The World’s Greatest Goal Achiever – John Goddard

“There’s something about the human spirit that when you accept challenge and work on it and have deadlines and capture your potential, it’s astounding what you can do.”
—John Goddard

Have you ever heard an adult complain about all the things they wish they could have done in their lives? What about hearing an adult tell you not to waste your life away like they did? Or tell you something like, “If only I could go back in time, then I would . . . ”

We know you heard about him at SuperCamp, but we thought it would be fun to look again and refresh our memory about this man who was the greatest goal achiever in the world! We learned about him in an article some years ago—his name is John Goddard. In the article he was quoted as saying, “When I was fifteen, all the adults I knew seemed to complain, ‘Oh, if only I’d done this or that when I was younger.’ They had let life slip by them. I was sure that if I planned for it, I could have a life of excitement and fun and knowledge.”

At fifteen years old John Goddard was fed up with hearing people complain about all the things they should have done in their lives. He made the decision to live his life differently. While still a young man of fifteen, he listed 127 goals on a sheet of paper. At the time of this article, he had achieved 103 of those goals. In 1951 he became the first man to explore the entire length of the Nile River by kayak. He became a celebrated adventurer and lecturer. His earliest accomplishments were the easiest ones: learning to type; becoming an Eagle Scout; learning to play the piano, the flute and the violin; riding a horse in the Rose Parade; going on a mission; building his own telescope; running a mile in five minutes; and learning to water and snow ski. As he moved down his list, his goals got more difficult, but he still accomplished them: exploring the Nile River; studying primitive cultures in the Congo; climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount Ararat; learning to fly a plane; visiting the Taj Mahal; skin diving to forty feet and holding his breath under water for two-and-a-half minutes; learning to speak French, Spanish and Arabic; reading the works of Shakespeare, Plato, Aristotle, and others; becoming proficient in the use of a plane, motorcycle, tractor, surfboard, canoe, microscope, football, basketball, bow and arrow, lariat and boomerang; and retracing the travels of Marco Polo and Alexander the Great. These are only a partial list of all Mr. Goddard wanted to accomplish—and did. No long before his death in 2013, he was still working toward visiting every country in the world, reading the entire Encyclopedia Britannica, and visiting the moon!

Have a look at the full list in one of the playbook links to refresh your memory about the variety and extent of John Goddard’s goals. It’s incredible to think that a fifteen-year-old would even dream that some of those things on his original list were possible. Not only did John Goddard achieve most of those original goals, he added 600 more goals over the years and accomplished many of those as well.

And now . . . why not start your list of goals! Check out our next article—Mid-Year Goal-Setting Check-In—for a different approach to goal-setting.