

How To Set Goals With Your Family

By James Conway

When you got married, you and your partner probably discussed all sorts of things, from the Mercedes you wished you were driving to how many kids you wanted and where you wanted to be in twenty years. If you haven't already found out, time and circumstances can change those plans almost from moment to moment. One of the most important things you can do for yourself, your spouse and your children is to make sure that the discussion of plans, goals and dreams never stops. Your family can work as a team to meet goals and handle setbacks. While you might find that you can't get everything you wanted starting out, you just might find, to quote a Sixties rocker, you get what you need. Here are some things to keep in mind.

1. Things do change. The important thing is to keep the ball rolling in a positive direction, even if it's a new one. You might find after a couple of years that you hate the job that was going to be your lifelong occupation. You might have twins. A thousand things can happen, so don't look upon obstacles or the unexpected as failures, but as challenges and opportunities.
2. Keep the conversation going. If there is a single thing that can cause problems in a marriage or in a family, it is the gradual erosion of communication over time. Jobs become more demanding and stressful, the needs of children intervene, expectations become written in stone. Even if you can't have a family dinner every night of the week, schedule at least one night when all "screens" are off, the answering machine is on and you have a family roundtable where everyone can update everyone else on what's going on in their lives, and in their heads.
3. Start a "Book of the Family." If you look in your family Bible or Baby book, you may just find that the last thing you wrote down about anyone in your family was the day they were born and how much they weighed. Keep a yearly scrapbook (or special box) of photographs, kids drawings, awards, articles and so on, plus a diary for which someone takes the responsibility to chronicle the family – perhaps once a week at the family meeting. Be as high or as low tech as you want, but make sure that every year at holiday time you have something to look back on and be thankful for.
4. Coordinate your lives. Every once in a while, or every day, one or more family members can find themselves working at cross purposes to everyone else, whether it's needing to be picked up from soccer practice or considering a job transfer from across the country. These are family decisions, and should be discussed and worked out in such a way that everyone can participate, even if it means making compromises. Some of the best lessons you can teach your children is that things don't happen just by magic, and that many of the things they want require work and sacrifice. This doesn't mean emphasizing that you "worked like a slave for five hours to buy that Barbie doll." It means that everyone bands together to solve problems and help each other meet new challenges.
5. Learn, accept, and evolve. If you make the effort over time to communicate, chronicle and coordinate your family's lives, dreams and goals in both the short and long term, you may find that this step comes naturally. Every generation

contributes new ideas and information that you can either close out or be open to. If you shut down your ability to learn something new about the world, about a family member or about others, you're shutting down the engine that keeps your family going. Follow the old adage of accepting the inevitability of change with grace and wisdom. Your daughter may give up championship tennis for medicine, you son may abandon the law for auto mechanics. With luck, these things may not come as a surprise, but once you've processed all the pros and cons, accept change and incorporate it into your family celebration. Holding onto the past is absolutely the best way of shutting out the future.

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