

Your Parachute is Packed:

Who is positioned to push you out of the plane?

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In a Harvard Business Review article entitled "Turning Goals into Results", Jim Collins (as in Collins & Porras, co-authors of "Built To Last") recounts a story about how a former student guaranteed the achievement of his goals.

This guy wanted to start his own business immediately, but he was burdened by school debt and deluged with job offers. He accepted a position with a large manufacturer, promising himself that he'd launch his business in precisely five years—when the school debt was retired.

To keep his promise to himself, the student drafted a resignation letter and dated it five years out. He made copies, and gave them to trusted friends with these instructions: "If I don't leave my job and launch out on my own by the specified date, then send the letter in for me."

He quit right on schedule.

I love this story! Three things strike me as significant:

1. He delayed gratification to give his business every chance for success. He didn't choose to incur more debt—he wanted to be 100% committed, financially and emotionally, to his dream.

2. He tapped into his entrepreneurial enthusiasm to establish a bold measure, before he became fully committed to someone else's dreams and demands.

3. He entrusted the letter to many, not just one. Chances were excellent that at least one letter would make it to his boss if he didn't bail out on schedule.

I've thought about implementing drastic and undesirable consequences to keep me engaged with my own goals. I am behind the curve on my goal to read 24 books in 2001. Should I tell my husband to sell one book back to the bookstore each week until I get back on track? If I haven't lost 18 of my 24 pounds by the end of September, do I force myself to show up to my class reunion picnic in a swimsuit?

Punishing myself with these self-imposed measures may get my attention, but there's a lingering problem. The pain and suffering I'd endure still wouldn't get me to my goals. I'd lose money, I'd lose face, but I wouldn't be guaranteed the loss of 24 pounds and the completion of 24 books. And let's speak frankly—you probably don't know me, but let's just say that I have a Ph.D. in creative rationalization, justification and

excuse making. Those books will not be sold...that swimsuit will never be worn!

The power of the student's strategy was that, one way or another, he would be on his own at the 5-year mark. Could he have chickened out and begged his supporters to burn the letters? Yes, but then he'd have to survive all those pep talks, coaching sessions, and disapproving lectures

about not staying true to his vision. By the last conversation, he'd have his nerve back!

Big goals require planning, perseverance, and plain old hard work. They can also benefit from a strategic push by a third party. Who can you enlist to pull the plug on your procrastination?