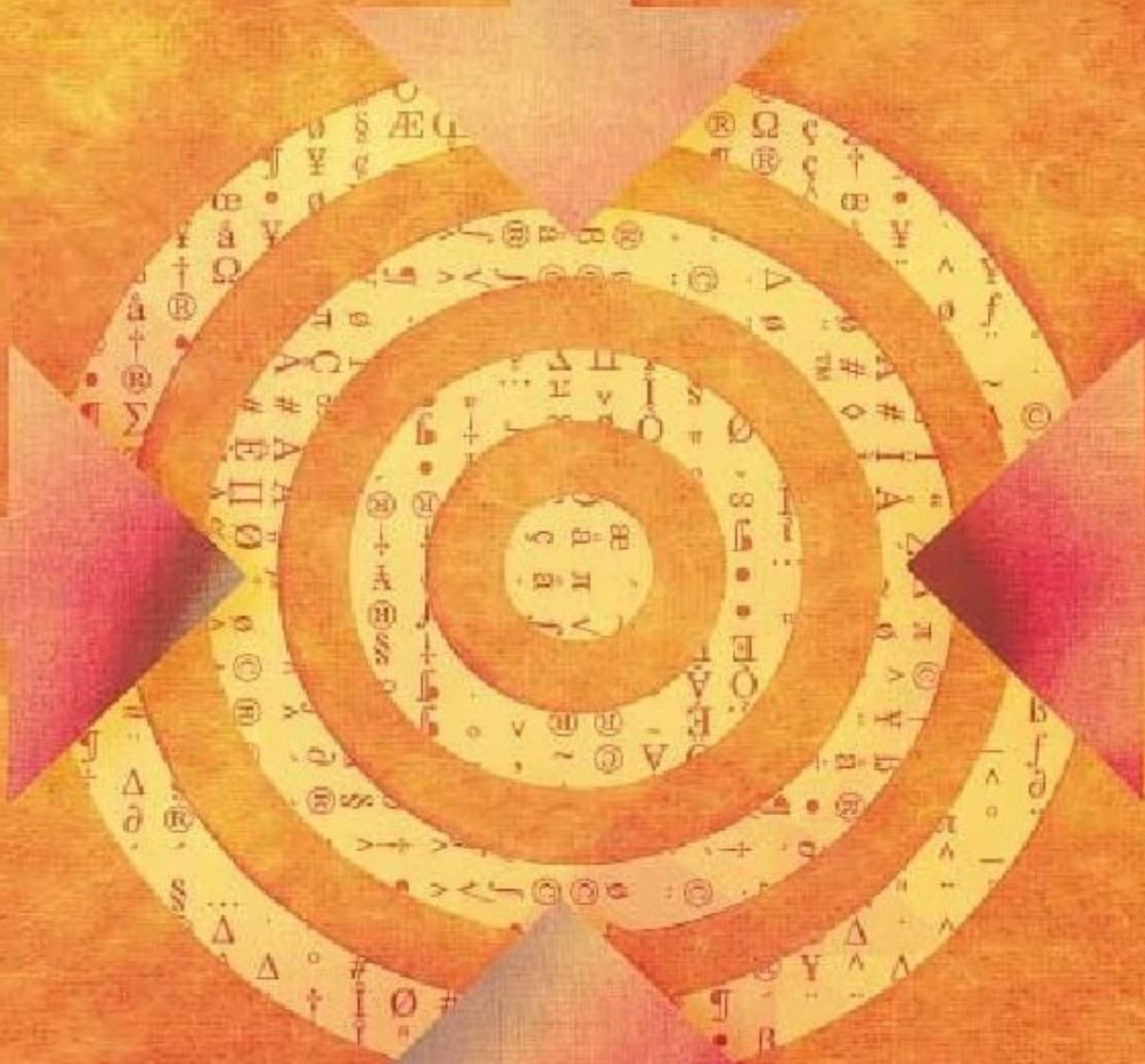


MIND TOOLS

Essential skills for an excellent career



Goal Setting Toolkit

Essential skills for an excellent career

Goal Setting Toolkit

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Goal Setting Toolkit

Welcome to the Mind Tools Goal Setting Toolkit!

Imagine setting out for a drive without a destination. You might tour round a few streets, aimlessly but you'd likely just give up and return home quite soon, with a feeling of having achieved nothing, and possibly even having wasted your time.

Living your life without setting goals is like this. Unless you are clear about where you want to get to, the chances are that you won't get there. Without goals we also lack the motivation to carry on working hard at what we're doing, and we will rarely experience a sense of achievement.

Simply plucking a goal out of thin air is certainly better than nothing, but you'll achieve much, much more if you plan out a comprehensive set of goals for all aspects of your life, and follow some straightforward rules when it comes to defining those goals in detail.

Find out how to do both of these things with the tools in this Goal Setting Toolkit – and enjoy the results!

About MindTools

Each year MindTools.com helps more than 6.7 million visitors from around the world learn the "essential skills for an excellent career!" Online since 1995, we publish the practical, proven skills and techniques that help managers and professionals achieve high personal effectiveness, become exceptional leaders, become successful... and be happy at work and in life.



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Personal Goal Setting

Find Direction. Live Your Life Your Way.

Goal setting is a powerful process for thinking about your ideal future, and for motivating yourself to turn this vision of the future into reality.

The process of setting goals helps you choose where you want to go in life. By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know where you have to concentrate your efforts. You'll also quickly spot the distractions that would otherwise lure you from your course.

More than this, properly-set goals can be incredibly motivating, and as you get into the habit of setting and achieving goals, you'll find that your self-confidence builds fast.

Achieving More with Focus

Goal setting techniques are used by top-level athletes, successful business-people and achievers in all fields. They give you long-term vision and short-term motivation. They focus your acquisition of knowledge and help you to organize your time and your resources so that you can make the very most of your life.

By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals. You can see forward progress in what might previously have seemed a long pointless grind. By setting goals, you will also raise your self-confidence, as you recognize your ability and competence in achieving the goals that you have set.

Starting to Set Personal Goals

Goals are set on a number of different levels: First you create your "big picture" of what you want to do with your life, and decide what large-scale goals you want to achieve. Second, you break these down into the smaller and smaller targets that you must hit so that you reach your lifetime goals. Finally, once you have your plan, you start working to achieve it.

We start this process with your Lifetime Goals, and work down to the things you can do today to start moving towards them.

Your Lifetime Goals

The first step in setting personal goals is to consider what you want to achieve in your lifetime (or by a time at least, say, 10 years in the future) as setting Lifetime Goals gives you the overall perspective that shapes all other aspects of your decision making.

To give a broad, balanced coverage of all important areas in your life, try to set goals in some of these categories (or in categories of your own, where these are important to you):

- *Artistic:*
Do you want to achieve any artistic goals? If so, what?

- *Attitude:*
Is any part of your mindset holding you back? Is there any part of the way that you behave that upsets you? If so, set a goal to improve your behavior or find a solution to the problem.
- *Career:*
What level do you want to reach in your career?
- *Education:*
Is there any knowledge you want to acquire in particular? What information and skills will you need to achieve other goals?
- *Family:*
Do you want to be a parent? If so, how are you going to be a good parent? How do you want to be seen by a partner or by members of your extended family?
- *Financial:*
How much do you want to earn by what stage?
- *Physical:*
Are there any athletic goals you want to achieve, or do you want good health deep into old age? What steps are you going to take to achieve this?
- *Pleasure:*
How do you want to enjoy yourself? - you should ensure that some of your life is for you!
- *Public Service:*
Do you want to make the world a better place? If so, how?

Spend some time [brainstorming](#) these, and then select one goal in each category that best reflects what you want to do. Then consider trimming again so that you have a small number of really significant goals on which you can focus.

As you do this, make sure that the goals that you have set are ones that you genuinely want to achieve, not ones that your parents, family, or employers might want (if you have a partner, you probably want to consider what he or she wants, however make sure you also remain true to yourself!)

Starting to Achieve Your Lifetime Goals

Once you have set your lifetime goals, set a 25 year plan of smaller goals that you should complete if you are to reach your lifetime plan. Then set a 5 year plan, 1 year plan, 6 month plan, and 1 month plan of progressively smaller goals that you should reach to achieve your lifetime goals. Each of these should be based on the previous plan.

Then create a [daily to-do list](#) of things that you should do today to work towards your lifetime goals. At an early stage these goals may be to read books and gather information on the achievement of your goals. This will help you to improve the quality and realism of your goal setting.

Finally review your plans, and make sure that they fit the way in which you want to live your life.

Staying on Course

Once you have decided your first set of plans, keep the process going by reviewing and updating your to-do list on a daily basis. Periodically review the longer term plans, and modify them to reflect your changing priorities and experience.

Goal Setting Tips

The following broad guidelines will help you to set effective goals:

- *State each goal as a positive statement:* Express your goals positively – 'Execute this technique well' is a much better goal than 'Don't make this stupid mistake.'
- *Be precise:* Set a precise goal, putting in dates, times and amounts so that you can measure achievement. If you do this, you will know exactly when you have achieved the goal, and can take complete satisfaction from having achieved it.
- *Set priorities:* When you have several goals, give each a priority. This helps you to avoid feeling overwhelmed by too many goals, and helps to direct your attention to the most important ones.
- *Write goals down:* This crystallizes them and gives them more force.
- *Keep operational goals small:* Keep the low-level goals you are working towards small and achievable. If a goal is too large, then it can seem that you are not making progress towards it. Keeping goals small and incremental gives more opportunities for reward. Derive today's goals from larger ones.
- *Set performance goals, not outcome goals:* You should take care to set goals over which you have as much control as possible. There is nothing more dispiriting than failing to achieve a personal goal for reasons beyond your control. In business, these could be bad business environments or unexpected effects of government policy. In sport, for example, these reasons could include poor judging, bad weather, injury, or just plain bad luck. If you base your goals on personal performance, then you can keep control over the achievement of your goals and draw satisfaction from them.
- *Set realistic goals:* It is important to set goals that you can achieve. All sorts of people (employers, parents, media, society) can set unrealistic goals for you. They will often do this in ignorance of your own desires and ambitions. Alternatively you may set goals that are too high, because you may not appreciate either the obstacles in the way or understand quite how much skill you need to develop to achieve a particular level of performance.

SMART Goals:

A useful way of making goals more powerful is to use the SMART mnemonic. While there are plenty of variants, SMART usually stands for:

- **S** Specific
- **M** Measurable
- **A** Attainable
- **R** Relevant
- **T** Time-bound

For example, instead of having “to sail around the world” as a goal, it is more powerful to say “To have completed my trip around the world by December 31, 2015.” Obviously, this will only be attainable if a lot of preparation has been completed beforehand!

Achieving Goals

When you have achieved a goal, take the time to enjoy the satisfaction of having done so. Absorb the implications of the goal achievement, and observe the progress you have made towards other goals. If the goal was a significant one, reward yourself appropriately. All of this helps you build the [self-confidence](#) you deserve!

With the experience of having achieved this goal, review the rest of your goal plans:

- If you achieved the goal too easily, make your next goals harder.
- If the goal took a dispiriting length of time to achieve, make the next goals a little easier.
- If you learned something that would lead you to change other goals, do so.
- If you noticed a deficit in your skills despite achieving the goal, decide whether to set goals to fix this.

Failure to meet goals does not matter much, as long as you learn from it. Feed lessons learned back into your goal setting program.

Remember too that your goals will change as time goes on. Adjust them regularly to reflect growth in your knowledge and experience, and if goals do not hold any attraction any longer, then let them go.

Key Points

Goal setting is an important method of:

- Deciding what is important for you to achieve in your life.
- Separating what is important from what is irrelevant, or a distraction.
- Motivating yourself.
- Building your self-confidence, based on successful achievement of goals.

If you don't already set goals, do so, starting now. As you make this technique part of your life, you'll find your career accelerating, and you'll wonder how you did without it!

A good way of getting going with this is to use the Mind Tools [Life Plan Workbook](#). Supported by worksheets and advice, this guides you through a simple 5-step process for setting your life goals and for organizing yourself for success.

Locke's Goal Setting Theory

Understanding SMART Goal Setting

Goal setting is a powerful way of motivating people. The value of goal setting is so well recognized that entire management systems, like [Management by Objectives](#), have goal setting basics incorporated within them.

In fact, goal setting theory is generally accepted as among the most valid and useful motivation theories in industrial and organizational psychology, human resource management, and organizational behavior.

Many of us have learned - from bosses, seminars, and business articles - to set [SMART](#) goals. It seems natural to assume that by setting a goal that's Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound, we will be well on our way to accomplishing it.

But WHY is this really the best way of setting goals?

To answer this, we look to Dr Edwin Locke's pioneering research on goal setting and motivation in the late 1960s. In his 1968 article "Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives," he stated that employees were motivated by clear goals and appropriate feedback. Locke went on to say that working toward a goal provided a major source of motivation to actually reach the goal - which, in turn, improved performance.

This information does not seem revolutionary to most of us some 40 years later. This shows the impact his theory has had on professional and personal performance.

In this article, we look at what Locke had to say about goal setting, and how we can apply his theory to our own performance goals.

Goal Setting Theory

Locke's research showed that there was a relationship between how difficult and specific a goal was and people's performance of a task. He found that specific and difficult goals led to better task performance than vague or easy goals.

Telling someone to "Try hard" or "Do your best" is less effective than "Try to get more than 80% correct" or "Concentrate on beating your best time." Likewise, having a goal that's too easy is not a motivating force. Hard goals are more motivating than easy goals, because it's much more of an accomplishment to achieve something that you have to work for.

A few years after Locke published his article, another researcher, Dr Gary Latham, studied the effect of goal setting in the workplace. His results supported exactly what Locke had found, and the inseparable link between goal setting and workplace performance was formed.

In 1990, Locke and Latham published their seminal work, "A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance." In this book, they reinforced the need to set specific and difficult goals, and they outlined three other characteristics of successful goal setting.

Five Principles of Goal Setting

To motivate, goals must take into consideration the degree to which each of the following exists:

1. Clarity.
2. Challenge.
3. Commitment.
4. Feedback.
5. Task complexity.

Let's look at each of these in detail.

1. Clarity

Clear goals are measurable, unambiguous, and behavioral. When a goal is clear and specific, with a definite time set for completion, 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 when it's expressed as a general instruction, like "Take initiative" - it has limited motivational value.

To improve your or your team's performance, set clear goals that use specific and measurable standards. "Reduce job turnover by 15%" or "Respond to employee suggestions within 48 hours" are examples of clear goals.

When you use the SMART acronym to help you set goals, you ensure the clarity of the goal by making it Specific, Measurable and Time-bound.

2. Challenge

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. When you know that what you do will be well received, there's a natural motivation to do a good job.

Rewards typically increase for more difficult goals. If you believe you'll be well compensated or otherwise rewarded for achieving a challenging goal, that will boost your enthusiasm and your drive to get it done.

Setting SMART goals that are Relevant links closely to the rewards given for achieving challenging goals. Relevant goals will further the aims of your organization, and these are the kinds of goals that most employers will be happy to reward.

When setting goals, make each goal a challenge. If an assignment is easy and not viewed as very important - and if you or your employee doesn't expect the accomplishment to be significant - then the effort may not be impressive.

Note:

It's important to strike an appropriate balance between a challenging goal and a realistic goal. Setting a goal that you'll fail to achieve is possibly more de-motivating than setting a goal that's too easy. The need for success and achievement is strong, therefore people are best motivated by challenging, but realistic, goals. Ensuring that goals are Achievable or Attainable is one of the elements of SMART.

3. Commitment

Goals must be understood and agreed upon if they are to be effective. Employees are more likely to "buy into" a goal if they feel they were part of creating that goal. The notion of participative management rests on this idea of involving employees in setting goals and making decisions.

One version of SMART - for use when you are working with someone else to set their goals - has A and R stand for Agreed and Realistic instead of Attainable and Relevant. Agreed goals lead to commitment.

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. As long as the employee believes the goal is consistent with the goals of the company, and believes the person assigning the goal is credible, then the commitment should be there.

Interestingly, goal commitment and difficulty often work together. The harder the goal, the more commitment is required. If you have an easy goal, you don't need a lot of motivation to get it done. When you're working on a difficult assignment, you will likely encounter challenges that require a deeper source of inspiration and incentive.

As you use goal setting in your workplace, make an appropriate effort to include people in their own goal setting. 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 that the company seeks.

4. Feedback

In addition to selecting the right type of goal, an effective goal program must also include [feedback](#). Feedback provides opportunities to clarify expectations, adjust goal difficulty, and gain recognition. It's important to provide benchmark opportunities or targets, so individuals can determine for themselves how they're doing.

These regular progress reports, which measure specific success along the way, are particularly important where it's going to take a long time to reach a goal. In these cases, break down the goals into smaller chunks, and link feedback to these intermediate milestones.

SMART goals are Measurable, and this ensures that clear feedback is possible.

With all your goal setting efforts, make sure that you build in time for providing formal feedback. Certainly, informal check-ins are important, and they provide a means of giving regular encouragement and recognition. However, taking the time to sit down and discuss goal performance is a necessary factor in long-term performance improvement. See our article on Delegation for more on this.

5. Task Complexity

The last factor in goal setting theory introduces two more requirements for success. 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:

- Give the person sufficient time to meet the goal or improve performance.
- Provide enough time for the person to practice or learn what is expected and required for success.

The whole point of goal setting is to facilitate success. Therefore, you want to make sure that the conditions surrounding the goals don't frustrate or inhibit people from accomplishing their objectives. This reinforces the "Attainable" part of SMART.

Key Points

Goal setting is something most of us recognize as necessary for our success.

By understanding goal setting theory, you can effectively apply the principles to goals that you or your team members set. Locke and Latham's research emphasizes the usefulness of SMART goal setting, and their theory continues to influence the way we set and measure performance today.

Use clear, challenging goals, and commit yourself to achieving them. Provide feedback on goal performance. Take into consideration the complexity of the task. If you follow these simple rules, your goal setting process will be much more successful . and your overall performance will improve.

Golden Rules of Goal Setting

Five Rules to Set Yourself Up for Success

Have you thought about what you want to be doing in five years' time?... 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?

If you want to succeed, you need to set goals. Without goals you lack focus and direction. Goal setting not only allows you to take control of your life's direction; it also

provides you a benchmark for determining whether you are actually succeeding. Think about it: Having a million dollars in the bank is only proof of success if one of your goals is to amass riches. If your goal is to practice acts of charity, then keeping the money for yourself is suddenly contrary to how you would define success.

To accomplish your goals, however, you need to know how to set them. You can't simply say, "I want." and expect it to happen. Goal setting is a process that starts with careful consideration of what you want to achieve, and ends with a lot of hard work to actually do it. In between there are some very well defined steps that transcend the specifics of each goal. Knowing these steps will allow you to formulate goals that you can accomplish.

Here are our Five Golden Rules of Goal Setting:

The Five Golden Rules

Rule #1: Set Goals that Motivate You

When you set goals for yourself, it is important that they motivate you: This means making sure it is something that's important to you and there is value in achieving it. If you have little interest in the outcome, or it is irrelevant given the larger picture, then the chances of you putting in the work to make it happen are slim. Motivation is key to achieving goals.

Set goals that relate to the high priorities in your life. Without this type of focus you can end up with far too many goals, leaving you too little time to devote to each one. Goal achievement requires commitment, so to maximize the likelihood of success, you need to feel a sense of urgency and have an "I must do this" attitude. When you don't have this "must do" factor, you risk putting off what you need to do to make the goal a reality. This in turn leaves you feeling disappointed and frustrated with yourself, both of which are de-motivating. And you can end up in a very destructive "I can't do anything or be successful at anything" frame of mind.

Tip:

To make sure your goal is motivating, write down **why** it's valuable and important to you. Ask yourself, "If I were to share my goal with others, how would I tell them to convince them it was a worthwhile goal?" You can use this motivating value statement to help you if you start to doubt yourself or lose confidence in your ability to actually make it happen.

Rule #2: Set SMART Goals

You have probably heard of "SMART goals" already. But do you always apply the rule? The simple fact is that for any goal to be achieved it must be designed to be SMART. There are many variations on what SMART stands for, but the essence is this - Goals should be:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Time Bound

Set Specific Goals

Your goal must be clear and well defined. Vague or generalized goals are not achievable because they don't provide sufficient direction. Remember, you need goals to show you the way. How useful would a map of the United States be if there were only state borders marked on it and you were trying to get from Miami to Los Angeles? Do you even know which state you are starting from let alone which one you're headed to? Make it as easy as you can to get where you want to go by defining precisely where it is you want to end up.

Set Measurable Goals

Include precise amounts, dates, etc in your goals so you can measure your degree of success. If your goal is simply defined as "To reduce expenses" how will you know when you are successful? In one month's time if you have a 1% reduction or in two year's time when you have a 10% reduction? Without a way to measure your success you miss out on the celebration that comes with knowing you actually achieved something.

Set Attainable Goals

Make sure that it's possible to achieve the goals you set. If you set a goal that you have no hope of achieving you will only demoralize yourself and erode your confidence. However, resist the urge to set goals that are too easy. Accomplishing a goal that you didn't have to work very hard for can be an anticlimax at best, and can also make you fear setting future goals that carry a risk of non-achievement. 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 personal satisfaction.

Set Relevant Goals

Goals should be relevant to the direction you want your life and career to take. By keeping goals aligned with this, you'll develop the focus you need to get ahead and do what you want. Set widely scattered and inconsistent goals, and you'll fritter your time - and your life - away.

Set Time-Bound Goals

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

Rule #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 expenses by 10% this year." Not, "I would like to reduce my operating expenses by 10% this year." The first goal statement has power and you can "see" yourself reducing expenses, the second lacks passion and gives you an out if you get sidetracked.

Tip 1:

Frame your goal statement positively. If you want to improve your retention rates say, "I will hold on to all existing employees for the next quarter" rather than "I will reduce employee turnover." The first one is motivating; the second one still has a get-out clause "allowing" you to succeed even if some employees leave.

Tip 2:

If you use a [To Do List](#), make yourself a To Do List template that has your goals at the top of it. If you use an Action Program (see Mind Tools' [Make Time for Success!](#) course), then your goals should be at the top of your Project Catalog.

Post your goals in visible places to remind yourself everyday of what it is you intend to do. Put them on your walls, desk, computer monitor, bathroom mirror or refrigerator as a constant reminder. You can even post them in the Mind Tools Career Excellence Club forum and share them with other members, for added motivation.

Rule #4: Make an Action Plan

This step is often missed in the process of goal setting. You get so focused on the outcome that you forget to plan all of the steps that are needed along the way. By writing out the individual steps, and then crossing each one off as you complete it, you'll realize that you are making progress towards your ultimate goal. This is especially important if your goal is big and demanding, or long-term. Read our article on Action Plans for more on how to do this.

Rule #5: Stick With It!

Remember, goal setting is an ongoing activity not just a means to an end. Build in reminders to keep you on track and remember to review your goals continuously. Your end destination may remain quite similar over the long term but the action plan you set for yourself along the way can change significantly. Make sure the relevance, value, and necessity remain high.

Key Points

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. What will you decide to accomplish today?

Backward Goal-Setting

Using Backward Planning to Set Goals

If your goal is to become an account executive within the next five years, where do you start your planning process? Or if your team needs to redesign the company's organizational structure, where do you begin?

In planning, most of us would usually start building our plan from start to finish. What do you have to do first, second, third, and so on? What milestones do you have to reach

before you can continue on with the next step in the plan? By what date does each step need to be completed?

This is a solid form of [Personal Goal Setting](#) that works very well. When combined with the [Golden Rules of Goal Setting](#), you have a motivating formula that can help you actively move yourself forward.

A New Approach

However, there's another, simple but lesser-used method of goal setting that can be equally as powerful. It can show you other ways to achieve the same result, and it can help you deal with the necessary unknowns of goal setting that can so often cause you to give up on your plan entirely.

It's called backward planning, backward goal-setting, or backward design, and it's used quite often in education and training. The idea is to start with your ultimate objective, your end goal, and then work backward from there to develop your plan. By starting at the end and looking back, you can mentally prepare yourself for success, map out the specific milestones you need to reach, and identify where in your plan you have to be particularly energetic or creative to achieve the desired results.

It's much like a good presentation, when the presenter tells you where he's headed right at the beginning. Then, as the presentation unfolds, it's easy for you to follow the concepts and think critically about what's being said. If you have to figure out the main points as they come, your energy is often used up by just trying to keep up.

The Backward Planning Process

Here's how it works:

1. Write down your ultimate goal. What specifically do you want to achieve, and by what date?

Example: "By January 1, 2013, I will be the key accounts director for Crunchy Chips International."

2. Then ask yourself what milestone you need to accomplish just before that, in order to achieve your ultimate goal. What specifically do you have to do, and by when, so that you're in a position to reach your final objective?

Example: "By September 30, 2011, I will successfully complete the executive training program offered by Crunchy Chips International."

3. Then work backward some more. What do you need to complete before that second-to-last goal?

Example: "By March 1, 2011, I will submit my application for the executive training program, outlining my successes as a key accounts manager, and I will be accepted into the program."

4. Work back again. What do you need to do to make sure the previous goal is reached?

Example: "By January 1, 2011, I will complete my second year as a key accounts manager with Crunchy Chips International, and I will earn the prestigious Key Accounts Manager of the Year award."

5. Continue to work back, in the same way, until you identify the very first milestone that you need to accomplish.

Example: "By January 1, 2010, I will complete my first year as a key accounts manager with Crunchy Chips International, and I will be rewarded for my performance by gaining responsibility for clients purchasing over \$10 million per year."

"By January 1, 2009, I will be promoted to key accounts manager with Crunchy Chips International, and I will have responsibility for clients purchasing over \$1 million per quarter."

When you read a backward plan, it doesn't look much different from a traditional forward plan. However, creating a backward plan is VERY different. You need to force yourself to think from a completely new perspective, to help you see things that you might miss if you use a traditional chronological process.

This can also help you avoid spending time on unnecessary or unproductive activities along the way. Furthermore, it highlights points of tension within the plan, showing where you'll need to be particularly creative to make the next step successfully.

Key Points

On the surface, backward planning doesn't seem much different from traditional goal-setting processes. You start with a basic vision, and then you ask yourself what needs to be done to achieve that vision. You can read your plan from the beginning to the end, or from the end back to the beginning.

Backward planning, however, is more than reversing the direction of your traditional plan. It's about adopting a different perspective and, perhaps, identifying different milestones as a result. It's a great supplement to traditional planning, and it gives you a much fuller appreciation for what it may take to achieve success. After all, the more alternatives you have, the better your final plan will likely be.

Treasure Mapping

Visualizing your goal for greater achievement

When you want to achieve something really badly, have you ever tried closing your eyes and imagining yourself "there"? You touch it, feel it and see it clearly. You scan every detail in your mind's eye.

This is a powerful and important technique for motivating yourself and building the self-confidence needed to achieve your goals. Yet when you open your eyes, the vivid image start fades: it takes real concentration to visualize again each time you want some inspiration.

What if you could keep hold of that vivid image and refer to it when ever you need a little motivation or reminder of what you are working towards?

Treasure mapping is a simple tool to help you do just that. Visualization itself is a very powerful technique. And treasure mapping can be the icing on the visualization cake!

It's a very simple but effective idea: Treasure mapping involves creating a physical representation or collage of what you want to achieve. It acts as a constant reminder and representation of your goals. And so it intensifies the effects of visualization, which acts on your subconscious mind to motivate and encourage you towards achieving those goals.

Let's say you have the ambition to get fitter and run a marathon: Your "treasure map" could include pictures of runners, people crossing the finishing line, athletes training hard; perhaps it could also include pictures of the foods that you need to eat (and those you need to avoid).

If you are a salesman with ambition to beat sales records in your company, your treasure map could include a representation of the sales chart you hope to achieve, pictures of people signing deals with customers, pictures of your product standing proud; perhaps a picture of someone receiving a prize.

Using the Tool

Your treasure map will represent how you visualize the achievement of your goals and your journey toward that achievement.

The first step towards your treasure map is to clarify your goals and then visualize what will happen, or what you will have, once you have achieved the goal. (For further help on clarifying your goals, please refer to Mind Tools article on [goal setting](#).)

Once you have are clear about what you want to achieve, write it down in detail and start to visualize your achievement: Ask yourself questions such as:

- What will I see when I have achieved my goal?
- What will I have? What will I be?
- How will I celebrate the achievement?
- How will other people see me and what I have achieved?

Now enjoy collecting images that represent this visualization and arrange the images on paper as a collage. These image of the ultimate achievement go in the most prominent position of you treasure map – at the top or in the middle.

The next step is to visualize the journey towards achieving the goals. What will you have to do? What will you have to stop doing to achieve your goals? There may be important milestones or necessary sacrifices to achieving your goals. Visualize these too, and find images that represent them. Now arrange these on the collage too.

Now paste the pictures of your goals, your journey towards them, and sacrifices on your collage. Make sure you arrange them in a way that helps imprint upon you the desire to achieve your goals.

Hang your chart in a prominent place so that you see it daily: There it will help motivate and inspire you towards achieving your goals.

Key Points

Treasure mapping helps bring you goals to life and gives you a clear image of what you want to achieve and how you will achieve it.

First clarify your goals and what you need to do to achieve them. Then visualize these. Choose images to represent how you see your achievement and make a collage; and use this as a constant reminder to keep motivating and inspiring your achievements.

New Year's Resolutions

Planning for a Year of Achievement

Are you busy making your New Year Resolutions. or have you resolved never to make a New Year's resolution ever again.? If the latter, you're not alone. So many people get demoralized when, year after year, they make resolutions that they keep for only a few weeks or maybe even just a few days.

Why is this? After all, we all have the best intentions and the timing (new year, new start) couldn't be better. The problem may lie in the fact that we place a huge amount of pressure on ourselves. During the last week of December and the first week of January, all you hear is, "What're your New Year's resolutions?" "What are you going to work on this year?"

And the focus is on the "what" not the "how." When you are more concerned with the goal you set than on the specifics of how you are going to accomplish it, or even whether it is realistic and achievable, you can set yourself up for failure.

So if you resolve to set successful New Year resolutions, read on. Let's focus on how, this year, you can set yourself up for a year of achievement!

New Year Resolution Mistakes

There are two common mistakes that people tend to make before they even start to make their New Year resolutions: They think about what they "should" do, rather than what they really want to do. And worse they think in about what they should **stop** doing, rather than what they actually want to achieve. "What should I do this year?" "What should I stop doing?", "What do other people suggest I should work on?"

To be successful at any change, you need to really want it. Unless you take time to consider what it is you really want you (rather than what you **should do** or **should stop** doing) you will invariably end up making a resolution to which you are not entirely committed.

Without commitment, you aren't motivated and after the first setbacks or obstacles you will quit. So the first rule of New Year Resolutions is to only make ones that you are committed to - Don't make a resolution simply because it is "the thing to do", or because someone has told you that you should.

The irony of it is that New Year's resolutions have the potential to be very powerful because they are such a well recognized practice. Everyone knows that everyone else is setting resolutions. And what a great mutual support network that can provide! This external motivation and support, along with your internal motivation - the desire to succeed - is what can make the difference between success and failure.

Eight Rules for New Year's Resolutions

Our Eight Rules for New Year's Resolutions will help set you up for success right from the start. Inevitably you will come up against challenges and road blocks along the way; however by planning ahead and following these rules, you will be better placed to negotiate these easily, rather than stumble and quit.

Rule 1: Commit to Your Resolution

Successful resolutions start with a strong commitment to make a change. To succeed, you must **believe** that you can accomplish what you set out to and that belief is bolstered by the unwavering support you give yourself.

- Choose resolutions that you **really want** to achieve - and make them positive;
- Announce your resolution to everyone around you - they will help hold you accountable;
- Develop a ceremony to mark the beginning of your commitment - this makes it more "real" and special for you;
- Don't leave your choice of resolution to the last minute - take time to think about your goals. If you don't, you risk reacting to your current environment and missing the big picture;
- Questions to ask yourself to determine if you can take ownership of your resolution include:
 - Is this resolution my idea or someone else's?
 - Does this resolution motivate and invigorate me?
 - Is this resolution sit comfortably with other factors in my life such as my values and long-term plans?
- Remember that there's no reason why your New Year's resolution should take all year to achieve.

Tip:

Imagery is a powerful technique to help you own and commit to your goals or resolutions. Try picturing yourself having attained your goal. How do you feel? How do you look? Where you are, what you're doing? How do others react to you? By visualizing yourself in the position you desire, you can bolster your belief that you can do it and strengthen your motivation.

Rule 2: Be Realistic

The key to achieving goals is continued motivation. If you set the bar too high, you risk failing. Consistently failing at something is profoundly de-motivating (It's no wonder that after a few dismal attempts some people abandon the idea of New Year's resolutions altogether!)

- Consider carefully before setting the same resolution you set last year. If it didn't work then, you need to make sure there is good reason to believe you can

achieve it this year? What has changed? Do you have more commitment to make it work? (Be careful, or else you will end up with a repeat performance, and another failed resolution).

- Aim lower, rather than too high - aim for something that is challenging but that you have a good chance of accomplishing. If there is any doubt, err on the side of caution and expand your goal later if you still want to keep improving.
- Don't bite off more than you can chew. There is no reason to set more than one or two resolutions. Anymore than that and you divide your focus and energy and lessen your chances of success in any area.

Rule 3 - Write It Down

A simple but powerful technique for making your goal real is to put your resolution into writing. There is something inside us that creates more commitment and drive when we take the time to do this. Consider writing it down on pieces of card and keeping it where you'll see it often – on your desk, the fridge, in your wallet.

Rule 4 - Make a Plan

This is where so many resolutions fall down. Articulating what you want to achieve is one thing; deciding how to do it is quite another. Don't miss out this step!

- Start by envisioning where you want to be.
- Then work back along your path to where you are today.
- Write down all the milestones you note in between.
- Decide what you will do to accomplish each of these milestones. You need to know each step and have a plan for what comes next.

Rule 5 - Be Flexible

Not everything will work out precisely the way you planned. If you are too rigid in your approach to resolutions the first minor obstacle can throw you off your course completely.

- When creating your plan try to predict some challenges you will face - make a contingency for the ones that have the highest probability and mentally prepare yourself for the others.
- Realize that your resolution itself might change along the way as well. That's not failure, it's reality. As your life changes so will your goals, dreams, and desires. Remember Rule 1 (Commit to Your Resolution): If you need to make changes to the goal so you continue to care about it, do so.

Tip:

There is no fixed rule saying that a resolution must be set in January. If your circumstances say it is better to wait until March, then do so. Resolutions and goal setting are a year round activity. Don't get too caught up in the New Year frenzy!

Rule 6 - Use a System of Reminders

It's hard to keep focused on your plan when you have many other commitments, responsibilities, and obligations. The best way to stay on top of your resolution is to develop a formal reminder system.

- Have your written down resolutions visible as many times of the day as possible. Leave reminders at work, at home, in the car, on your calendar, in your briefcase, etc.
- Make sure the planned actions are on your to-do list (perhaps have a special section for them at the top).
- Set up reminders in your desktop calendar or subscribe to an email reminder service.
- Be as creative as you can to keep being reminded, and so make sure your goals stay in the front of your mind.

Rule 7 - Track Your Progress

You won't know how well you are doing unless you keep track of your progress. This is why your detailed plan is so important. You need to know when each milestone is accomplished. The excitement around the little successes will keep you motivated and keep you pushing forwards.

- Use a journal and make an entry regarding your progress regularly.
- Note when you felt particularly pleased with your efforts.
- Note when you felt down or felt like quitting - over time, look for common themes and decide if there is an underlying issue that needs to be addressed.
- Record challenges you faced as well as things that went better than planned.
- Look back at your entries on a regular basis and use your past experiences to shape your attitude as you move forward.
- Ask a friend or family member to call you on pre-defined occasions to discuss your progress.

Rule 8 - Reward Yourself

Although knowledge of a job well done can be reward enough, we all enjoy a little treat from time to time. Even the most committed person needs a boost and sometimes that is best accomplished through an external reward.

When you are developing your plan, make a note of a few milestones where you will reward yourself once they are achieved. But spread them out - you want to make sure the rewards remain special and are not too easy to get.

Key Points

New Year's resolutions can be a pain or a pleasure. The choice is yours. If it's a pain, you may resolve never to make a resolution again. So resolve to make it a pleasure! The starting point is to focus on something that you really want and are ready to give your commitment to. Do this and you'll be in a great position to stay motivated and be successful!

As you plan your New Year resolutions, apply the Eight Rules to set yourself up for success.

Next Steps

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