

Roadmaps For Your Life

By Jean Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., WFS Founder

It sounds ridiculous to say that most of us know where we've been in our lives, even though some of us might rather forget it, or most of it. But we do know what has transpired in our lives.

It is even easier to know where we are, if not emotionally then certainly geographically and actually. We know what we are doing, even though we may not like what we are doing. We know our actions, and we know each day and how we will go through it, doing what we must do.

And then there is the future – where we are going. Do we know? Can we know? Or do we dread it so much, we put thoughts of our future out of our minds? Strangely enough, and sadly, most do.

Suppose you were going on a trip several thousand miles away from where you presently live. Would you ever start out on that trip without a roadmap? Yet of all the persons reading this article right now perhaps only a handful have a roadmap for their lives, have goals!

That's really what goals are – roadmaps for our lives, yet so few persons ever have any or seriously make goals a part of life. Oh, I don't mean goals that are vague, goals such as merely thinking, "Gee, someday I'd like to have enough money to travel." That is not a goal. That is a wishful dream... however, it could be transformed into a goal.

But thinking about it in such vague and wishful ways will not help it to come true.

Too often we let life just happen, wanting to be happy and dreaming big dreams. Few of us ever realize that none of that can happen without our making it happen. We don't just become happy. Nor do we accomplish or have in life that which we want merely by dreaming about it. We must have a plan; we must have realistic goals that we consciously set out to achieve.

How many times in my speeches and writings have I used the illustration of a picnic to make the point of planning? None of us would ever think to invite 15 people to come to a Saturday picnic without our doing some planning for it – what we will have to eat, what we must buy, what we must prepare ahead, and a dozen other small details we must attend to before our Saturday.

Just think of all that planning for one small event in our lives, a picnic. Yet here we have our entire life stretching before us to be lived, and we are never enough concerned to have a plan for it!

Are we so naïve that we believe our future will take care of itself? Or are we so dependent upon others that we believe they will take care of our future for us? Or don't we ever think about the days, weeks, months, and years to come?

Why are we humans like that? Do we believe that by not planning, we will live longer? Do we believe that we have plenty of time and we'll plan later? Or do we think that everything will be wonderful just by chance?

Too often we just let life happen, willy-nilly. And then we wonder why we are bored, why life is so unexciting. And then we feel restless and depressed. Often we then do something drastic. We overindulge in food, drinking, indiscriminate sex, or in various combinations of all three of these. And then we can spend another period of time licking our wounds, feeling guilty, and indulging in self-pity for the awfully dull life we lead.

If you have never tried goals in your life, then the best way to begin is by setting up daily schedules. Each night before bed, set your goals for the next day. Use pen and paper to draft the outline for your day. It might read something like this: pick up cleaning, call Florence, clean closet, rewrite resume, stick with 1500 calories on your diet, take a minute or two and lay out your three meals exactly. That will make the dieting easier. I even use a time schedule. I lay out my day in segments – that which I want to do in the morning, and whatever I want to do in the afternoon and evening. If I have to go to a store, I list exactly what I want.

Having a plan for each and every day prevents time from getting away from us. Otherwise, day after day rolls around and we are still saying, “One of these days I must get around to rewriting my resume.”

Unless we actually plan to do those things which are not to our liking, we will continue to put them off. That is the difference between a person who is successful and one who is not. The successful person makes a plan to do what she would rather not do, then makes herself do it.

There is a bit of procrastination in all of us. Overcoming the urge to postpone that which we don't want to do is the difference between success and failure. Each time we are able to make a plan and we stick to its execution, we are that much stronger as a person. And there are rewards, because we feel good about having made ourselves carry out our plan. And this self-satisfaction never goes away, no matter how many times we follow our plan.

There are a few small tricks one can use to help with execution. I have learned that if I put those things which I hate to do the most at the top of my list, then I can relax for the rest of the day, because I have made myself do the things I like the least during the early part of the day. One of my pet dislikes is making phone calls. I am almost a rarity among alcoholics in that I didn't spend lots of time on the phone when I was drinking. I did spend some time, but I don't think as much as a number of other women I know. However, now I really dislike making calls and I don't exactly know why. There are times when I lose sleep over knowing I must make a certain phone call the next day. Of course, there is no way of getting out of it. Each of us has a certain amount of calls we must make within a week's time. So I plan to make mine as early as possible. If it were possible, I'd make all of my phone calls the minute I got out of bed. But I can't do that. However, I make myself place the phone calls as early as possible so that I can enjoy the rest of my day.

For each of us, that which is the most difficult will be quite different. But doing the most difficult as soon as possible each day will help you with your day's goals and it will be a great accomplishment in discipline, which brings about self-satisfaction.

After you master the daily schedule of goals, then move on to larger goals, make larger plans. Try a month, which permits you to use more imagination. Be sure to include some adventuresome goals, but not impossible ones. You might wish to include something you've been promising your children, like going to the zoo. Or include something you've been promising yourself, having your hair cut short.

Maybe instead of monthly goals, you would rather try seasonal goals. I think these are one of my favorites, especially if you take care of a house. My list for Spring is something to see: call nursery-man and find out how to get rid of the poison ivy before it gets started again; paint the porch railing, prune the apple tree, plant some summer flowers, plan the vegetable garden, clean the cellar, and so on.

The great part about the seasonal goals is that one can make use of cold winter days and engender hope that spring is right around the corner. Another nice thing about goals made for spring, while in the dead of winter, is that it makes one want to get with these projects. It acts as

encouragement, so that when spring does come, we are ready to jump right into our spring projects.

Of course, our ultimate goal is to make a plan for our life, not just a single day. Making plans for each day is the way to begin but then we must move on toward other plans – plans for months, plans for seasons, and plans for years. We need to have a one-year plan, a two-year plan, a five-year plan, and a ten-year plan. And we need plans even beyond that. We think nothing of having a retirement plan, which concerns only money. What of us? Our hopes, our dreams, our wants and desires, our goals? These, too, must be formulated in order for them to happen. Otherwise they will simply remain as dreams... impossible dreams.

Although I had many problems when I first attended college, I found that when I really got with it, when I was ready to learn, I loved being in college and graduate school, because there was a plan. I knew where I would be in the next ten years. And that was curiously satisfying to me. It gave me a sense of security and it took away the pressure of having to make immediate decisions.

Our goals, our plans, can do that for us. They give our life direction, purpose, and a knowledge that we must work toward a certain point of accomplishment. Goals and plans provide us with security, for our lives do not seem meaningless and without direction or purpose. We begin to feel needed; we begin to feel that our lives have some value.

Few of us think in spans of five years, much less ten years, but we should definitely try to do so. Right now, ask yourself if you have ever specifically considered where you will be and what you will be doing ten years from today? Some will answer, “Oh, probably exactly what I am doing now – the laundry, taking care of the kids, looking for a job, and hoping the kids don’t get into trouble.”

How sad that is, how without hope, or direction, or without life. None of us were meant to live lives of abject servitude. For some, it serves as a cop out; for others, it shows total defeat of self as a person without hopes or dreams.

What is desperately needed is a plan, a goal, a dream, a blueprint for a better and more self-productive life. Each of us deserves to have the time to find the best in us and then to find the time to develop that best in us, even if it means learning how to wallpaper, first a hallway, then a room, then a whole house.

Never believe that you cannot set goals in your life because you have a family or because of this or because of that. Every one of us can set goals, can make plans, even though within those plans we must make a place for our responsibilities.

The time is now to plan more than picnics. The time is now to take a hold on life and to make a roadmap for where you are going. There is no one single plan. My room is scattered with plans of all kinds: plans for this summer, plans for next fall, plans for the next five years. I have a writing plan and I have a house-repair plan; and I have a personal plan that includes things I want to read, places I want to go, things I want to do.

We can have plans of many kinds. The important thing is to have plans of many kinds and then to stick to them. Never make your plans impossible and always make them as specific as you possibly can. Don’t just write ‘prune the trees.’ Instead, write down the exact name of the trees and try to set a small schedule – like specifying “the first week in spring.”

If your goal is to make a million dollars, it is rather impractical to simply write: “In the next five years, make a million dollars.” This goal can’t happen without some plan for it. There must be a

specified way, one that is possible. The more specific we are about how we are going to put our plans into action, the better chance we have at succeeding.

Sometimes we will be adding to our plans as we go along. Perhaps you will write down only the best outline of what you wish to accomplish, but then your mind will start to work on this. Actually, you have set it into motion. Then, as your mind develops the execution of this, add the details to your plan, to your goals. By the time you get around to the time scheme you listed, your goal will be partially accomplished.

Goals will make your life exciting. Goals give your mind something vital to work on. Begin to see your goals as accomplished. See the end result and this will help you to work towards that end.☞
[March 1985]

(This article is from *The Collection of Sobering Thoughts Booklet*, Volume 10 and copyrighted by Women for Sobriety, Inc., PO Box 618, Quakertown, PA 18951.)

Comments from Irene Q-B:

This article encompasses a number of ideas that really helped me keep in gear. In my early days of staying sober, I had no specific ways that I wanted to use to help me make a change in my thinking. The Thirteen Statements were there and I shared each week how the one had kept me on track. I read Jean's book, Turnabout: Help for a New Life as well as other suggested readings. I read that book over and over from 1981 to 1986 until Goodbye Hangovers, Hello Life was published. Then the *Sobering Thoughts* newsletter came monthly. Added reading was imperative for me. I treasure all articles in the newsletter and have the 17 Volumes of *Collection of Sobering Thoughts* booklets by Jean. This article, from Volume 10, stirs up a further desire to keep changing and keep following the program and "make goals a part of life."

Jean suggests "a plan and realistic goals" to each one who has an addiction. She encourages us to not procrastinate and "put dislikes at the top of your list and relax." Further readings are a must for me. In her article on 'Wanting To Belong', Jean says, "Read, read, read." Her readings took me down my dusty road to the now smooth paved one in my life. For all her writings, I am truly grateful.☞

Comments from Shirley "didit4me":

I realized when I read the article that is what I have done; I made roadmaps or plans. As Jean asks in the article, "Would you go on a trip of several thousand miles without a plan?" Not if you want to have a safe trip. Early in my recovery, my counsellor said I had to have plans so that I wouldn't be tempted to go to the liquor store or find some way to drink. Then I had trouble with the right balance of plans. I made some falls along the way because I tried to overdo it. I wore myself out with all the plans and I wasn't giving myself relaxing time. I worried so much that I set myself up to fail. Thank goodness that is a long way behind me.

Jean suggests that we think that we cannot set goals because of family or other things. We think there is no time for us. Well, let me tell you, we are important. We have to be good to ourselves before we can do any good for our family.

My goals are important to me; first my continuing sobriety, my growth in the "New Life" Program, and my growth in the world. **"I am what I think"** fits this plan.

I really like the idea of goals that are more than one week in advance, the seasonal goals of gardening, holidays, painting, exercising...the holiday I wish to take, the next WFS Conference. Then the long-term goals of where I retire, how much money I can put aside for comfort. The good things I can do to maintain a healthy life style. And there are many goals we will make during our lifetime. We make roadmaps sometimes without thinking about it! Planning for tomorrow.

Look to the future and see that goals (roadmaps) will give you added happiness and satisfaction.☞

Comments from Leslie "meez too":

I immediately thought of one of my cats while I was reading this article. One of my beloved cats, Godzilla, who has since left this earth, used to do something really cute when I would take him the vet. Instead of being anxious and shaking, losing fur and hanging onto me for dear life with outstretched claws, he would just peacefully sit on my lap with his face burrowed in my armpit. There he would stay even when the doctor came into the room and an exam was imminent. The vet and I would discuss Godzilla's well-being and I would ask questions regarding which shots he would be getting that day. Godzilla just stayed put, head burrowed while purring loudly, until the doctor removed him from the safety of my lap and the nothingness of my armpit. I really believe Godzilla thought that if he couldn't see what was going on, then what was going on couldn't see him.

As Jean suggested in this article, our reasons for not setting real goals are varied. I carefully examined my own reasons for not having concrete long-term goals, and pretty much figured out I was pulling a Godzilla when it came to goal-setting. I chose to

see only what I wanted and kept my head burrowed in the figurative safety of the armpit. I couldn't fear what I didn't see and what I didn't see, or think about, couldn't hurt me. What I clearly failed to understand, was that choosing to remain cloistered in the safety of the armpit also eliminated so many possibilities, rendering my life to the realm of ordinary.

Sure, I had some goals, but nothing set too far into the future; I did not seek that which would challenge me or allow me to seek greatness in myself. I had allowed past experiences to color my contemplation of the future: everything becomes a waste of time, too many barriers (read 'persons'), what's the point (blah, blah, blah). **"The past is gone forever."** My roadmap will represent the present and how I will plan for the future. Letting myself off the hook, based on past experience, was a very convenient tool of avoidance.

Lack of vision was another way to avoid setting goals. I have always been a "planner", but always in the sense of ordinary daily task kind of planning. This type of planning has its place and is necessary for the larger picture; however, the lack of vision on my part was steeped in fear and absence of confidence. If I kept my goals to the ordinary, I could feel safe and in the comfort zone; unfortunately, safe and comfortable yields ordinary. What I have since learned is the only thing I have to fear, is living a life that is without vision and ordinary: greatness is mine by a conscious effort. Each time I think big, and attach goals to said big thoughts, I am breeding confidence. The mere act of thinking big creates the confidence necessary to take action.

So, here I am in my new life with a firm set of goals, both short and long term. Do I sometimes feel twinges of fear and anxiety connected to these goals? Of course!! Do I have to occasionally tweak my goals? Absolutely!! It is so very comforting and self-esteem elevating to have this roadmap in my life. I now have a fighting chance of having a life that is great, as opposed to ordinary, void of the soul crushing veil of the past, and that is the product of developing a habit of happiness. ☘ [June 2011]

Comments from "TeddyBear":

What is a roadmap? It is a detailed plan that guides progress toward a desired outcome.

We have a past that is gone forever. This past is to be referenced as we grow and evolve in our New Life but not carried along, weighing us down, rendering us incapable of moving forward with excitement and enthusiasm.

We have a present. It is where we are NOW. Where we are doing our struggling, accepting, living, growing, creating. We do all of this knowing that we must do whatever it takes to live a full life in recovery.

We have a future. Where are we going? What do we want to do? Who do we want to be? How do we get there? This is what Jean Kirkpatrick discusses in the article *Roadmaps for Your Life*. When I first started reading this article, I had an argument with myself in my mind. If I had had it out loud, I might have been put under 72 hours of observation. The argument revolved around the facts that we are supposed to forget the past and live in the NOW - how can I do this and plan a future?

Effectively what Jean tells us is that in order to accomplish creating a better past and living in an awesome NOW, we must have a plan for our future. If we do not, we may end up feeling helpless and overwhelmed. This builds on the idea that today is yesterday's tomorrow. All of these moments in time are interconnected.

Jean gives some personal hints on how she develops her plans. She advocates a daily plan as well as one-year, five-year and ten-year plans. In the daily plan, she would put the things she hated to do first on her list. Get them out of the way so the rest of the day is spent feeling accomplished, happy, and not hung-over with negativity from the need to handle the disliked tasks. These daily goals are also a means of practice, gaining confidence and experience so that we can move on to longer term goals. The successful attainment of daily goals motivates us to set realizable longer term goals. In so doing, we provide ourselves with direction, purpose and security. We sense personal value, increase our self-esteem and gift ourselves with an inner serenity.

Jean also stresses that these plans need to be detailed. Not a general phrase like 'go to the store' but a specific list like 'go to the grocery store at ___ and get: bread, milk, oranges, bananas, coffee, etc.' We plan for trips, fall yard clean up, whatever; but, each plan needs to be specific, attainable and executed. Periodically, you evaluate your long-term plans because life changes and we change, so our goals might change. This is okay; we simply revamp the plan to take these things into account.

Sobriety should be a period of positive change. See it as a period of great forward movement, as a period of positive growth. See it as a time to get on top of life and problems. Take one problem at a time. Know that there is always something you can do about every situation. In planning, we are in charge of our life ship, we shoulder the responsibility and we reap the rewards. We change self-pity into self-reliance; we move from chaos to serenity; we become the women we are meant to be.

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." - Benjamin Franklin

"Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." - Warren Buffett

"If you don't know exactly where you're going, how will you know when you get there?"

- Steve Maraboli, *Life, the Truth, and Being Free*

There is no time like the present to start a life of positive pasts and amazing futures through development of your own unique roadmap for your life. See **"I am what I think"** in action. ☘ [January 2013]

Comments from "Sister":

I was pulling together my thoughts for this posting while making a trip into the far western reaches of my state, and just before I got on the highway that would carry me most of the distance, I was struck by the image of the stoplight I was caught by just before my on-ramp. Thinking about goal-setting in that moment, my own life-long struggle with goals seemed perfectly illustrated by the green light changing to yellow and then to red. On reflex, I slapped my right hand down in the passenger seat as I applied the brakes because of the yellow light. The familiar gesture, which I doubtlessly learned as a child from my mother sending a thwacking arm across my chest, on this day only saved my book-bag from hitting the floor; but it startled me into contemplating the ways in which I live in response to the "yellow lights" I encounter.

I am really good with yellow lights. I tend to slow down to a stop instead of gunning it through as the light turns "orange"; but, in general, I am well practiced at going from "Go" to "Stop!" and trust my intuition and my reflexes to keep me safe when I am Going and need to Stop. The AH-HA comes because I am NOT good at the yellow that SHOULD exist between Stop and Go. I long for a warm amber nudge to say, "Get ready, Sister. It's time to make ready for the full on GREEN-GO that is coming. You can do it. Just get ready to go." Like many, I stare intently at the traffic light, waiting for someone to tell me I can GO (as a child, I used to imagine a person sitting away from the intersection or under the base of the pole in a submarine like vessel, peeking out of a hidden periscope, calling the shots, saying the magic words to make the Green for Go come for us). Or, I rev the engine and restlessly drift forward and then break and then repeat and miss the moment when the green first comes.

Jean writes that goals are roadmaps for our lives. She is careful to point out that vague goals are wishful dreams. She writes, "*We must have a plan; we must have realistic goals that we set out to achieve.*" And she says that failure to have goals leads to boredom and depression and these things lead to over-indulgence and drastic action. (This feels like sitting at the Red Light and then Zooming up to Green to me—like going from 0 to 60 mph too fast.)

She writes, "*The successful person makes a plan to do what she would rather not do, then makes herself do it.*" Procrastination is an enemy to success. And the confidence boost that comes with doing the unappealing tasks is a boon to success, and more importantly to the self-concept of being a woman who is successful.

Jean suggests for the goal-challenged, that we begin with daily goals then increase to monthly, yearly and beyond. She suggests doing the unpleasant things early in the day so that they don't get procrastinated, and also so that the rest of the day is free from the weight of the unpleasant thing.

My own experience has been that I'm pretty good with the daily and weekly to-do lists, though things do get moved along into further and further away slots due to my dislike of some tasks. I really struggle with the big picture of a year or a multi-year period for goals. Again, I'm imagining the stop light, and a whole journey of stoplights in which I "Go" on a to-do list and then I stop, and then I "Go" again on another list or another task, and then I stop again. I don't mean stopping to rest. That kind of Sabbath, a rest between two times of effort, would be helpful to my progress, I think. I mean something more akin to shutting the engine off and sitting alone at the intersection. Occasionally someone will pull up and honk at me to move; but, mostly, I just sit there, waiting for the next change of the light.

In this article, Jean says we need a 1, 2, 5 and 10 year plan, and then plans beyond that. She also suggests that if monthly goals aren't a fit, we can try seasonal goals. She writes, "*What is desperately needed is a plan, a goal, a dream, a blueprint for a better and more self-productive life.*" It is at this point in the article that I really began to understand that Goal-Setting is not about getting things done; it is about a way of thinking and a way of living my life. And this approach presumes a few things that might sound familiar (from the WFS Program!).

- Statement #3, "**Happiness is a habit I will develop.**" *Happiness is created, not waited for.* So, sitting at the stoplight of my life, waiting for someone out there to tell me to Go isn't part of this program.
- Statement #5, "**I am what I think.**" *I am a capable, competent, caring, compassionate woman.* If I think I'm not good at goals, or if I think I'm not able to set them, then I'm not. If I think I am capable of doing so, then I am. Hmmmm. Rocket science? Ready for lift off?
- Statement #6, "**Life can be ordinary or it can be great.**" *Greatness is mine by a conscious effort.* Conscious effort?!! Right, I am in charge, driving the car, choosing the route and anything less than Greatness is also my choice.
- Statement #11, "**Enthusiasm is my daily exercise.**" *I treasure all moments of my new life.* Daily. Yes. Goals are not to-do lists. They are the bigger picture that determines our to-do lists.
- Statement #13, "**I am responsible for myself and for my actions.**" *I am in charge of my mind, my thoughts and my life.* So, if my life feels boring or stagnant or directionless, I am responsible for that too. But, not need to fall into the dumps, because I can choose different actions at any moment. And, different RE-actions, which has seemed to be the thing that most often lets the air of my tires when I am driving a goal-oriented life.

- Statement #8, **“The fundamental object of life is emotional and spiritual growth.”** *Daily I put my life into a proper order, knowing which are the priorities.* Wow. I get to set the priorities. I hadn’t really thought of this as an opportunity for freedom. I have, for many years, been an active participant in a spiritual community that values responsiveness to movement of the spirit. In fact, this responsiveness sometimes encourages deep and long waiting, which can be a trap for a woman like me who has for too long been externally reliant for directions on which way to grow.

Perhaps the biggest AH-HA of contemplating Jean’s article, and my experience of living a “Stop Light” life, is that I have spent a little too much time (long before my WFS involvement) being comfortable with my understanding of the first part of Statement #8. Yes, the object of life is growth. I have taken this to mean acquiring new information, new skills, new certifications and degrees and EXTERNAL VALIDATIONS of all sorts. I have sat at the stoplight of my life at far too many intersections, waiting for the invisible person who controls the change of lights to move me from Red to Green. This has left me quite deficient in the second part of Statement #8. For years, I have not identified true priorities, based on goals for myself, and I have struggled for any kind of daily ordering of tasks and actions (Greatness would be mine by a conscious EFFORT, if only I exerted the effort). My dear husband was home schooled and went to a small liberal arts college and, in both contexts, he did lots of self-directed study. I was public-schooled and attended a large university and, in my contexts, other people set standards and goals and schedules and priorities. I received grades and strived for a positive evaluation. Such a long history of learning to be and move according to certain external motivations takes a while to undo on the thought level.

These are my thoughts. Thank you for reading. What do you think? ☺ [January 2013]

Comments from “JenB”:

I must be honest that I have really struggled with this article. I have read it multiple times and even utilized the annotating strategies which I teach my students to use when encountering difficult texts. Of course, it’s not the language or syntax which I find challenging; honestly, the essay is quite straightforward and I could easily provide you with a summary.

Setting goals and creating a plan to achieve those goals is key to success. I know this intellectually; heck, I even have my students do this each term. I can talk about SMART goals, making certain that a goal is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely. So why is this task so challenging???

I know where I want to be in five years, and I know what I need to do to get to that point. The difficulty is LIFE! I keep setting goals and making plans; but, the realities of my life seem to get in the way. As a very small example: I set the goal to get up early two times this week so I could practice yoga. As a person who requires eight hours sleep, this seemed quite reasonable. Of course, I could not anticipate that my son would have a horrible day at school, so he would need my close supervision from the time I picked him up until he went to bed. This means that I then needed to prep for today’s lessons until after my bedtime. Getting up early today was suddenly unrealistic. So, now I feel like a failure.

I did a quick bit of research and discovered that research is being done regarding the damaging effects of goal-setting. Please do not think that I am trying to contradict the wisdom of Jean’s point; I am simply trying to make sense of how to balance moving forward in the recovery/discovery process with the roadblocks that often pop up.

Many people thrive in a goal oriented world, but some of us who aren’t competitive, withdraw. I share my thoughts simply to open a discussion... ☺ [January 2013]