

Setting Goals and Targets

Are you clear about what your main objective at work is at the moment? Do you know what you want to have achieved by the end of today? Do you have projects or tasks that will take several weeks to achieve?

If you want to achieve them, you need to turn tasks into goals or targets. Without goals you lack focus and direction. Goal setting not only allows you to take control of your work; it also provides you a measurement for determining whether you are succeeding or not.

To accomplish your tasks, however, you need to know how to set them. You can't simply say, "I want" and expect it to happen. Goal setting has to be done right to work – otherwise there is no focus, motivation or purposeful action.

The Five Golden Rules

1. Set Goals/Targets that Motivate You

When you set goals for yourself, it is important that they motivate you: this means making sure that they are important to you, and that there is value in achieving them. If you have little interest in the outcome, or they are irrelevant given the larger picture, then the chances of you putting in the work to make them happen are slim. Motivation is key to achieving goals. Some people are scared of targets, but they are simply a motivator to ensure activity is purposeful and not wasteful. It also prevents procrastination – putting things off unnecessarily.

Tip: To make sure your goal is motivating, ensure it adds value to your role: "I'll try to get my work done" is not inspiring. "I will complete xyz project within 10 days" or "I will achieve sales of £500 today" adds value to the role and shows commitment.

2. Set SMART Goals

You have probably heard of "SMART goals" already. But do you use it? Research shows goal setting does lead to high achievement:

A review of both laboratory and field studies on the effects of setting goals when performing a task found that in 90% of the studies, specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance than easy goals, "do your best" goals, or no goals. Goals affect performance by directing attention, mobilizing effort, increasing persistence, and motivating strategy development [Locke et al (1981)]

There are many variations of what SMART stands for, but the essence is this – goals should be:

Specific – be precise about what you want to achieve

Measurable – quantify it with numbers/percentages etc.

Attainable – make sure it is within your/your teams capability, but not easy. You should stretch your capabilities. Use past achievements and add 10% to push yourself.

Relevant – ensure it adds value to your role. This will keep you focussed and motivated as the achievement will have a direct impact on your tasks.

Time Bound – have a date to be completed by stated

3. Set Goals in Writing

The physical act of writing down a goal makes it real and tangible. You have no excuse for forgetting about it. As you write, use the word "will" instead of "would like to" or "might." For example, "I will reduce my operating costs by 10 percent this year," not "I would like to reduce my operating costs by 10 percent this year." The first goal statement has power and you can "see" yourself reducing expenses, the second lacks passion and gives you an excuse if you get sidetracked.

Tip : Post your goals in visible places to remind yourself every day of what it is you intend to do. Put them on your walls, desk, computer monitor as a constant reminder.

4. Make an Action Plan

Add this goal to your to do list – if you don't have a to do list – create one and use it!

This will help you to prioritise at a moment's notice, whilst remembering all other pending tasks – so nothing gets forgotten.

5. Stick With It!

Remember, goal setting is an **ongoing activity** not just a means to an end. Build in reminders to keep yourself on track, and regularly review your goals.

Goal setting is much more than simply saying you want something to happen. Unless you clearly define exactly what you want and understand why you want it the first place, your odds of success are considerably reduced. By following the Five Golden Rules of Goal Setting you can set goals with confidence and enjoy the satisfaction that comes along with knowing you achieved what you set out to do.

So, what will you decide to accomplish today?