

# Getting There

ARE YOUR DREAMS ALWAYS JUST BEYOND YOUR REACH? MAYBE YOUR APPROACH IS HOLDING YOU BACK. REFORM YOUR PROCESS AND RESHAPE YOUR RESULTS.

By CAT THOMPSON

**Y**ou probably know where you're heading. Maybe you have kept a journal, talked to a counselor or just spent intense, sweaty hours on your bike or treadmill, figuring out what you really want to do with your life. Perhaps you've even taken a few steps toward making your dream reality. Even so, down in your gut, you may harbor a fear that, even with all this under your belt, you won't be able to reach your goal.

If, in the past, you've found your dreams and goals slipping away before they're fully achieved, it may be that your achievement style is holding you back.

Perhaps you don't think you have a style. But we all have habitual ways of approaching challenges, and sometimes we rely on them too exclusively. By recognizing and exploring your favored or instinctive approach, you'll be much better equipped to pursue your dream with every available skill and resource at your disposal. And perhaps to flex some dream-building muscles you didn't even know you had.

## TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHES

In my years of talking with people about harnessing the energy in their lives, I've identified two distinct styles that people use to move toward goals: planning and leaping. Of course, most people blend styles, but generally they revert to one dominant one, especially when the stakes are high. Take a

look at the profiles below to see if you recognize yourself, your spouse, your boss — even your children!

**Planners** are people who are most comfortable having a concrete series of steps that make logical and linear sense — plans they see as leading clearly from where they are to where they want to go.

Planners think things through and prepare themselves for a variety of circumstances. They are usually well organized, they understand and like working with timelines, and they prefer to have a strong, dependable framework from which to launch their plan. Generally, it's when planners feel they have such a structure in place that they are most motivated and best able to channel their creative energies toward achieving success.

**Leapers**, on the other hand, tend to feel that planning wastes valuable creative energy that could be better used for moving forward — now! If you're a leaper, you tend to be optimistic about your abilities, highly flexible and comfortable with quick change.

Leapers' confidence in others can inspire tremendous group cooperation. They are less concerned with *how* a project gets done than that it *does* get done, ideally as quickly as possible. Leapers enjoy the challenge of problem-solving in the moment and trust their ability to respond quickly and creatively. Leapers tend to inspire those around them with their optimism, their encouragement and their ability to draw in unexpected resources.

## GIFTS AND GAFFES

As you might suspect, both leapers and planners get things accomplished. Both styles have valuable components. But each style also has its drawbacks, and depending excessively on →

## When it comes to getting your dream, are you a *planner* ...

- Is it important for you to know *how* you will get to your goal?
- Do you educate yourself on what will be required to reach your goal?
- Do you like detailed procedures, such as creating schedules and charts?
- Do you enjoy the process of taking a series of clearly defined, progressive steps?

## ... or a *leaper*?

- Are you inspired by having a big dream, even if you have no idea how to support it?
- Do you often say yes to your dreams and then trust that the "how" will appear?
- Do you enjoy having to think on your feet and change gears quickly?
- In spite of not having a structured plan, do you often make quick progress?



either one tends to backfire, resulting in less-than-ideal outcomes and wasted opportunities. So let's take a look at what each approach has to offer.

**Planning is valuable because** it tends to ensure high quality. Good planning helps us define the parameters of our dreams. Because it typically involves some research, planning also gives us the benefit of learning from other peoples' experiences (vs. re-creating the wheel) and it helps us identify the very best ways of doing things. With a plan, we have a sense of security so we can relax and enjoy the journey.

**Planning is a problem when** we lose our ability to think or act outside our self-imposed framework. Too much planning can also bring on boredom and inertia. For many planners, it is the act of planning (creating forms, organizing information into notebooks, and so forth) that is the fun part. If they invest too heavily in complex systems, planners can lose all their momentum before they actually get anything done. They may fritter away resources or get overwhelmed by the complexity of their own plans. Or they may *feel* like they've gotten a lot done before they've affected any real change.

Planners may insist on endless meetings to gather information and track progress, unnecessarily slowing momentum, and creating a framework that is too rigid for creative solutions. Planners may also lose their ability to act spontaneously, so that when faced with free time they may resort to compulsive inaction, such as excessive criticism, nitpicking and worry.

**Leaping is valuable because** it teaches us to trust our responses and instinctive judgments. Leaping keeps us excited about our lives and lets us take advantage of momentary opportunities. Because we don't know exactly how things will go, we are often more fully alert and engaged in our activities. Leaping keeps us agile, because we must recognize, evaluate and commit to opportunities as they arise. Leaping gives us the benefit of learning from our own experiences.

**Leaping is a problem when** there is not enough skill to back up the trust that leapers need from others. This style also uses a lot of energy: Leapers can become drained to the point of dysfunction and may be exhausting to be around. They may start and abort plans at great expense. Because leapers rely on others to execute their plans, they are vulnerable to political intrigues within a group. Quality may suffer when leapers cut corners or are too impatient to listen to concerns or questions from the planners they rely on for information.

Leapers also depend on others to believe in their visions. If cohorts withhold their approval, leapers may become bogged down with doubt, fear or seething anger.

## GOOD BALANCE

Ideally, each of us would combine planning and leaping in order to achieve our desired outcomes. Essentially, we all need to have enough mystery to excite us and enough knowledge to feel confident and safe.

The next time you set a goal, step back from your first impulse to leap or plan. Instead, think about what combination of these styles would be best in the situation. Lay groundwork for each, or seek input from both the leapers and planners in your midst. You'll find your dreams going further and faster than you ever dreamed possible. ●

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# MIX 'n' Match

The best style of approach and accomplishment involves a mix of both leaping and planning. Not sure how to make it happen? Here's how planners can blend in a bit of spontaneity, and how leapers can lay a solid groundwork before they pounce.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS THAT LEAPERS MIGHT EMPLOY ...

1. **WHAT RESEARCH WOULD** best prepare you for your journey? Knowing what you can expect along the way will help you stay focused and make higher-quality decisions. It will also help your support team feel more confident in you.
2. **WHAT'S YOUR BEST GUESS** of the process that will get you to your goal? Make sure you have at least an outline of possible steps. You can always adjust your plan and timeline, if need be. But without any plan, you could easily come up short.
3. **WHAT'S NEXT?** When we reach our desired outcome, we may need some new skills and behaviors (such as leadership and communication abilities). Start learning them now, and you'll get to your goal more quickly. You'll also enjoy it more once you arrive.

## LEAPING SKILLS THAT PLANNERS MIGHT ADOPT ...

1. **BE CLEAR** where you are going, and plug into your passion for your destination. Know *why* you are choosing the outcome you are choosing — if it is solely driven by wanting to be safe or secure, chances are you will not be able to achieve your goal.
2. **WHEN THINGS DO NOT GO** as planned, retool your plan, but don't hide out inside it. Get present in the moment and be aware of your immediate options so that you can marshal your resources for an instant leap if necessary.
3. **TRUST YOURSELF.** Practice taking small risks and learning about how you react, so that you can take bigger leaps as you get more confident and experienced. Fear holds us back, trust sends us forward. Practice trusting.