upon which the universe operates. All of the changes that we have been discussing occur because of the passing of time and time is a curious thing.

How do we define time? How do we describe what it is? St. Augustine famously said, “I know what time is until you ask me for a definition about it, and then I can’t give it to you.” This pretty much sums up the slippery nature of time. We are aware of time. We all agree it occurs. We all also agree to quantify it using seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years. We live our lives according to these quantifications, organizing ourselves around certain activities that occur at certain “times”. Ultimately, though, these quantifications are artificial and arbitrary. A second of time measures nothing except a section of our awareness that things now are somehow different than things were a moment ago.

What we do know is that time moves in one direction, from the past, and into the future. The past is yesterday and is known. The future is tomorrow and is unknowable. We are on a train that makes the future the past. We didn’t ask to get on this train and we have no way of getting off. It is a one-way journey leading from awareness to nothingness. The arrow of time pulls the entire cosmos along with it, but what is it?

Well, St. Augustine was right. Time does seem to defy definition. We know that it exists only by its effects. However, it may be that our sense of time is an illusion brought about by a physical law called entropy.

Entropy is basically the process whereby order turns into disorder or randomness. The second law of thermodynamics states that in any closed system, like our universe, entropy will increase until a steady state of overall disorder or randomness is achieved. What we may perceive as time may simply be our perception of entropy in action.

For example, take an egg that you’re going to use to make breakfast. The egg, when you take it out of the carton, represents a system with low entropy. It’s organized, neat and is experiencing very little change. When you break the egg to make breakfast, you increase the entropy in the egg’s system. You continue to see an increase in entropy as the egg changes and becomes an omelet. This change is one way because entropy is always increasing. Therefore, you can make an omelet, but you cannot unmake it. In other words, the idea of time is a direct result of entropy changing everything in the universe, including us.

As stated, this change has the most direct effect on most of us in the concept of death. If time is the avenger it is because of entropy. This means that entropy is the actual cause of human mortality. Because of this, the best way to accept this knowledge of personal extinction is with equanimity. If death is the ultimate fate that everyone faces, and if there is nothing that any of us can do to change that fate, then there is nothing to be done. Death becomes a footnote. There is an acceptance that the only thing that can be changed is today. Therefore, today is the only thing that matters. What we do and say today becomes profoundly important, not for their future effects but because these actions are the only things that we can be sure of. In a world full of uncertainty, the things we do today are definite. This concept of acceptance lies at the heart of the idea of behavior-based goals.

Behavior Based Goals Explained

There are two ways of looking at a specific goal. You can look at it in terms of the end result. Alternatively, you can look at the goal in terms of how to reach the goal. The first approach is how most people traditionally look at goal setting and reaching goals that have been established. This way involves a lot of conceptualizing about how reality will look once the goal is achieved. There is a lot of thought given to the benefits that will accrue once a certain set of results come to pass.

The problem with this approach is that it tends to gloss over the work that is necessary to reach any changed state of behavior. Yes, quantifiable positive changes will likely produce some certain benefits. However, those benefits are purely theoretical without a real world, day-to-day plan. In order to effectively reach your goals, you need a plan that effectively takes into account the realities of the average life. You need a plan that understands human nature and considers the actions that are necessary to allow the desired changed state of behavior to come into being. The plan you need is behavior based.

Behavior-based goals are designed to get you to a place that is not the place you are currently inhabiting. They are real and actionable steps that, if implemented

on a daily basis, will move you in the direction that you want to go. Behavior-based goals are not wish based. They tend to be brutally honest. In other words, if you want to climb that mountain, then you better be ready to lift your end of the load. Behavior-based goals are not about dreaming and wishing, they are about doing the work that needs to be done in order to summit.

Start Using SMART Goals

Goal setting is serious business. Improving the quality of your life is serious business. Effectuating positive change in your day-to-day existence is serious business. So, when you set a goal, don't take it lightly. When you have an ambition, treat it with respect. When you decide to make changes in your daily life, do it with an attitude that will get things done.

One of the ways to ensure that you're setting behavior-based goals is by using the SMART system. SMART goals are goals that have been vetted to exclude wishes, hopes, and daydreams from the process of change. They don't depend on fate or a chance to make them happen. Quite the contrary. They rely on discipline and hard work as the fuel to move them forward.

SMART is an acronym that stands for goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. These are the qualities that define behavior based goals. SMART goals are not concerned with what you plan on doing tomorrow. Instead, SMART goals focus on the here and now. A smart goal is always asking "What are you doing today, right now, to get the result that you decided you wanted?"

The answer to that question can be difficult, but only if you're paying lip service to your personal goals. If you have a definite idea of where you want to be in a week, month or even a year, then behavior based goal setting can help you get there.

In the next section, we're going to look at the individual elements that make up a SMART goal. We're also going to take a look at the difference between personal



behavior and results and how using SMART behavior-based goals can get you to where you want to go in no time flat.

Takeaways for This Section

- Reaching your goals requires more than simply setting an end point;
- Behavior-based goal setting is about doing the things that need to be done, on a daily basis, that keep you moving towards the end points that you have chosen;
- In order to understand behavior-based goals, we first have to understand the reason that we set goals for ourselves in the first place;
- One reason we set goals and make plans is because we are aware of change in the world around us;
- All the changes that we experience are, from our perspective, due to the passage of time;
- We understand that, as human beings, we have a finite amount of time available to us;
- Like everything, we will break down and be broken down in the end;
- The process of entropy guarantees this result;
- Therefore, while we set goals and make plans because we are aware that the clocks of our lives are ticking, all we really have to work with is today;
- Behavior-based goal setting recognizes this fact;
- Behavior-based goals are not about dreaming and wishing, they are about doing the work that needs to be done in order to summit;
- One of the ways to ensure that you're setting behavior-based goals is by using the SMART system.

Behavior vs. Results

Everyone wants results. Everyone wants those results now. Everyone wants those results now without having to put in any effort. Who wouldn't want a stronger and more flexible body without having to change their exercise habits? Who wouldn't want to lose weight without having to change their eating habits? Who wouldn't want to make more money in less time without having to learn and develop a new skillset? No one, that's who.

The annals of modern marketing are filled with page after page of copy promising essentially just that. Muscles with ease. Weight loss with no effort. More money at the drop of a hat. Were these marketing efforts successful? Of course, they were. Those types of promises are just what most people want to hear. They want results, but they don't want to have to work for those results. In the end, though, the only people who end up reaching their goal are the marketers whose plan was to make a financial killing by promising something for nothing.

It's human nature to want to try and take the easy way out of any situation. We're biologically programmed to avoid taking more difficult routes to desired results. After all, it would make no sense to climb to the top of a mountain to get food if there were sources of food more easily obtainable. The more calories that our ancestors could obtain for the least amount of effort spent was an equation that would pay evolutionary dividends.

However, as thinking, rational humans, we instinctually know that not every goal can be reached by taking the easy way out. We know that sometimes, oftentimes, in fact, the only way to reach an alternative desirable state is by doing the work necessary to get there. In short, the majority of the time there is no easy way to get the results you want.

This way of thinking is why so many people have such difficulty in maintaining progress towards their personal goals. They have no problem in setting goals. They want to lose weight. They want to be in better shape. They want to make more money. However, once the goal is set they have a hard time staying on track. They start out strong, doing what needs to be done to get to where they

want to go. However, after a week or a couple of weeks, bad habits begin to reassert themselves. They don't work as hard or as often at the job of reaching the goal. Eventually, they give up altogether.

The problem with approaching a goal in this manner is that all of the focus and energy is on the end result. Very little thought or energy is placed on charting a sustainable course to that result. Because of this, when the going gets tough, which is always going to occur no matter the goal, it's literally like hitting a wall. With absolutely zero mental or physical preparation to deal with the difficulties, the average person defaults back into the habitual behaviors that are the source of the problem that the goal was supposed to fix. The end result is that there is no forward movement whatsoever. The individual in question remains where they were, out of shape, overweight and chronically short of cash.

We don't set a goal to fail. That's not why we set goals. Instead, we are setting goals to better some aspect of our lives. Goal setting is an inherently positive process that should be producing positive results. So, what's the problem?

The problem isn't the goal itself. Any end result is ultimately achievable. The problem lies in how we are going about getting to that end result. It's the journey from where we are now to where we want to be that the trouble starts. That's where behavior-based goals come into play.

Behavior-based goals, as the name implies, are goals that focus on the process of, and the problems involved in, getting from point A to point B. They are not dealing with the actual desired end result at all. Instead, they deal with the behaviors and actions that are necessary to get to that result. In other words, change your behaviors, develop new behaviors and, in time, you will reach your overall goal.

Many behavior-based goals use the SMART system that we began to discuss in the previous section. As you will recall, SMART is an acronym that stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. Each of these elements is an integral part of any behavior based goal. Let's take a look at an example to get a better understanding of how this works.

Let's say that you want to climb Mt. Everest. That wish or desire can be considered a typical goal. Ordinarily, all the focus would be on the summit. There would be no focus on the strategy that needs to be implemented in order to summit. Not much thought would be given to equipment needed, provisions required or necessary physical conditioning. When using ordinary goal setting techniques, you'd decide you wanted to get to the top, you'd maybe pick up a warmer coat and up you'd go. Chances are you'd get nowhere near the top. Now, let's take a look at using behavior-based goals to help you summit Everest.

The first thing that you'd do to get to the top of the mountain is to forget about the top of the mountain. Instead of looking at the big picture, you'd break that picture into smaller, extremely specific steps. Instead of thinking about the summit, you'd think about how to climb the first 500 feet. What would you need? What do you have to do? Chopping a big task into smaller and more manageable action specific steps makes the goal less overwhelming and more doable on a daily basis.

You'd also want to make those more specific steps measurable. This means that you want to set some milestones along the route to the desired end result that you can use to gauge your progress. Let's face it. A big goal is going to take a long time to achieve. If you have no way to measure your forward progress during that time, it's going to feel like you're not getting anywhere at all. That's going to make you want to quit. When you can measure your progress, you can see that you are indeed getting closer to the end result. This provides you the motivation to stay the course and continue onward to the top.

The next one is important. You have to make sure that the goal you set is achievable. You may want to climb Mt. Everest, but if you're in poor health, no amount of specificity or measurability will allow you to climb that high. Behavior-based goal setting would not keep you from ultimately climbing Everest. Instead, it would focus on the intermediate steps that would need to be taken to potentially improve your health so that you were physically capable of attempting the climb.

Is your goal realistic? This is critical. Everyone can take up running. However, not everyone is going to be able to run like Usain Bolt. Everyone can learn to cook, but not everyone is going to be able to cook like Thomas Keller. The point here is that you have to be reasonable and realistic about your talents and abilities when setting a goal. Some things can be done and some things will never be done. Confusing these two points is only a recipe for unhappiness. So, getting to the top of Mt. Everest using the easiest pitch may be entirely doable. Getting to the top of Mt. Everest by attempting an approach that's never been used successfully is another matter entirely. Knowing the difference between the two is sometimes also the difference between success and failure.

Finally, you need to make sure that you are setting a time limit on your goal. Why is time important? Well, having a certain limit in which to get something done keeps your feet to the fire. A deadline is a motivation to keep working. Without a time limit, the temptation is to put off doing the work that needs to be done until tomorrow. Soon enough, your motto in regard to the goal is "don't do today what you can put off until tomorrow". You end up procrastinating yourself right into failure. So, if you say that you're going to climb Mt. Everest within the next two years, you actually have a better chance of doing all the specific and measurable work that needs to be done in order to stand on the summit on time.

So, remember that there is a direct relationship between behavior and results. When you concentrate on results, you never develop the habits that will get you to your goals. However, when you concentrate on the habits and behaviors that you need to develop to successfully get to an end result, you exponentially increase your chances of finding that success. It's SMART and it works.

Takeaways for This Section

- Everyone wants results;
- Unfortunately, many people want immediate results without doing the work that's necessary to achieve those results;
- It's an evolutionary fact that we will take the easy road to a reward if one is available;
- However, the majority of the time there is no easy way to get desired results;
- This difficulty does not stop people from desiring those results;
- They simply choose to ignore the necessary work;
- This fact often means that the desired results remain unachieved;
- Behavior-based goals do not focus on the end result;
- Instead, they focus on the intermediate steps that need to be taken in order to be successful;
- They are more about the incremental elements of a process than the big picture;
- When you change your behaviors, develop new behaviors then, in time, you will reach your overall goal;
- Behavior-based goals utilize a SMART philosophy which includes;
 - Setting specific smaller goals that contribute to the overall result;
 - Making sure that goals are measurable so that motivation continues;
 - Ensuring that goals are achievable, so that time and effort aren't wasted;
 - Examining whether goals are realistic so that talent and ability are properly aligned with what is being attempted; and
 - Using time-bound goals to keep forward momentum going and avoiding procrastination.

Tips and Best Practices

Now that you have a better understanding of what behavior-based goals are and how they work, it's time to offer you a few tips or best practices that will allow you to make the most of your own behavior based goal setting. These tips are suggestions that you can choose to adopt and implement as you see fit. They are not one size fits all. So, pick the ones that seem best suited for your purposes and streamline your goal setting process. The only thing better than achieving your desired result is being able to achieve the results that you desire over and over.

Utilize Mentors

If you have set a certain goal for yourself, there is likely another person in the field of endeavor in question that had already successfully done what you want to do. There is no glory in breaking your own trail. If someone has blazed the route that you need to take, you'd be foolish not to follow in their footsteps. Examine their story. Get all the information that you can about what they've done. If possible, reach out to them and ask for advice. You'll be surprised at the response. Most successful people are more than willing to share what information they can with others who are behind them on the road. In other words, don't try and go it alone if you don't have to.

See Your Path

Behavior-based goal setting is all about keeping your eyes wide open. It's about not fooling yourself. It's about being realistic. It's about being pragmatic. It's about getting things done. That's why visualizing where you're heading is so important. When you use your imagination to see yourself successfully completing specific tasks or meeting certain milestones on time, you are actually practicing for the actual acts that you will have to accomplish in the real world. Visualization gives you a "practice run" at an upcoming situation that will give you the mental muscle memory that can increase your chances of being successful. Give it a try.

Believe in Yourself

Believing in your ability to reach the desired result is an enormous advantage. It gives you the determination to keep going when the road gets tough. It prevents you from giving up when things don't turn out as planned. It helps you get through rough patches that you didn't anticipate would occur. It also helps eliminate that negative inner voice that can hold you back at critical moments in your journey. You can stop the inner doubts and the negative self-talk simply by maintaining a belief in you worth and in your ability to perform the acts that will get you where you want to go. Begin loving yourself and you will also love where end up.

Absorb Everything

Knowledge is power. This means that the more that you know about the subjects that surround your goal, the more successful you will be. Think about it. People who achieve high-level goals tend to be experts, right? Of course, they do. A certain level of expertise is absolutely necessary for getting the results that you want. So, were those experts born with that level of skill and expertise? Of course, they weren't. They started off as ignorant and wet behind the ears as you did. What they did do is read, listen and absorb every bit of information about their goal that they could lay their hands on. They were willing to learn. No matter how much they knew, they were always ready to learn more. In fact, they never considered themselves experts at all. Even at the moment of their greatest success, they still knew that there was someone who knew more than they did and they were hungry for that knowledge. Don't stop learning. Ever.

Resolve, Purpose, Fortitude

There are going to be times on your journey to your goal that you're going to want to give up. There are going to be times when the last thing that you want to do is to keep doing the work that's going to keep you moving forward toward your goal. At some point, you're going to ask yourself "What am I doing?" and you won't have a good answer. It's at these moments that you have to grit your teeth and set your jaw and keep doing what needs to be done. Right then, at that

moment, you may not have a single reason to continue. Everything inside you is screaming to quit. In fact, nothing will seem more desirable than to rid yourself of this godawful goal that you've saddled yourself with. At that point, you have two choices – quit or keep going. The only thing that is going to prevent you from quitting will be your resolve, your purpose, and your intestinal fortitude. You better have them ready, because these intangibles can be the only thing between you and failure.

Positivity vs Negativity

Think about positivity as a balloon and negativity as a weight. You have the choice, every day, about which one you will carry. One will lift you up, perhaps carrying you over an unseen obstacle. The other will weigh you down, slowing your steps, making your journey longer and more difficult. When you find just one thing to be positive about on your worst day, that positivity has the power to transform you. It can give you the reasons that you need to keep moving forward. It can provide comfort when all else seems cold and hostile. Positivity is powerful and it can give you the energy you need when you need it the most. Negativity will accomplish the exact opposite. It will rob you of the reasons that you need to continue. It can transform you into something that you won't like. It can rob you of light and make any situation worse. It is as powerful as positivity but it pulls in the opposite direction.

Conclusion

This particular goal has been reached. You are now in possession of all the information that you need to begin to implement a program of behavior-based goals on your own. You understand what behavior-based goals are and how they differ from less successful, more traditional forms of goal setting. You also understand why behavior-based goals are so important to anyone who truly desires to effectuate positive change in their own life. You've learned that behavior-based goals, by focusing on the process instead of the journey, are perhaps the most important tools that a goal oriented individual can possess. Now, is the time to begin a new journey. It is time to set your own goals. Goals that are SMART, behavior based and designed to change your life and bring you the happiness and fulfillment that you deserve.
