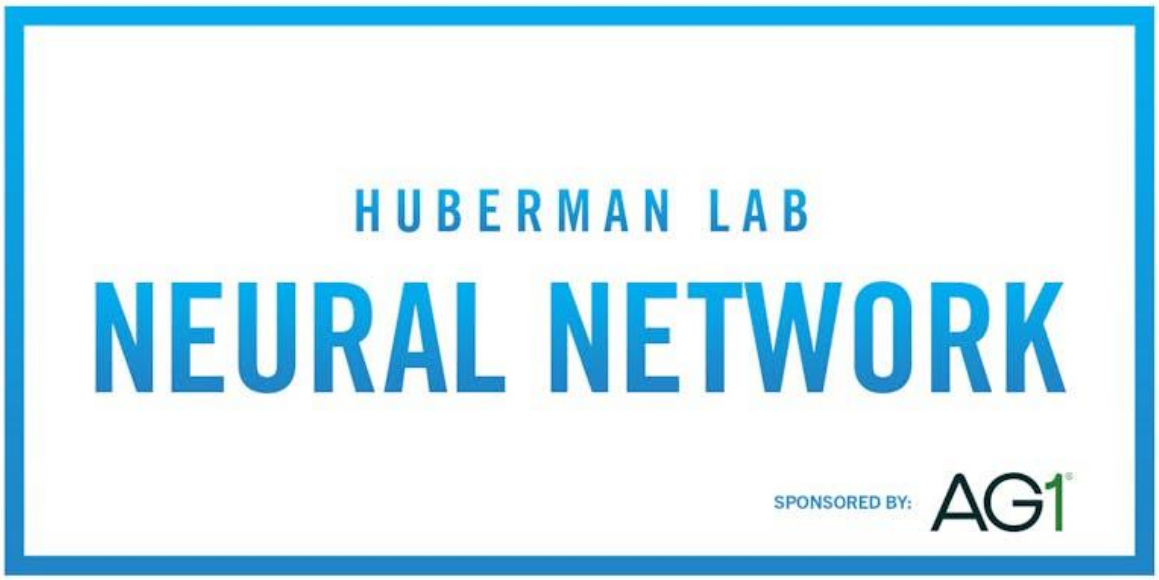

Here I explain how to set and achieve your goals. These topics have been discussed in several Huberman Lab episodes including The Science of Setting & Achieving Goals and Goals Toolkit: How to Set & Achieve Your Goals.

Goal Setting: 6 Steps to Make the Process Easier and Make You More Productive

To begin, you'll need to pick a goal. That might seem obvious. But many people fail to achieve their goals. Why? They don't spend time defining their specific goal(s). To do so, follow steps #1-6:

Step 1: Choose a Priority Goal

During goal setting, people often want to overhaul too many habits at once. For example, start a diet, workout, sleep more and start meditating. All starting January 1st. Pursuing too many goals simultaneously often leads to failure of all goals. Instead, **set a priority goal** by asking: *What is the one goal I can give the necessary time and energy to pursue right now?*

Step 2: Pursue a Lofty Goal

Your chosen goal should be ambitious. Simple goals won't cause sufficient levels of neural arousal and stress to stimulate real growth and learning. Therefore, aim for a lofty goal.

Step 3: Define Specific Actions

While overarching goals like "get fit," "write a book" or "run more" are helpful to list during brainstorming, you must identify the actions involved in achieving each of these 'macro'-goals. Break down your desired outcome into **specific actions steps** to significantly improve your likelihood of achieving your goal. For example, run three times per week.

Step 4: Goal Measurability

Establish a finite time course to complete your goal; I'd suggest a **12-week** time period is appropriate for most goals. Within this quarterly timeframe, define:

1. Total hours per week
2. Specific days
3. The length of each goal-oriented work session
4. A specific time window (e.g., from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.) or a time constraint (e.g., before 9 a.m.) for the goal-oriented work session

Step 5: Quantify Your Goals

Some goals have easily quantifiable outcomes (e.g., running a marathon in less than a given amount of time). Others are more subjective (e.g., developing a meditation practice). With loosely defined goal outcomes, take extra care. Outline the specific, necessary actions for your plan.

For any type of goal, it can also help to **designate smaller outcomes** along the 12-week journey. They will keep you feeling motivated.

Step 6: Don't Tell the World!

Have you ever started a goal and wanted to share this news via group text or a social media post? Unfortunately, receiving positive feedback on a newly set goal can **undermine your success**. This positive encouragement can activate the brain's reward mechanisms. This reduces your motivation to continue pursuing the goal. You already got the reward without the hard work. So, when you start a goal, it's usually best to keep this endeavor to yourself. It can also make sharing with friends and family more fun once you've hit your first milestone.

Goal Pursuit: 7 Tools to Make It Easier and More Effective

Once you have specified your goal and outlined the necessary action steps, use tools #1-7. They will help you to stay motivated and reach your goal.

Tool 1: The Post-it Note Fallacy

Placing a note on the mirror that exclaims "floss!" or "run today!" might be motivating at first, but likely, after a few days, you fail to "see" this visual reminder anymore. The brain monitors for anything new in our environment. But it doesn't call our attention to the day-to-day similarities. A static visual reminder will **fail to trigger action**. Instead, write a new note every few days and post it in a different location.

Tool 2: Visualize the End and Visualize What Failure Looks Like

Yes failure. If you feel motivated before the work session, spend one to three minutes **visualizing the positive outcomes** of goal success as well as goal failure. Do this to sustain motivation through your work bout. On unmotivated days, spend one to three minutes visualizing the **failure** of not achieving your goal. That is, **visualize the negative outcome**. Humans will work very hard to avoid feelings of failure. This visualization

exercise focuses on feelings of failure. It will recruit neurochemicals, like adrenaline, to boost your levels of arousal and focus.

Tool 3: Visual Targets

Maintaining mental focus is strongly anchored to the visual system. Use a **visual target strategy**. Narrow the "cone" of your visual attention to a specific object or point in front of you. Hold it in your gaze for 30-90 seconds. Dr. Emily Balcetis and colleagues have shown that this exercise **increases alertness** and autonomic arousal in the brain and body. It also helps to build and sustain motivation.

Tip: Relax your gaze and look off to the horizon when you finish working. This "turns off" the release of chemicals associated with alertness and arousal and will aid in relaxation.

Tool 4: Put Your Phone Away!

During your work bouts, put your **phone out of reach** or turn on **airplane mode**. Both task-switching and procrastinating can eat up your work time. Task-switching is when you look at your phone between bouts of work. Procrastinating is when you look at your phone right before starting the work.

Tool 5: Intermittent Rewards

Motivation and the associated neurochemical dopamine have been the topic of many Huberman Lab episodes. In brief, consistently receiving rewards diminishes the reward's power and reduces overall motivation. In contrast, only rewarding yourself at the finish line (~12 weeks) also reduces motivation.

The solution? Use **random, intermittent rewards** (like a slot machine) to maintain motivation. After your goal work, **flip a coin**: heads = reward vs. tails = no reward.

On a reward day, try using positive self-talk. Do it for 30-60 seconds to reinforce the neural circuits associated with internal motivation. Treat yourself to a physical reward from time to time. For example, watch a movie or eat a food you enjoy!

Tool 6: The Middle Problem

People tend to be highly motivated to start and finish a goal. But motivation often declines in the middle. To overcome the middle problem:

1. Acknowledge this is a **normal phenomenon**
2. Use **time chunking** to break-up the middle portion into 3-4 smaller time segments

Tool 7: Circadian Rhythms & Attention

There are specific times during the day that are for optimal goal work. Dr. Pablo Valdez describes three peak times each day when our attention and focus are at their highest. As a rough guide, **30 minutes, 3 hours, and 11 hours after you wake up are great times for hard work**. This happens because of the body's circadian rhythm (sleep-wake cycle) and rhythmicity of body temperature and associated neurochemicals.

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