

# Live better with attainable goals

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Those who set realistic goals can hope for a higher level of well-being. The key for later satisfaction is whether their life goals are seen as attainable and what they mean to the person, as psychologists from the University of Basel report in a study with over 970 participants.

Wealth, community, health, meaningful work—these life goals express a person's character, as they determine behavior and the compass by which people are guided. It can therefore be assumed that goals can contribute substantially to how satisfied people are in life—or how dissatisfied, if important goals are blocked and cannot be achieved.

A team of psychologists from the University of Basel explored how life goals are embedded in adult's lives; the results are now published in the *European Journal of Personality*. The researchers used data from 973 people between 18 and 92 years old living in German-speaking parts of Switzerland; more than half of the participants were surveyed again after two and four years. Using a four-point scale, the participants assessed the importance and the perceived attainability of life goals in 10 areas—health, community, personal growth, social relationships, fame, image, wealth, family, responsibility/care for [younger generations](#), and work.

The findings revealed that perceiving one's [personal goals](#) as attainable is an indicator for later cognitive and affective well-being. This implies that people are most satisfied if they have a feeling of control and attainability. Interestingly, the importance of the [goal](#) was less relevant for later well-being than expected.

Life goals also hold predictive power for specific domains: Participants who set social-relation goals or health goals were more satisfied with their [social relationships](#) or their own health. The link between life goals and subsequent well-being appeared to be relatively independent of the age of the participants.

## **Younger people want status, older people want social engagement**

What are the goals that people value the most in a respective age period? The goals that people value in a particular life stage depend on the development tasks that are present at this stage: the younger the participants were, the more they rated [personal-growth](#), status, work and social-relation goals as important. The older the participants were, the more they rated social engagement and health as important.

"Many of our results confirmed theoretical assumptions from [developmental psychology](#)," says lead author and Ph.D. student Janina Bühler from the University of Basel's Faculty of Psychology. Life goals were strongly determined by age: "If we examine, however, whether these goals contribute to well-being, age appears less relevant." Hence, adults, whether old or young, are able to balance the importance and attainability of their goals.

**More information:** Janina Larissa Bühler et al, A Closer Look at Life Goals Across Adulthood: Applying a Developmental Perspective to Content, Dynamics, and Outcomes of Goal Importance and Goal Attainability, *European Journal of Personality* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/per.2194](#)

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