



careergasm

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# ENLIGHTENED AMBITION

I'm an ambitious person. When I want something I go after it with laser focus, and I work hard enough that I usually get it. So, over the years I've developed a sense that I can achieve pretty much whatever goal I put my mind to. That should be a good thing, right?

*Well, sometimes.*

That kind of focused drive works wonders when your goals are closely aligned with what you actually want. Work feels like play. Energy abounds. Ideas flow freely.

However, that kind of striving is draining if your goals aren't in alignment with what you really want. The pursuit feels forced. Each step is laboured with lead-heavy legs. I bet you know what this feels like. I'm guessing so because **many of us have set goals that are really out of whack with our true desires.**

Why would we do this to ourselves? Why on earth would anyone work toward a goal that's not aligned with what they really want?

**Sometimes we blindly strive for things we *think* we want, or things we think we *should* want, which may or may not be what we *actually* do want.**

Crazy, I know. But it's easier than you think to confuse those things.

## WHY?

When I'm helping clients set goals for their careers, one of the most important questions I ask them is "why?". *Why* are they setting that particular goal? That simple question helps them determine whether the

goal is aligned with what they *actually* want.

A while back, I noticed that some of my own goals felt heavy. Oppressive. It was time to start asking myself why I wanted what I wanted.

Once I started asking myself why, I learned that some of my ambitions had nothing to do with my actual desires.

I like to think I'm someone who generally has her shit together (**nobody has all of their shit together...not all at once, anyway**), but I was going about some of my own goal setting in the wrong way. That struck me as especially ironic because I get paid to help other people set and achieve their goals. Alas, as the saying goes, we teach best what we most need to learn.

For example, right beside my refrigerator, in black Sharpie marker, I had scribbled the goal, "Own a beautiful lakefront cottage." Surely that goal couldn't be misdirected, right? I'm a nature lover. And, plus, doesn't everyone want that? To my surprise, it turns out I do not.

I asked myself why I wanted a beautiful lakefront cottage in the same way I ask my clients why they set a particular career goal.

*I want to own a beautiful lakefront cottage. Why?*

*Because I feel most like myself in nature. Because I think clearly and feel connected in nature.*

Oh. I see that I want to *be in nature*, not necessarily *own property*. Hell, that's easy. I live in a city with lots of beautiful trails. My parents own a farm. I'm in walking distance to some gorgeous parks. It might take me a decade to save up for a lakefront cottage, but I can go for a hike this afternoon.

Funnily enough, right this second I'm writing this from a little off-grid cabin in the woods. I rented it for a whole week. I'm sitting on a big

orange Muskoka chair wearing jogging pants and flip-flops while I listen to the wind shuffle the maple leaves. I feel grounded and steady and wise. I feel small and expansive all at once. Yes, THAT is what I want. And I can certainly make room for more of that in my life. Problem solved.

Let's examine one of my career goals:

*I want to write for a certain big badass publication. Why?*

*Because I want to develop my writing voice and become a better writer.*

Wait. What?

Writing for a big publication won't help me develop my writing voice. And it won't help me become a better writer. It's more about having something to prove than getting better. Plus, I already write for some pretty badass publications. More is not what I need. I need to just keep doing my thing.

I went through this same process of inquiry with all of my goals. Eighty percent of them were already right on track, but editing or ditching the other 20 percent felt downright LIBERATING! Setting goals that are aligned with your true desires is what I call **enlightened ambition**.

**Setting better goals requires only three simple steps:**

1. State your goal.
2. Drill down to "why".
3. Tweak or toss anything not aligned with what you *really* want.

Try it, yourself.

**Goal #1:**

Why do I want this?

Is this goal aligned with what I really want?

Yes                  No

Check one:

Keep it (my goal is aligned with what I really want)

Tweak it (my goal will feel better if I change it in some way)

Toss it (my goal is not aligned with what I really want)

**Goal #2:**

Why do I want this?

Is this goal aligned with what I really want?

Yes                  No

Check one:

Keep it (my goal is aligned with what I really want)

Tweak it (my goal will feel better if I change it in some way)

Toss it (my goal is not aligned with what I really want)

### Goal #3:

Why do I want this?

Is this goal aligned with what I really want?

Yes

No

Check one:

Keep it (my goal is aligned with what I really want)

Tweak it (my goal will feel better if I change it in some way)

Toss it (my goal is not aligned with what I really want)

That's it. It seems almost too simple to work, but sometimes simple is best.

*It's time your goals started working for you again, and not the other way around.*

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*PS: This aligned approach to goal setting is something I came to after reading *The Desire Map*, by Danielle LaPorte. I highly recommend that book. Especially if you want to start setting feel-good goals instead of oppressive ones.*