



HOW TO SET GOALS - SUMMARY

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“A goal is a dream with a deadline.” – Napoleon Hill (1883-1970)

Research on goal setting has found that transforming a few subconscious (implicit) goals into written (explicit) goals provides direction and motivation and results in better outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations. Individuals can use personal goals to direct their efforts and achieve greater success in their careers, health, and family. Similarly, teams and organizations can use shared goals to direct their efforts, set expectations, support reviews, and be more successful. Leaders and coaches can also use goals to help individuals and teams direct their efforts and achieve greater success.

SMART is a popular acronym used to help set goals. SMART has been around for a long time, but no single variant is widely accepted. This author recommends:

(S) Specific – Goals should be stated simply and clearly so they are easy to remember, communicate, and evaluate. Specific goals are written down, measurable, and time-specific. For example, in a personal context, a goal of losing weight is not specific, but a goal of losing five pounds this year is specific. In a business context, a goal of reducing cost is not specific, but a goal of reducing cost by 10% in the next quarter is specific.

(M) Measurable – Goals should be measurable to support accountability, tracking, and feedback. It is important to clearly define both the metric and the target value for the metric. Not all goals should be measurable. Most long-term goals are difficult to measure.

(A) Aligned – Aligned goals are consistent, shared, balanced, and focused. Consistent goals are aligned between shorter- and longer-term timeframes and between individuals and organizational units. Shared transparent goals enable alignment between people and units. Balanced goals reflect tradeoffs and focused goals help people and teams “do less and obsess.”

(R) Realistic – Goal-setting theory finds that overly ambitious goals lead to low self-efficacy/self-belief, low goal commitment, and failure. However, goals should also be challenging, engaging, and exciting, particularly when breakthrough creativity, innovation, and “stretch” is needed. Therefore, realistic goals must balance realism and challenge.

(T) Time-specific – Goals should have a specific deadline. Once the goal and the deadline are set, it is important to work backward from the deadline with a realistic project plan, complete with intermediate milestones and well-defined tasks.

This tutorial defined leading practices for individuals that go well beyond the simple SMART acronym: Develop a hierarchy of goals (purpose, goals, projects, metrics, and habits); create a personal life plan using the Life Planning Template; select the right types of goals; and use reviews to reflect, celebrate, and improve. This tutorial also defined leading practices for teams and organizations: Use structured brainstorming to set goals; use a management system such as MBO, OKR, BSC, EOS, or Hoshin-Kanri to execute a hierarchy of goals; use catchball to align goals; assign goals; and use reviews to hold individuals and teams accountable.

Feel free to share this summary with others.

The complete tutorial is available from www.ManagingMe.Solutions for a small fee.

