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Value of coherent written plans

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A CHINESE proverb says: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." The journey should be planned with direction, organised and expressed in terms of a definite action. As the philosopher Goethe said: "He who moves not forward goes backward."

The goal of a thousand miles must be clear, the purpose strong. Then the first step will be decisive, assertive and forceful. A planned and written direction, with constant determination as well as room for alteration and motivation, will ensure that destiny will come to pass.

Planning has no guesswork, it has definiteness of purpose. Thousands of years ago, Noah planned and built his Ark though it never rained.

Without plans, one is like the Titanic with no rudder. Sooner or later, one will strike an iceberg.

To accomplish something worthwhile, one has to plan the work and work the plan. Life is like the humble roadmap, dotted with a thousand destinations and a thousand ways to get there. Choosing the goal and charting its course through planning is essential, if you choose not to waste time, not to end up asking for directions or losing the way.

In my early years selling life insurance, I had to write down my production goals for the year and my plans to achieve them. Writing gave clarity to my purpose and dedication to its achievement. Figuratively, it gave me the "kick in the pants" to keep going.

A definite plan produces definite results. Indefinite plans do not produce indefinite results - they produce no results. As the saying goes: "If you aim at nothing, you can be sure you will hit it."

If my career in the insurance industry taught me anything worth my two decades in sales, it was this one thing: Wishing will not bring success. But designing success with a state of mind that becomes an obsession, then planning definite ways by which to achieve it and backing those plans with persistence which does not recognise setbacks, will bring success. As Dr Napoleon Hill, author of Think and Grow Rich said: "Whatever the mind of man can vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe and enthusiastically act upon must invariably come to pass."

Successful people in any society are considered role models. Their success in helping and inspiring others cannot be discounted. Our country can be proud of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The most outstanding of his achievements, to me, is his rousing of the country by virtue of a written plan to make Malaysia a fully developed nation by the year 2020.

Let me briefly mention eight values of writing your plans and goals in planning ahead.

\* It's the strongest memory

Chinese philosopher Confucius said the palest of ink is stronger than the strongest of memory. When we consider the times in which we live and the continuous pressure from all sides by demands on our time and attention, it is clear the ideas of today will become obscure tomorrow if we fail to write them down.

Unless we write our goals and plans to achieve them, they will disappear in the face of new challenges, new problems, new decisions and a new day.

A good written plan keeps us on track. If we are derailed, it has enough written modifications to put us back on our course towards progress. It acts as "interference blinders" to eliminate foreign distractions and

interruptions.

The Prophet Moses was entrusted with the 10 Commandments only after they were first written by God.

- \* It provides feedback

Written plans and goals provide feedback essential for measuring progress. Unless you refer to your map you will not know if you are in the right place.

Motivation to keep going will be lost if you are not sure where you are. Feedback provides the best motivation for accomplishing your written plans and goals.

The outstanding achievement by Magendran and Mohanandas in scaling the world's highest peak would have been impossible if they had not had visible points of reference which provided feedback to measure their progress before they conquered Mount Everest.

Written goals with plans and deadlines provide feedback which can spur you to succeed at a critical period when most people without written goals would have give up.

- \* It motivates action

Writing down your goals and plans makes your thoughts and purpose definite. These ideas become clearer and that helps motivate action.

Imagine our country without a written constitution. Chaos would be the order of the day. Written plans and goals motivate one to stick to the plan and not deviate.

- \* It works as reference and reminder

Writing your plans and goals works towards preserving information necessary to achieving your objectives. Whenever a review takes place, you gain new enthusiasm to "fire you up".

Written plans act as a constant reminder of your successes and that which is within reach. You will be reminded where you are going and reminded how far you have come.

If you have deviated from your plans and are not moving forward, a quick reference can help remind you to reroute.

- \* It banishes frustration

Writing your plans and goals assures you of consistency of purpose in all areas of your life, because once you have laid your plans out in writing, any conflicts between goals and values will be obvious. You are in a good position to allocate priorities and get rid of frustrations before they cause damage.

A short story was told to several groups; they were to tell this story - without adding or subtracting a word it - to another group. When the story reached the tenth group, it was so distorted it was an entirely different story. The moral is, if you want to avoid frustration, write down your story. None can then distort it.

- \* It influences the subconscious

While you set your goals and plans down in writing, you stimulate visualisation which contributes to creativity and to the successful accomplishment of your purpose.

At the same time, reading some of your written plans and goals regularly, especially before going to bed and on waking up, will convey your goals to your subconscious, engendering a spirit of absolute faith. Through repetition of this procedure, you bring about thought habits advantageous to your efforts to achieve your objectives.

- \* It's the law of reciprocity

Our written goals and plans act as a magnetic force which draws us to them. The law of reciprocity states: We are inclined to attract to ourselves that which we position for ourselves. But first your thoughts must be written down with definiteness and in detail. Because none can

attract to themselves that which their thoughts repel.

\* It saves time and energy

A written plan helps you understand your "five wives and one husband" - why, where, what, who, when and how.

This understanding will help you save time and energy because you know at all times where you are going and what you should do next. No guessing is necessary. When in doubt, refer to your written plans.

Paul J. Meyer in his book Dynamics of Human Motivation writes about a survey throughout the United States which revealed some startling information about the importance of written goals. It was found that only three per cent of the people interviewed had any definite, concrete and written plans for achievement in life. Another 10 per cent had a fairly good idea of their aims and objectives. 60 per cent had more or less given some thought to it, but only in the financial area. The balance, or 27 per cent, had never given serious thought to their goals or planned for their future in any way.

Of the people surveyed, only three per cent were moderately well off, 60 per cent were people of modest means and the remainder were just getting by with the help of charity.

The most startling revelation of the survey was that the 10 per cent of the second group had the same qualifications as the top three per cent. These people had equal education, talent and intelligence. They had ambitions and knew where they were going. The only difference was that the top three per cent had their goals in writing while the next 10 per cent did not.

But the greatest significance was that the three per cent was outperforming the 10 per cent group at a ratio of 10 to one and better. That means planning ahead on paper is more important than paper qualifications.

\* Jackson Yogarajah is a council member of the Malaysian Association of Productivity and principal consultant of Sales Excellence Training Sdn Bhd. He will conduct a one-day public seminar on goal-setting at the Concorde Hotel in Kuala Lumpur on May 9. For more information, please call 03-6166300.

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