

THE MAGIC OF THINKING BIG

Every morning at 4am, while the rest of the world is still asleep, I head out for my morning walk. And while that might sound like torture to many people, it's actually my favorite part of the whole day, the time where the whole world is just mine. It's my time to think and dream and listen to audio-books and make sense of the world, to get purpose and clarity on who I am and where I am going. And I wouldn't give it up for anything.

Lately I've been doing a lot of thinking about goals and motivation and why some people are able to achieve the things they want, and others seem to just sit there making excuses, worrying about all the things that could go wrong, or waiting for circumstances to be perfect.

And I think it comes down to how bad you really want it.

You see, when you want something, I mean really want it, you can feel it in every bone in your body, that drive, that hunger, that internal pressure to achieve. You don't need anyone else to push you—you're more than willing to do whatever it takes. And it doesn't feel like work, either. Oh sure, there might be hard days and annoying moments, but they are worth it because every step you take is getting you closer to that goal.

And if you don't feel that? Then maybe your goal isn't big enough.

When I first started this blog, *Living Well Spending Less*®, I set a goal for myself to make enough money blogging that my husband—an aerospace engineer—could quit his job and become a stay-at-home dad. At the time, it was a completely crazy goal that seemed utterly impossible, and my husband told me as much, insisting that I would never be able to make money from a blog.

But I wanted it so *bad*, I could almost taste it, and I was determined to do whatever it took to make that crazy dream a reality.

And so, with two toddlers at home, I started getting up at 3am every morning—and often even earlier—in order to work on my blog before anyone else was up. I took advantage of every naptime, every weekend, and every spare moment. And when I wasn't working on the blog itself, I was learning everything I could about the business of blogging, from SEO to social media to how to actually generate revenue.

I'm not going to lie, it was a pretty exhausting time. There were lots of downsides. My husband couldn't understand why on earth I was spending all my time on a blog that he was sure would never amount to anything. My real life friends laughed at me to my face and talked about me behind my back. My kids watched way too much Dora the Explorer and Wild Kratts. I didn't get nearly enough sleep. I had almost no life. And even though it was hard, to me the effort was worth every sacrifice, because I could see the vision of what this blog could be, even if no one else could at the time.

In 2013, nearly three years after starting this blog, that dream became a reality.

My husband was able to quit his job and we've never looked back. The blog—and the full-fledged business that has grown out of it—has continued to grow and flourish.

But that's not the end of the story.

You see, once I actually achieved that crazy big goal, the one everyone--even me--thought was totally impossible, I was left with two very clear choices. I could sit back and coast, or I could set some NEW crazy big goals, new dreams that would keep me hungry and keep me jumping out of bed before dawn every day.

You probably know which one I chose.

Whether you are a blogger or own your own business, or whether you are a working mom or a stay-at-home mom, you might think setting small, reasonable goals is the way to go. After all, small reasonable goals seem safe and, well, reasonable, right?

Wrong.

I am here to tell you that thinking small won't get you anywhere. For your dreams to motivate you to action, they have to be big enough to scare you a little, to ignite that spark of courage and determination that lives inside you.

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Have you ever heard of a football coach named Lou Holtz? In 1966, when he was twenty-eight years old, Lou Holtz was going through a serious rough patch. His coaching career is going nowhere. He was broke and unemployed. And, to make matters even worse, his wife was expecting their third child.

Something had to give.

Hoping to motivate him, his wife bought him a book called ***The Magic of Thinking Big*** by David Schwartz. The book worked. Inspired by what he read, Holtz decided that the key to changing his life was to make a list of all the BIG things he really wanted to achieve in life.

His list included some pretty audacious goals, such as becoming the Notre Dame football coach, meeting the president, landing on an aircraft carrier, and appearing on *The Tonight Show*—CRAZY things that most people would have laughed at him for even considering.

But guess what? Not only did Lou Holtz become the head football coach at Notre Dame, but he also led his team to a National Championship. Among other things, he enjoyed dinner with Ronald Regan at the White House, was a guest on *The Tonight Show*, met the pope, shot not one but two holes-in-one at golf, jumped out of an airplane, went on a safari in Africa, and yes, he even landed on an aircraft carrier.

To date, Lou Holtz has crossed off 102 of his 107 lifetime goals.

But what people often forget is that as awe-inspiring as Lou Holtz turned out to be, he didn't start out that way. He was just an ordinary guy full of the same frustrations and failures and self-doubt that we ALL experience sometimes. In fact, at one point his poor pregnant wife was wringing her hands just wondering how to get him off the couch!

But ultimately the difference between Lou Holtz and so many others was that he became not only willing to *imagine* a better life for himself in the biggest possible ways, he was also willing to *write those goals down and make them real*. Once they were real to him, he was able to take the steps necessary to make those goals happen.

WHY YOU NEED A STRETCH GOAL

In his most recent book, “**Smarter, Faster, Better**,” bestselling author Charles Duhigg explains that while we often hear about the importance of setting “SMART” goals—goals that are Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-Bound,” there is an even more critical piece of effective goal-setting—that often gets forgotten.

So what is this critical element?

According to Duhigg, it is starting with what he calls a “stretch goal.” In other words? It is thinking BIG. “The problem with many to do lists,” he explains,” is that when we write down nothing but a series of short term objectives we are only working to satisfy the immediate need for closure.”

He goes on to explain that without a BIG goal to reach for and tell us what to focus on, we will spend hours on unimportant tasks simply because it feels good to check them off our list.

But here's the thing--the true secret of productivity is **being able to focus 100% of your attention on your biggest, most important tasks at any given time.**

And while that sounds so simple, I've discovered that for most of us, it's not. There are a few big obstacles that get in our way. We don't know what the most important task is. We are too distracted. We are afraid we might miss something.

But all these obstacles point to one larger problem, and that is that we don't have a BIG plan for success. Instead of thinking BIG and allowing ourselves to consider—and shoot for—the wildest possibilities, we think small, allowing ourselves to get mired down in the day-to-day grind.

We tell ourselves there is too much to do to worry about pie-in-the-sky ideals; that it is more important to worry about where our next paycheck is going to come from than what our retirement plan will be.

But being busy is not the same as being productive.

And so before we can figure out how to focus 100% of our attention on our biggest, most important tasks, we need to give ourselves permission to think BIG.

The reality is that big goals get big results, while small goals get small results. What you will become is what you believe you can become, and the bigger and scarier your goal, the more chance you will have for big success.

Big goals are the road map for our lives that tell us what direction we need to go. They are the compass that keep us on the right path. They are the filter that lets us know what is important and what is not worth our time. Big goals are the key to success.

OVERCOMING YOUR LIMITING BELIEFS

So what holds us back from setting—and therefore achieving—these big goals? Almost always, it is something known as a limiting belief—a thought or belief we have about ourselves that holds us back from achieving our full potential.

These limiting beliefs can come in all shapes and sizes, and appear in all different areas of our lives. They are also shape shifters—re-emerging in a new way each time we think we’ve overcome one. Most of us have many limiting beliefs, but I believe that all of us have at least a few.

It might be that we don’t believe that we actually have anything valuable to offer the world, or that we aren’t as talented or witty or well-spoken as so-and-so. It might be that we don’t believe we can actually accomplish those things that we’ve thought about doing, or that we’re not smart enough to be successful. It might be that we don’t want to invest in ourselves because we might fail. It might be that we don’t want to reach out and ask for help because we might get rejected. It might be that we don’t want to put 100 percent of our energy and efforts into a new project because we’re not sure what the people around us will say. What if they don’t understand? What if they make fun of us?

Whatever your limiting beliefs may be, I guarantee they are there. And while we can’t always stop those limiting beliefs from popping up, we CAN refuse to listen to them. Because once we’ve recognized a limiting belief for what it is—just a thought that is holding us back—we can take away the power it has over us and move past it.

CONQUERING THE FEAR OF FAILURE

I think that the biggest limiting belief that most people have is the fear that they might fail. Because let’s face it—none of us want to fail! And often that fear that we might make a mistake or a misstep, that we might fall flat on our face or lose all the time or money that we’ve invested becomes completely paralyzing.

And our response to that fear is to pull in, to get smaller, to try to mitigate the potential risk by not doing too much in any one area. We dabble a little here

and a little there, ever dipping our toes into the water, never wanting to go all in.

The results from this strategy range from minimal to moderate success. There is no big failure, but there is also no big success.

Here's the thing—it is really easy to look at the most successful people and assume that they have always been successful, or that everything they touch turns to gold, or even that they were just born lucky and happened to be in the right place at the right time. But in reality, this is very rarely the case.

Even the most successful people have experienced—and continue to experience—failure. That is the nature of entrepreneurship—some risks will pan out and others won't. The key is usually to learn from your missteps and to not let a few setbacks stand in your way.

Michael Jordan once famously said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed."

Likewise, Thomas Edison had to try 10,000 versions of the light bulb before he finally figured out what would work.

Steve Jobs was actually fired by the board at Apple at one point. He later said that it was the best thing that ever happened to him, because it spurred more creativity and more ideas than he had ever had before.

Most people don't know that Henry Ford actually founded two failed motor companies before finding huge success with the Ford Motor company and the Model T.

Bill Gates' first startup company, Traf-O-Data, was an abject failure. The product barely even worked & the endeavor was a complete disaster. However, that failure taught him some very valuable lessons that he was able to apply when he started his new company, Microsoft, a few years later.

One of my favorite quotes of all time is from Winston Churchill who said, **"success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is only the courage to continue that matters."**

While failure isn't fun to think about, I don't want that fear of failing to be what holds you back from thinking big. The reality is that you will make mistakes. Everyone does. Think big anyway.

In my own life, I have certainly experienced my share of failures, mistakes, bombs, and missteps. My first marriage ended in divorce. I dropped out of law school. I got fired. I filed for bankruptcy. I trusted someone I shouldn't have, only to have the situation blow up in my face. Even in my business, I have hired the wrong people, made giant mistakes, and invested in projects that have

been nothing but big money losers.

But I've also learned that this is just part of life. If I spend my time beating myself for the mistakes I make, I wouldn't have any time to focus on the things that are going well. Being successful in life is all about learning to think BIG in order to maximize your success.

SETTING YOUR BIG GOALS

When setting your big goals, don't be afraid to start with a grand vision—a life list, similar to the one that Lou Holtz came up with after reading ***The Magic of Thinking Big***. To help you focus, try dividing it into different categories---family, financial, professional, and personal.

As you let yourself dream about the future in these different areas, be conscious of the limiting beliefs that begin creeping into your thoughts. Recognize them for what they are—limiting beliefs—and allow yourself to write down even the craziest, most audacious goals and dreams without judgment or self-editing. Don't worry either about setting time limits or making them perfect—just write whatever comes to mind.

In other words? Think BIG.

And so, my question for you today is this: **how bad do you want it?** Are you reaching for a dream so big it scares you? And if not, why not? Push yourself to make it bigger until you feel that spark, that hunger, and then you will know you're on the right track.