

How To Set SMART Goals That You Will Accomplish

Anyone can start setting SMART goals, but many individuals struggle and fail to complete them. With these tips, set your goals and stay motivated to achieve them.

Goals are the foundation of a successful life. You won't go anywhere unless you are someone with a vision and various systems in place to help you along that path. Ultimately, how you can get there is through setting goals.

Now, over the years, there have been many people discussing how to set goals and achieve them. However, the focus of this article is on a method developed in 1981. It's the idea of setting SMART goals.

However, setting goals isn't going to be enough. Like many other goal theorists over the years, they've learned there is more to setting goals. After setting SMART goals, you need to accomplish them.

Table of Contents

1. What Are SMART Goals?
2. How To Write Effective SMART Goals
3. Evaluating Success and Failure When Setting SMART Goals
4. Setting SMART Goals Is Smart
5. More Tips on Setting SMART Goals

What Are SMART Goals?

The theorist behind this goal-setting process is George T. Doran, a consultant and former director of corporate planning for Washington Water Power Company. He wrote a paper in 1981 outlining the SMART goal process.

As you might've guessed, SMART is an acronym where the goals that we set follow five criteria:

1. Specific
2. Measurable
3. Achievable
4. Relevant
5. Time-Bound (or Timely)

Let's dig into each one.

Specific

Doran determined the best way for a goal to be specific was by going into detail with your answers to six questions:

1. Who is needed to achieve your goal?
2. What exactly are you trying to accomplish?
3. When do you expect to complete the task? (For this question, you don't need to be too specific since this is covered in Time-Bound)
4. Where will this take place? This question isn't always relevant but if there is a location or relevant event, it's smart to identify that.
5. Which obstacles or requirements must be met to achieve this goal?
6. Why are you working towards this goal?

The idea with these questions is to look for potential obstacles in your process. Of course, there will be obstacles no matter what, but making your goal specific will ensure you remove the more obvious roadblocks.

Measurable

To make a goal measurable, you need to place a metric in place to evaluate your progress. If this is work that will take several months to complete, have milestones for when you want things to be done.

Some other measuring tactics are making to-do lists or reflecting on your week to see if any progress has been made.

Achievable

The third aspect is achievable. This is one that many people trip up on as many focus more on the big question of 'Can I achieve this with my current skills and abilities?'

Instead, it's important you look beyond that as goals in most situations push us to do things beyond our capabilities. That's not to say we're doing something impossible, but rather we're motivating ourselves to learn new skills we otherwise wouldn't have worked on before setting SMART goals.

This is also the point to determine what sort of skills and tools you need to even start working on this goal properly.

Relevant

To make a goal relevant, it needs to be alignment with your overall life. For example, I used to place a lot of my focus on my work to the point that the relationship with my kids, my wife, and my own health started to suffer.

At that point, I decided to turn my life around as my health, wife, and kids are aspects I care about. A relevant goal for me at that point was to cut back on my work and develop small habits like doing stretches, setting time aside for my family, and so on.

A non-relevant goal in that situation would be setting goals on my work and financial prosperity.

Time-Bound

The final aspect is time-bound. This is where you want to be bringing your answer from Specific into the mix. Time-bound is the final important aspect, and it's a tricky one.

Anyone can be setting goals, but not everyone can make them timely. The key is to set dates of course, but you want to dig further into it.

Set a date and determine whether that's enough time for you to reach that goal. Don't be afraid to do some research either and see if others discuss how long it's taken them.

It's also a good idea to be setting milestones with expectations for where you want to be. Consider Parkinson's Law:

Work expands to fill the time allotted.

In other words, the tighter the deadline you set, the more of an urgency you create to complete it. By keeping deadlines tight and reasonable, you can find other incentives to complete your goals.

How To Write Effective SMART Goals

Now that you have an in-depth understanding of what SMART goals are, you'll want to commit these goals to paper. Keeping them locked in your head might make sense, but if you don't write them down, you're not going to feel as compelled to complete them.

We have billions of thoughts over the course of the day, and sometimes having a written reminder for some things helps.^[1]

However, when you get into writing, you'll find that there is more to writing these goals down than simply ensuring they hit the SMART criteria.

You'll find yourself asking more questions, and the answers will begin to adjust your goals further and your strategy to achieve them. If questions aren't coming to mind, consider this SMART goals template that Smart Sheet put together.^[2]

Another tip when it comes to setting SMART goals is that you want to be setting only one and working it through the SMART criteria. After that, you can consolidate the goal into one statement.

You'll only want to set one goal because when we set multiple goals, it can create competition for our attention. Similar to how we shouldn't be multitasking, we don't want to set multiple goals for similar reasons.^[3]

It breaks our focus and can lead to more problems down the road. Instead, it's important that we set goals, achieve them, and then maintain the results as we progress towards other goals.

Evaluating Success and Failure When Setting SMART Goals

Despite understanding what SMART goals are and how to effectively write them out, some of you will succeed in your goals while some of you will fail.

That is the nature of goals. Despite your best efforts, sometimes you'll come out short. But that's okay because this reveals another aspect of goals.

You see, goals help us change in so many ways, and they themselves can change, too. As you work through your goals, you might make adjustments to them. Maybe you need a little more time, or you weren't expecting other life distractions to dig into your time.

Regardless, here is how you want to approach and evaluate these aspects:

Evaluating Failure

Take failure as a learning opportunity. It's a chance for you to learn about yourself, your goal-setting strategy, and the goal itself. From there, you can take that information and begin to make adjustments before attempting the goal again.

It is essential that if you experience roadblocks or failure, you don't take them as such. These are challenges and opportunities for growth and further adjustment. The key is to walk away from these aspects with more knowledge than before.

Evaluating Success

While this is a good opportunity to enjoy your rewards, you should also use this opportunity for reflection, perhaps even more than with failure.

Success is great, but that often leads to the question of 'What's next?' And for many people, this is not an easy question to answer.^[4] All in all, success can lead to us stagnating, which is dangerous.

That's not to say we need to be constantly achieving and setting goals. You should certainly be celebrating victories big or small. Not only that, but it's key that we enjoy the results of our efforts.

However, there comes a point where we need to reflect on that success. What have you gained from that success? What can you do moving forward to achieve more? What do you want to do next?

By asking deeper questions about what you have achieved, you can further develop yourself and narrow down what needs to be focused on next.

Setting SMART Goals Is Smart

When you're setting SMART goals, there is more to it than writing down a goal and making sure it checks off the five criteria. How you approach your goals and evaluate the results of your efforts towards those goals is important information.

Goals, no matter the method you set to achieve them, are ways for you to implement systems and to develop habits and skills to achieve your desires. By understanding this relationship thoroughly, you can now set SMART goals that you will put more effort into achieving.

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