

## Figuring it Out: Self-Awareness and Goals

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Take a moment to consider this question: what matters to you? Family, money, education, freedom, kindness, sports, religion? Take a moment to think about this.

Got it?

Good.

Now, what *really* matters to you? If I told you that you can't have all the things on that list of things that matter to you, what would you give up? What would you need to keep to feel right with yourself? What could you let go?

One of the most beneficial things we can do in helping us determine the course of our lives is to understand what matters to us the most. When we better understand the priority of values in our lives, we are more likely to find a trajectory that will be most satisfying to us. For example, if a six-figure salary is important to you, it would probably be smarter to pursue a career in the medical field or in law than in education or the military. If you want to be available to spend more time on your social life or with family, it's likely that will come at the expense of a higher paying career. While this isn't always true, being aware of your priorities can help you play the odds.

There's a metaphor for this with which you may be familiar. There are several variations on this, but for the sake of simplicity we're going to go with the following. The story goes that a professor brings a big glass jar into his class. He proceeds to dump a bunch of golf balls into the jar and then asks the class if it's full. Some students say it is; some hesitate. He then pours a bunch of marbles into the jar, letting them filter through the golf balls, filling empty space. Again, he asked if the jar was full. Again, the students gave the answers students typically do. He followed this up with some sand that filled the gaps between all the orbs in the jar. The follow up to this story, as you've probably guessed, is

that if we prioritize our lives, putting things that are most important into the jar of existence first, there will be room for all the little things afterward.

It's a wonderful metaphor for the idea we're exploring in this chapter. By setting priorities, figuring out what matters most, we can find a way to have it all.

At least that's what it seems to be saying.

But what if we can't. There are, after all, only so many hours in a day, so many dollars in a paycheck, so many conversations that you can have.

Sometimes, we can't have it all. And that's where priorities become even more important. There's a phrase in the *Bible* that exemplifies this concept. *The Old Testament* tells the story of three young men who have chosen their devotion to God as one of the things that *really* matters to them, one of the golf balls in their jar. They're put in a situation where they may have to choose between that devotion and the value they place on their own life, typically a golf ball as well. They're convinced they can have both. However, even though they anticipate God will save them from death, they follow up by saying, "But if not" they're willing to accept the reality that they can't have it all. That level of understanding of priorities can be incredibly beneficial in your life.

To be clear, this is in no way a suggestion of the priorities you should set. While many people may put their theology high on the list of priorities, that isn't necessarily the take home lesson from this. What is important to understand is when you can't have it all, when confronted with that "but if not" moment, that your decisions about what to let go are made clearer by knowing what matters most in your hierarchy of priorities. If family matters more than career, or if money matters more than a social life, knowing that will make it easier to decide where to focus your resources, whether it be time, money, or energy. So, when we consider the jar and the golf balls, which parts of your life are at the core of what matters to you? Which parts of your life may be less important than you might have thought?

These questions are important as you consider your path through college and life in general. Knowing your priorities can be especially valuable when setting goals. Determining your priorities is vital to setting goals that will move you in the direction you want your life to go. Knowing your priorities coupled with good strategies makes for good goals.

A key factor of good goal setting is that they can be layered. Long-term goals can be facilitated by short-term goals. One effective method for setting both long and short-term efforts is to make SMART goals. In this system, goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time bound.<sup>1</sup> Goals that meet these criteria help you to measure your progress. They can help you find the fullest and richest life.

There is another wrinkle addressed in other chapters. At any given point we may be able to identify these priorities, but this isn't a one-time consideration. Over time some of our priorities can, and frequently do, shift. It's valuable to occasionally go back to the jar and make sure all your golf balls are still golf balls, all of your marbles are still marbles, and all of your sand even belongs in the jar.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE\\_90.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_90.htm)