SMART - How To Set Effective Goals?

Idea In Short

Are you good at setting and achieving your goals? Or, are you more likely to set big plans, be full of drive and then nothing happens? You are not alone. Many people feel this way. Often, we have sub-conscious fears of failure associated with our goal. Surprisingly, we are not aware of this. If we understand these fears, we we haven't yet achieved our goals. You may also have other blockers and beliefs that stand in your way that you should first resolve. Or, you may have inappropriately formulated your goal. The SMART approach helps appropriately formulate your goals.

Paul J. Meyer, businessman, author and founder of Success Motivation International, describes the characteristics of SMART goals in his 2003 book, Attitude Is Everything: If You Want to Succeed Above and Beyond. The SMART acronym outlines a strategy for reaching any objective. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and anchored within a Time Frame. In the words of Tony Robbins:

> Progress equals happiness. We need to feel like we're working toward a goal to ultimately feel fulfilled and joyful in life. But are all goals created equal? The outcomes you're achieving or not achieving ultimately point to the quality of the objectives you're setting for yourself – and if you're not using SMART goals, you could be holding yourself back.

Of course, you can also use it wonderfully when you are in appraisal interviews with your employees. It also makes sense if you want to work out goals together with the team. So, what do the individual letters stand for?

Specific

Saying you want to earn more is too vague. Instead, pick a number for how much money

you want to earn.

- Do you want to start making $150,000 per year, $500,000 or even $1 million?
- Do you want to increase your business profits by 20%?

Set a clear number to track your progress against. Having a specific goal is helpful in two ways:

1. You can better visualize your outcome, and
2. You will know without a doubt when you've achieved it

Write down your goal and be very specific about it. There's a German saying - Wer schreibt, der bleibt (who writes, stays). So, definitely write it down. This will help you realize your goals.

Unspecific goals

- I would like to work better with the team
- I want to work more productively
- I want to be more able to deal with conflict
- I would like to have more team meetings
- I want to finish my daily tasks faster

All this is not very concrete.

Specific goals

- I introduce weekly one-hour team meetings
- I complete my daily tasks in four hours of my working time

Do you see the difference? Also, make sure that you do not insert any softeners here, such as maybe, I think, I would, etc. Next, add the other letters to formulate a SMART goal.

Measurable

SMART goal setting involves tracking your progress. If your goal isn't measurable, you can't objectively say you've achieved it. In our example, the specific goal is already measurable:

You can check the numbers as the year goes on to see if you've reached $150,000. You can also make other goals measurable. For example, instead of learn how to play golf, your measurable goal might be reduce my handicap from 25 to 20. This allows you to see your development. How are you matching up to your goal? Are you on track to succeed? Think whether there are numbers to measure your progress. If your goal is to increase your productivity, generate more customers, etc., then setting measurable goals is easy. Some good examples of measurable goals are:

- I am introducing one-hour team meetings on Mondays.
- I complete my daily tasks in four hours of my working time.

Monday instead of weekly makes it even more concrete. Likewise, you can also measure weekly and the time specification of four hours. However, some areas are more difficult. For example, if your goal is to be more satisfied, how do you want to make that measurable? For example, how satisfied are you with your working life at the moment on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all and 10 means it couldn't be better? This allows you to make things measurable that cannot be measured in terms of hours, euros or kilos. Otherwise, you can consider for yourself what "satisfied" means to you. If you get this as an answer in an appraisal interview, for example, you can ask and specify it.

Achievable

A stands for achievable. Setting an achievable goal means choosing an objective that, while it requires you to push yourself, is also attainable. If you pick a goal that you know is outrageous – say you're currently earning $30,000 and want to earn $5 million next year – you're most likely going to come up short of your goal. When you create a goal that's too lofty, it can seem impossible, and you may eventually give up. Use SMART goal setting to ensure you can achieve tangible progress and avoid setting yourself up for failure with out-of-reach goals. Here it makes sense to be honest with yourself. Do you feel that this goal is appropriate or is it a little too high? You should motivate and challenge yourself appropriately without setting the goal too high. If you don't achieve your goal, you will feel demotivated to continue pursuing your goal. Mental blockers, such as "I can't do this anyway" are not conducive to achieving your goals. Following the earlier examples, appraise:

- Are weekly meetings appropriate?

- Does the time frame of one hour fit?
- Can you really complete your tasks in four hours?

Relevant

This step is about ensuring that your goal matters to you, and that it also aligns with other relevant goals. We all need support and assistance in achieving our goals, but it's important to retain control over them. So, make sure that your plans drive everyone forward, but that you're still responsible for achieving your own goal. Extraordinary goals get extraordinary results, so you want to be bold. However, for effective SMART goal setting, you also want to ensure that your goal is relevant. Relevant goals are those that you are willing and able to work toward that can be achieved by improving your current habits. As business guru Jay Abraham reminds us:

> You've got to know what you're trying to do, why you're trying to do it and what your skill sets are.

Your goals aren't meaningful if they aren't based in your reality right now. Whether you're setting business goals or setting personal ones, Abrahams' words ring true. While setbacks can be a catalyst for change and re-energize you, if your goal is not relevant, you will find it difficult to get back on track. A relevant goal can answer yes to these questions:

- How relevant is this goal for you / your staff / your team?
- Is it really feasible or would you have to start a little smaller?
- Is it relevant is it for you and your team to set aside one hour a week to discuss current issues together?
- Or, is that more feasible only every 14 days?
- Can you complete all tasks in four hours if it took you seven hours before?
- Or, would it be more realistic for you to allow yourself more time?

Time-bound

Every goal needs a target date, so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work toward. This part of the SMART goal criteria helps to prevent everyday tasks from taking priority over your longer-term goals. The final principle in the SMART goals definition

is setting a clear time frame in which you can achieve your goal. Give yourself a reasonable amount of time to accomplish your goal. Having a clear time frame is essential for checking your progress along the way to reaching your goal. If you don't reach your goal within the time frame, then it's time to reassess:

- Was your goal achievable and realistic?
- Was your time frame too short?
- Or did you just not give it your all?

When you employ the SMART goals acronym to map out what you want, there's nothing wrong with re-setting your goals as long as you have clarity on why you didn't meet them. How realistic something is for you also depends on the amount of time you give yourself. The time frame should not be too far in the distance (no more than three months away). You should break up large goals into smaller packages. This will give you a quicker sense of achievement that will motivate you to keep going. The example from above could read:

> By the end of the quarter, I will complete my daily tasks in four hours.

Is SMART goal phrasing enough?

Formulating goals smartly is the first right step to ensure more clarity. Yes, we only have a limited influence on some things. So, you should not disregard these factors when formulating your goals. In addition, your goal will have more power if you formulate it positively, i.e. without negation. Write rather

> I will complete my tasks in my regular working hours

instead of

> I will no longer work overtime

This gives you more clarity and your subconscious can also do more with a positive formulation.

Summary

There are various factors that play a role in goal achievement. To achieve your goals, review how you formulated your goals. Are your goals specific enough? Or, do they have too much leeway? Are your goals achievable and relevant? Of course, SMART goal formulation needs practice. Start by setting yourself the following goal first: I will formulate 3 SMART goals within 3 days that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.