

Choosing Your Goals

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Members of the The American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons (Society), friends, and guests, it has been my distinct pleasure and honor to have served as your president for the past year. Shortly after being elected to this distinguished office, my predecessor gladly sent me a notebook that contains all the previous presidential lectures, many of which have been published in *Diseases of the Colon & Rectum*. One of my goals as a past president will be to convert these talks into a digital format for future presidents.

In reviewing the binder, I learned that during the previous 111 years, there have been 101 presidents, with 6 of them serving 2 terms, an event unlikely to occur again. The presidential talks have run the gamut from scholarly scientific papers, attempts to foretell the future, predictions about the future fate of our specialty, both gloomy and bright, philosophic looks at our predecessors, and exhortations on what we could and should do for our specialty. Only one president did not give a presidential oration and to quote a previous president, J. Byron Gathright, “I won’t be the second.”¹

What would be a suitable topic for this presentation? I sought advice from my wife Sharon, who wisely advised me to speak slowly, make it interesting, and keep it short. After significant deliberation, I have chosen to speak on *Choosing your Goals* and how this skill has advanced our specialty and can enhance your professional career.

Goals are defined in Webster’s Dictionary as a boundary or an end that one strives to attain.² Goal setting is a powerful process for thinking about your ideal future, and for motivating yourself to turn your vision of this future into reality. Some people feel adrift



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and lack a sense of accomplishment. They usually have not spent enough time thinking about what they want from life, and have not set formal goals for themselves. After all, would you set out on a major journey with no real idea of your destination?

Goal setting is used by achievers in all fields. Setting goals gives you long-term vision and short-term *motivation*. It focuses on your acquisition of knowledge, and helps you to organize your time and your resources so that you can make the very most of your life. By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure your progress and take pride in the achievement of your goals. You will see advancement in what might previously have seemed a long pointless grind. You will also raise your *self-confidence*, as you recognize your own ability and competence in achieving the goals that you have set.

You should set your goals on a number of levels. First, you create the “big picture” of what you want to do with your life (for over, say, the next 10 years), and identify the

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large-scale goals that you want to achieve. Then, you break these down into the smaller and smaller targets that you must hit to reach your lifetime goals. As many of you know, a large part of my early career was spent in the Air Force. The military by its nature is very goal oriented. As we looked at career progression, we often used an evaluation sheet that contained check boxes of prerequisites for advancement. This led many of us to the phrase “checked that square” when we had a new experience or completed a task. Finally, once you have your plan, you start working to achieve these goals, but remember to periodically objectively review your plan and achievements. A superb summary of goal-setting techniques is available from the MindTools Web site.³

The first step in setting personal goals is to consider what you want to achieve in your lifetime or at least in the distant future. Setting lifetime goals gives you the overall perspective that shapes all other aspects of your decision making. To give a broad, balanced coverage of all important areas in your life, try to set goals in some of the following categories which may be important to you.

For this talk, I will review some aspects of goal setting and then discuss how the process has been used by the Society and how you can apply them to advance your professional career.

As you develop your goals, try to state each goal as a positive, precise statement. When you have several goals, prioritize them. This helps you to direct your attention to the most important ones. It is critical to put your goals in writing. This crystallizes them and gives them more force. Make your operational goals small enough to be achievable. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress toward it. Smaller, incremental goals provide more opportunities for reward. Goals are better when they set a performance rather than an outcome. “Reading the ASCRS textbook” is a better goal than “knowing colorectal surgery.” You should take care to set goals in areas over which you have control, and your goals should be realistic.

Your goals should challenge you and stretch your abilities. To accomplish your goals and be successful, you need a commitment to do the required work. Identifying a number of smaller tasks that are often required to achieve a larger goal eases the process and can keep you motivated. A useful way of making goals more powerful is to use the SMART mnemonic.

Although there are variations, SMART usually stands for³:

- S Specific (or Significant).
- M Measurable (or Meaningful).
- A Attainable (or Action-Oriented).
- R Relevant (or Rewarding).
- T Time-Bound (or Trackable).

For example, instead of having “to sail around the world” as a goal, it is more powerful to say, “to have completed my trip around the world by December 31, 2015.” Obviously, this will only be attainable if a lot of preparation has been completed beforehand!

Another technique has been called *Backward Planning*. Start with your ultimate goal and then identify the milestones of prerequisites required to accomplish your overall goal. Finally, once you have developed a plan, stick with it and enjoy your success. Vision and goal setting have benefited the ASCRS from its inception.

This started in 1899, when 13 surgeons led by our first president, Joseph M. Mathews, formed the American Proctologic Society. Fifty years later, the American Board of Proctology was created. After various publication efforts, our journal *Diseases of the Colon & Rectum* was first published in 1958. A name change to more accurately reflect our practice occurred for the Board in 1959 and for the Society in 1973. Highlights of these and other milestones of the first hundred years of our specialty and Society are chronicled in the text “From Mathews to the Millennium,” which was written and edited by J. Byron Gathright and Richard Bragaw in 1999 to commemorate our first centennial.⁴ Byron will be honored with this year’s memorial lecture on Wednesday.

More recently we have progressed in several areas that I would like to highlight. Leaders of our Society have met regularly to conduct strategic planning. Since 2002, we have had written goals that have been reviewed and updated on a 4-year cycle. A broad spectrum of our members have contributed to goal development. Our current set of goals is available on the Society’s Web site (www.fascrs.org), a site I would encourage you to explore. Our goals cover these 6 areas: education, specialty care and practice management, communication, relationships with other organizations, fiscal stability, and membership. Under these 6 areas, we have 53 specific objectives. Each of these has a responsible party, often one of our Society committees or officers, who is tasked with their accomplishment.

Another area in which we have successfully achieved our goals is publications. Following the impetus of Bruce Wolff, members of the Society produced an ASCRS Textbook of Colon and Rectal Surgery. The first edition was published in 2007.⁵ Taking excerpts from the textbook, members also compiled an ASCRS Manual.⁶ To date, more than 3000 copies of the Textbook and 6500 copies of the Manual have been sold. Royalties from these sales go to the Society’s educational fund and, to date, have totaled over \$133,000.

Our current Editor-in-Chief, Rob Madoff, has continued the legacy of our previous editors in producing a world-class journal. Its circulation exceeds 5000, its impact factor continues at a healthy 2.5, and it provides more than a million dollars in royalties to the Society each year. The

Journal staff and publisher have recently worked on strategic planning and are exploring the transition to an electronic format such as the increasingly popular tablets.

The Public Relations Committee under the leadership of Harry Papaconstantinou has worked on a number of projects to accomplish our branding efforts. We have developed a new Society logo, depicted on this slide, which is video friendly. We have partnered with CBS HealthWatch to produce public service announcements and other educational videos. We supported the Colon Cancer Alliance and their Undy Races and the Colon Cancer Coalition with their Get your Rear in Gear races in various parts of the country. We were fortunate to work with Coaches against Cancer and the American Cancer Society to produce a video spot that aired during the NCAA's March Madness. The Society continues its foray into electronic media under the direction of David Margolin. In addition to monitoring our Web site, which had more than 600,000 visits last year, he runs the Society's Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/pages/ASCRS-American-Society-of-Colon-Rectal-Surgeons/98186072534>), which has over 450 friends, and he is exploring Twitter.

How can goal setting have an impact in your career? We have a spectrum of attendees, from medical students, to trainees, to experienced and senior clinicians. Many of you are accomplishing or have accomplished your goals of education and residency. As you look at your career, you need to consider clinical activity, academics, and participation in professional societies such as the ASCRS. Participation in the ASCRS provides a number of benefits. In addition to educational opportunities such as this meeting, you can network with other colorectal surgeons. Colleagues you met during the interview process often become some of your closest friends. The Society aids career development and opportunities for recognition. You can be mentored and, as your career progresses, mentor others, and serve your patients and our specialty, as well.

Interaction in our Society starts with membership and attendance at meetings. The next step is participation in one or more of our 22 committees. Selection to a committee is made by the president, who considers members who have expressed an interest. This can be done by responding to our annual e-mail solicitation, or by speaking to a mentor or a senior member of the Society. Other opportunities also include presenting at this meeting and moderating a session or panel. If participation in our Society is one of your goals, we wish to support you. One piece of advice,

though, is, if you make a commitment, follow it through. Successfully completing your task will lead to other opportunities to contribute and serve.

In summary, goal setting is an important method of deciding what you want to achieve in your life, separating what is important from what is irrelevant or a distraction, and motivating yourself and building your self-confidence, based on successful achievement of goals.

Set your lifetime goals first. Then, set a 5-year plan of smaller goals that you need to complete if you are to reach your lifetime plan. Keep the process going by regularly reviewing and updating your goals. And remember to take time to enjoy the satisfaction of achieving your goals when you do so.

If you have not previously set goals, do so, starting now. As you make this technique part of your life, you will find your career accelerating, and you will wonder how you did without it!

In closing, I want to especially express appreciation to our members serving in the armed services. Their service and the sacrifices of their families has allowed us to enjoy our freedom and opportunity. Their contributions create a debt that we should make every effort to repay. I hope this presentation has encouraged you to set goals. It has been my great pleasure and honor to serve as your president. Our accomplishments this year are due in large part to the work of many individuals, and they have my sincere thanks.

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