

Setting Smart Goals

What Are They, Why Are They Used & How Do I Create Them?

Crystallize your goals. Make a plan for achieving them and set yourself a deadline. Then, with supreme confidence, determination and disregard for obstacles and other people's criticisms carry out your plan. ~ Paul J. Meyer

What good is a goal if you'll never reach it? One of the most effective approaches is the use of SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-based. Learning how to set SMART goals - whether you run a large organization, are an entrepreneur or just someone who wants to run a marathon - can make the difference between failure and achievement.

Specific

An effective approach to achieving a goal is to break it down into manageable pieces or steps. That may mean using smaller goals to help you reach your overall or ultimate goal, over a period of time. Setting a SMART goal is also best done in manageable chunks, and it starts by being specific. Know the difference between a specific goal and a vague goal. "I want to save more money" is very different from "I want to save \$2,000 by June 15." Being specific helps you measure your progress and maintain the momentum needed to reach your goal. Use action words like increase, make, decrease, or save.

Measurable

Determine how you will measure your success. If you cannot measure your goals, you cannot track your progress. Use concrete numbers and ask questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it's accomplished?

Quantify your goals. Instead of saying, "I want to run more," your goal might be "I want to run three times a week," or, "I want to run six miles twice a week."



Attainable

You will be more likely to reach your goal if it is attainable, realistic and if you believe you can reach your objective. Take into account your current circumstances. Consider the following questions:

- What is truly attainable given my current schedule, workload, knowledge, experience or commitments?
- Am I prepared to make the commitment to reach my goal?
- Am I willing to alter, either modestly or dramatically, aspects of my life or work to reach my goal?

If the answers to the above questions point to a goal that is unattainable, is there a more achievable target you are willing to undertake?

Realistic, Relevant

The “R” in SMART usually stands for realistic or relevant. Saving enough for your child’s college education this year may not be realistic. Instead, plan to save a specific and measurable amount every month for one year. Your goal should also be relevant to your life or work situation. If your board suggests you raise \$25,000 in major gifts when you’ve never received a donation of more than \$500, discuss a goal that’s more realistic for the organization.

Time Limited

Put a fence around your goal by setting a time limit, deadline or date for completion. Without a timeline, there is no internal pressure to accomplish the goal and it may get put on the back burner, or ignored completely.

Create a time frame that has a sense of urgency. “Someday” doesn’t work. Anchored within a timeframe--raise \$10,000 in grant funding in the next 12 months—you’ll set things in motion to begin working on your goal. Once you’ve established your time frame, ask yourself:

- What can I do TODAY to reach my goal?
- What can I do 3 weeks from now to reach my goal?
- What can I do 3 months from now to reach my goal?

Execution, Tracking & Evaluation

Now that you've written your SMART goals, you'll need more than words on a page to achieve them. Each goal will require specific tasks, completed within distinct time frames, to successfully achieve the goal.

Create action items with deadlines. Write your goals and the actions required to achieve them where you will see them throughout the day or week. Track your progress. Whiteboards, flip charts and now, even smartphone tracking apps, are all tangible ways to track achievements.

Finally, evaluate. Did you reach your goal? If not, why? Ask questions such as:

- What were some of the reasons I didn't achieve this goal?
- Which of those reasons were under my control or influence?
- What can I do differently next time, to achieve a better outcome?
- What is my new goal?

Examples

Decrease the time to respond to consumer inquiries for services from one month to three weeks by the end of the second quarter, and from three weeks to two weeks by the end of the fiscal year.

Ensure that all senior management can develop SMART goals for the July 2014 performance review cycle.

Increase major gifts by 50%, (from \$20,000 to \$30,000) by the end of the fiscal year.

Develop and receive board approval for a plan to reduce direct care staff turnover by 10% by the end of the second quarter. Develop a work plan for implementation of the plan by the start of FY15.