

SMART Goals

A simple method for setting quality goals is to design them to be "SMART". There are some variations on what SMART stands for, but the essence is that goals should be:

- S** – Specific
- M** – Measurable
- A** – Attainable or Agreed Upon
- R** – Relevant
- T** – Time-bound

Set Specific Goals

Goals must be clear and well defined. Vague or generalized goals are not achievable because they don't provide sufficient direction.

Remember, goals need to show the way. Make it as easy as possible to get where you want to go by defining precisely where it is you want to end up. When a goal is clear and specific there is less misunderstanding about what behaviors will be rewarded. You know what's expected, and you can use the specific result as a source of motivation. When a goal is vague or expressed as a general instruction, like "Take initiative" - it has limited motivational value.

Set Measurable Goals

Include precise amounts, dates, etc. in goals so you can measure the degree of success. If a goal is simply defined as "To reduce

expenses" how will you know when success is reached? For instance, is it in one month's time or two years' time, in one area or another or by what amount? Also, without a way to measure success you miss out on the celebration that comes with knowing it was actually achieved. "Reduce job turnover by 15%" or "Respond to employee suggestions within 48 hours" are some other examples of clear goals.

For goals or assignments that are highly complex, take special care to ensure that the work doesn't become too overwhelming. People who work in complicated and demanding roles probably have a high level of motivation already. However, they can often push themselves too hard if measures aren't built into the goal expectations to account for the complexity of the task. It's therefore important to do the following: (1) Give the person sufficient time to meet the goal or improve performance, and (2) Provide enough time for the person to practice or learn what is expected and required for success.

Set Attainable Goals / Agreed Upon Goals

Make sure that it's possible to achieve the goal. If you set a goal that you have little hope of achieving, you will only demoralize

yourself and erode your confidence. However, resist the urge to set goals that are too easy. One of the most important characteristics of goals is the level of challenge. People are often motivated by achievement, and they'll judge a goal based on the significance of the anticipated accomplishment. By setting realistic yet challenging goals you hit the balance you need. These are the types of goals that require you to "raise the bar" and they bring the greatest satisfaction.

Goals must be understood, agreed upon and motivating if they are to be effective. Encourage employees to develop their own goals and keep them informed about what's happening elsewhere in the organization. This way, they can be sure that their goals are consistent with the overall vision and purpose of the city. Employees are more likely to "buy into" a goal if they feel they were part of creating that goal. This doesn't mean that every goal has to be negotiated with and approved by employees. It does mean that goals should be consistent and in line with previous expectations and organizational concerns.

Set Relevant Goals

Goals should be relevant to the direction you want to take. By keeping goals aligned with this you'll develop the focus you need to get ahead and do what is needed. By setting widely scattered and inconsistent goals you'll use a lot of energy in the wrong areas.

Set Time-Bound Goals

Goals must have a deadline. When you are working on a deadline, your sense of urgency increases, and achievement will come that much quicker. This again, helps you know when to celebrate success.

Sources:

1. Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham, A Theory of Goal Setting & Task Performance: (1990).
2. mindtools.com