

introduction



material minds

Introduction

Goal setting might be personal or corporate but the process is the same: Establishing short- or long-term objectives, usually incorporating deadlines, tactics and quantifiable measurements. At its simplest, a goal is just something you aim for. But goals are powerful contributors to successful business and personal growth in several ways. To begin with, the process of setting goals forces you to think through what you want from your business or your life and how growth may--or may not--provide that. The process of building a strategy to achieve the goal or goals helps suggest directions for pursuing that goal, which can greatly improve your chances of achieving success in the first place.

Background

One of the best examples of the power of setting goals is Greg Mortenson's founding of the Central Asia Institute.

Greg Mortenson

As the story is told in "Three Cups of Tea", Mortenson got lost in northern Pakistan after descending K2 where a summit attempt failed when he stopped to rescue another climber's life. In his descent from basecamp Mortenson took a wrong turn and ended up alone, exhausted, and very ill in a very small village by the name of Korphe. The villagers nursed him back to health and in the process he got to know them. He discovered, not an idyllic mountain retreat, but a village with numerous health problems, a very high infant mortality rate and no school or full-time teacher. The students learned in an open-air environment did their assignments in the dirt and had help a few days a week from a part time teacher. So moved was he by the villagers assistance that Mortenson promised them that he would return and build them a school. That one goal became the entire focus of his life and while it has expanded, continues to be his goal to this day.

When he returned home to the United States, Mortenson set out trying to raise funds and after many frustrations, got funding primarily from one individual. That initial funding from Silicon Valley computer pioneer, John Hoerni enabled him to found not only that school but also the Central Asia Institute, a non-profit organization that promotes education, especially for girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan. To date they have supported over 171 schools and provided education to over 64,000 children. While Mortenson has been criticized for his lack of management capabilities, he cannot be criticized for establishing and reaching a very major goal.

While many of us have some sort of goals, the difference between establishing those goals and actually achieving them is quite great. There is a big difference between understanding what you need to do to get in control of your work situation for example and actually doing it. Changing behavior is hard. Tim Pychyl is a professor of psychology at Carlton University. At a recent conference on death and dying, he recalled a poignant seminar at which people who were close to dying spoke about their regrets. What they regretted was not what they had done but what they had not done.

In order to make progress in dealing with any of your objectives you must start by setting some goals. Goal setting is a very powerful tool. Approximately 5% of people actually set goals and of those, less than 1% actually achieves those goals. While a less than 20% success rate may seem abysmal, just the act of setting goals and getting part way there can have a very powerful effect on your life.

Among the world of motivational speakers, there is an oft-told study that purports to demonstrate the benefits of setting goals.

Yale University Study

According to this story, in 1953, researchers at Yale University (the story sometimes is about Harvard in 1979) surveyed the graduating class to determine how many of them had specific, written goals for the future. The results came back that only 3% of them had these goals. According to the story, 20 years later the researchers surveyed the class again and found that the 3% with goals amassed more personal wealth than the 97% who didn't. This is a very nice story of course, compelling, illustrative and inspirational but a number of people have followed up on it and unfortunately it is entirely fabricated. Both Yale University and the Secretary of the class of 1953 at Yale confirm that they have never heard of a study of the sort.

To test out the hypothesis of the story, Gail Matthews, a member of the faculty at Dominican University conducted some research into goal setting and published a paper entitled "Summary of Recent Goals Research." In this study, 149 participants were asked what they wanted to accomplish over the next 4 weeks and then asked to rate that goal in terms of:

- Difficulty,
- Importance,
- The extent to which they had the Skills & Resources to accomplish the goal
- Their Commitment and Motivation to the goal,
- Whether or not they had Pursued this goal before
- And if so their prior success.

The participants in the study were divided into five groups and had the following tasks to accomplish.

- Group 1- This group was simply asked to think about their goals
- Group 2- Had to write their goals down and rate them on the required dimensions
- Group 3- Had also to formulate action commitments
- Group 4- In addition to the above had to formulate action commitments and send their goals and action commitments to a supportive friend
- Group 5- Were asked to formulate action commitments and send their goals, action commitments and weekly progress reports to a supportive friend. Participants in this group were also sent weekly reminders to email quick progress reports to their friend.

At the end of the four-week study, participants were asked to rate their progress and the degree to which they had accomplished their goals. “Participants pursued a variety of goals including completing a project, increasing income, increasing productivity, getting organized, enhancing performance/achievement, enhancing life balance, reducing work anxiety and learning a new skill.” As you might expect, the fifth group achieved significantly more than all of the other groups. The conclusions of this study were that:

- Participants who wrote their goals down did significantly better than those who did not.
- Public commitment to goals is very powerful
- Being accountable to someone else will make it much more likely that you actually accomplish your goals.



The great thing about effective goals is that they will keep you:

- Incredibly focused – nothing will get in your way
- Motivated & challenged
- Liberated – ultimate personal freedom
- Improving your quality of life
- Living your dreams
- Balanced

If goal setting is so effective then you might wonder why people aren't doing it more frequently. Why do only 5% of people do it on a regular basis? I think most people have goals. The biggest problem is that people think they are setting themselves up for failure if they set out goals that they may not reach. This fear of failure is simple enough that it can prevent people from even taking the first step in setting out goals. The second most prevalent reason that people don't make goals is that they procrastinate. Whether the activity is something that they dislike or other things get in the way, goal setting is one of those important but not urgent activities that can be put off until tomorrow. People also think that they have done well without goals so why not keep going as I am now. Why are goals needed when I can get where I am without them. Finally, while many people set goals, they actually only do this in their head. The thinking is that "I'm organized enough and I know what my goals are so why do I need to write them down?"

Unfortunately, as studies have shown, these attitudes to goal setting just don't work. Instead people must take a proactive step to realizing their goals. The following is a primer on goal setting so those that want to improve their working life by tackling any of the issues of the Knowledge Revolution that have made life overwhelming, can actually do so.

Yogi Berra

If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there.

Your Goals

Let's look at one of the most complex goals ever achieved.

Sending a Man to the Moon

On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced before a special joint session of Congress the dramatic and ambitious goal of sending an American safely to the Moon before the end of the decade. Kennedy felt great pressure to have the United States "catch up to and overtake" the Soviet Union in the "space race." He wanted to announce a program that the U.S. had a strong chance at achieving before the Soviet Union. The decision involved much consideration before making it public, as well as enormous human efforts and expenditures to make what became Project Apollo, a reality, in 1969. It is beyond our imagination to grasp the complexity of this venture and the uncountable individual personal and technical goals that were enunciated, delegated, and accomplished.

Too many of us treat goal setting the same way. We dream about where we want to go but we don't have a "map" or plan to get there. What is a map? In essence, it's the written word. What is the difference between a dream and a goal? Once again, it's the written word. A "strong chance of achieving" is the backbone to great results"

Setting Overall Goals

The first step in getting control over your life is to set overall goals. Don't worry about making them too precise at this time, just figure out what is most important. Your goals could be:

- Career
- Financial
- Family/Social

- Recreational/Physical
- Intellectual/Spiritual

Figuring Out Steps

For the purposes of this workbook, we're going to imagine the case of a junior project manager, Sara, who wants to improve her ability to create ongoing project progress reports for senior management. She is working in a new area of the business, and the whole idea of project reports and even project management is new to the business and she feels that having regular progress reports would enhance these projects. We're going to follow Sara as she assesses her goals and figures out what steps she'll need to take to reach her goals.

Assessing Your Goals

In order to start assessing your goals, you must first ask why this is your goal or is it really your goal. Some people have goals because they reflect other people's needs for them. For instance someone's goal may be to get into med school because that is what your parents wanted for them since they were small. By figuring out why it is your goal, you are answering why that goal is important and this will keep you focused and committed to the achievement of the goal.

You must also ensure that the goal is morally right or fair to all concerned and that it is consistent with all your other goals. Wanting to get a promotion in the next six months may get in the way, for instance of spending more time with friends and family. Having all of your goals be consistent also makes it possible to commit to the goal totally by seeing yourself actually reaching the goal.

Finally, you should make sure that reaching this goal will contribute to your overall well-being by:

- Making you happier?
- Making you healthier?
- Making you more prosperous?
- Help you build friendships?
- Give you peace of mind?
- Make you more secure?
- Improve your relationships with others?

For Sara, this goal is important as it will make the project run smoother, thus freeing her up for other activities of actually perhaps not working quite as hard.

In the short run the free time will make her happier and in the long run it has the potential of getting her a promotion.

Creating the Plan

The next thing you need to do is to create a plan for reaching the goal. In order to create that plan, Sara would need to look at the following five issues:

- Goal Benefits – What's in it for me?
- Obstacles – What do I have to overcome?
- Skills – What do I need to achieve?
- People – Whom do I need to help me succeed?
- Resources – What do I need to succeed?

"What's in it for me." Figuring out the benefits of reaching the goal in a tangible way will keep you motivated towards achieving that goal. For instance, if you are trying to improve your ability to write reports generally, you might imagine that being better able to create a report will prepare you for a promotion so what's in it for you would be a promotion.

It is also important to figure out what obstacles you need to overcome. In the case of writing reports it may be that Sara doesn't have access to all of the data she needs in order to complete the report. In that case, access to data would be the obstacle that she would need to overcome in order to reach the goal.

Also, in terms of skills, Sara might determine that her grammar is not what it should be for preparing reports for senior management in which case she needs to take a course in grammar. Sara may also need her manager's help in reviewing initial reports to ensure that the information contained is relevant to senior management. Finally, she would need to figure out what resources are needed. Perhaps someone is needed to prepare some charts that she can edit on a regular basis.

So far we know the following about Sara's goal;

Goal	Produce a weekly project report for senior management
Why	Improve project efficiency Gain report writing skills
What's in it for me	Potential of promotion
Obstacles	Lack of access to data
Skills	Need to improve grammar
People	Need manager to review first drafts
Resources	Someone to prepare skeleton of charts.

Set goals in order of importance

If you have a number of goals it is necessary to prioritize those goals. Prioritization of goals is difficult when some might be career oriented, others financial and some others recreational. In order to set some priority among highly divergent goals, we need to go back to the concept of materiality. Each of these goals will have a potential impact on the quality of your life.

One way of establishing these mini goals or steps along the way is to look at each of the components of your larger objective as well as the obstacles and resources that you will need. In Sara's case, let's go back to the plan she created that specified things she needed to do in order to put her goal into action.

Plan	Issue	Action
Obstacles	Lack of access to data	Get access to computer data on timesheets from IT department
Skills	Need to improve grammar	Register for a course in grammar
People	Need manager to review first drafts	Show first draft to boss
Resources	Someone to prepare skeleton of charts.	Get marketing dept to create report chart skeleton

contingency plans

Despite many exhortations to the contrary, failure **is** an option. The key is to figure out how you may fail ahead of time and plan for contingencies. You can work towards your objectives with a positive frame of mind by figuring that everything will be OK but if something doesn't go exactly the way you plan it, you could be in big trouble unless you have a contingency plan. Contingency planning is an approach to figuring out what could go wrong in any situation and being prepared with plans and strategies for avoiding or coping with changes in your plan. For instance, if you quit your job with the expectation that you will get a job offer from a company with who you have been interviewing for some time and the job doesn't come through, what do you do? If you have a contingency plan you might have arranged a short-term contract before leaving your old job to tide you over until you find another one.

Risks

The first step in Contingency Planning is to figure out the risks. In looking at your goal, determine what could potentially go wrong. In Sara's case there is a big risk to the project if she is unable to get access to the computer data.

Downside

The downside is the damage that will be caused by something going wrong. In Sara's case, she will not be able to produce a weekly report at all without the data so her whole goal will be unattainable.

Contingency Plan

In order to address any potentially bad consequences, a contingency plan must be prepared ahead of time. If Sara can't get the data as she anticipates is there any other way she can get the data. Having another source for the data would mean that Sara has a workable contingency plan.

The Ultimate Contingency Plan

At the end of the Cold War Era, the United States released a booklet entitled ***“Survival Under Atomic Attack”***. The booklet was created due to rising fears that the Soviet Union would launch a nuclear attack against the United States, and it outlined what to do in the event of such an atomic attack. The booklet explained how to protect yourself, food and water supply, and your home. It also covered how to prevent burns and what to do if exposed to radiation.

S.M.A.R.T.

Next, each goal must be assessed in order to determine whether it is S.M.A.R.T. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measureable, Actionable, Realistic, and Timely.

Is your goal Specific

The first letter, S, which stand for Specific is one which answers six questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How.

- Who is involved?
- What do I want to accomplish?
- Where will this take place?
- When does this have to be done by or how often?
- Why am I doing this?
- How am I doing this?

Sara's original goal was to "Produce a weekly project report for senior management." This goal identifies her as the only person involved and states what she wants to accomplish. The place is identified in that this is a report for work. She has specified that it is a weekly report. The how is not well defined as Sara has only said that the report is to be produced, not how. Finally the reason for doing the report is not specified. In order to improve on the original objective, we should include something at least about the reason for doing the report. A revised objective may be something like:

Improve our ability to complete projects on time by writing a weekly report for senior management.

Figure out what you are doing now by recording metrics

The next step in making sure objectives are SMART is to ensure that they are measurable. The problem with many objectives is that you can't always tell when they have been achieved. For instance, "Losing Weight", is an objective that can go on forever. "Losing five pounds" is on the other hand a very measureable objective. For something to be measurable, you need to establish concrete criteria for measuring progress. Measuring progress will enable you to stay on track, reach target dates, and evaluate progress, potentially changing plans in midstream. If a goal is measurable, you should be able to answer such

questions as how much, how many, or when will I know that it has been accomplished?

In the case of writing reports, if you don't specify something about the report, you could keep on writing forever. Should the report be one page or is that enough data. Should it be 100 pages or will that mean that I never actually get it completed? In Sara's case, the lack of a measurable objective means that it could be very easy or very hard to achieve, depending on how she interprets what a report actually is. To make it measurable, Sara's objective should at least state what is in the report and how long it should be. A revised objective would be as follows:

Improve our ability to complete projects on time by writing a maximum four page weekly report for senior management that identifies project progress, milestones and obstacles.

Identify steps & actions required.

Under the SMART system, goals must be actionable so you will need to develop a set of action oriented steps or tactics that are required to meet your goal. One way of doing this is to start with the ultimate goal and work backwards. By looking at the annual goal and breaking that into a series of monthly goals and then even to weekly goals that are effective for the next month, then you have developed goals that are Actionable. Finally you can take this analysis even further to figure out what you need to be doing on a daily basis and even right now in order to meet my long term goal. By planning each of these steps well and establishing a realistic timeline you can obtain almost any goal you set out for yourself. The old joke goes "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." And this is true for any project that seems large and daunting.

One way of establishing these mini goals or steps along the way is to look at each of the components of your larger objective as well as the obstacles and resources that you will need. In Sara's case, let's go back to the plan she created that specified things she needed to do in order to put her goal into action.

Plan	Issue	Action
Obstacles	Lack of access to data	Get access to computer data on timesheets from IT department
Skills	Need to improve grammar	Register for a course in grammar
People	Need manager to review first drafts	Show first draft to boss
Resources	Someone to prepare skeleton of charts.	Get marketing dept to create report chart skeleton

At this point, an action plan has been developed for each of the issues that were identified in the plan. The next step is to break down the deliverable into bite size components.

Component	Action
Progress	Develop time reporting chart
	Create first draft with contents
Milestones	Create table showing future milestones
	Create first draft of table with content
Obstacles	Get weekly programmer report on obstacles
	Create first draft with contents

Is your goal Realistic

At this point in time Sara's project has ten smaller, identifiable steps. We really need to look though at whether these steps are Realistic, the next step in the SMART system. To be realistic, a goal or step must be something that you are not only willing to work towards but able to work towards. Sometimes you may be willing to work towards a goal but the requirement of having other people contribute towards the goal may make it realistic. There is much debate about the usefulness of stretch goals. Some people figure that if you set goals that are stretched you will achieve more than if you set lower goals. The problem with stretch goals however is that if you set them and consistently miss them, it can be demoralizing.

The best way of seeing if a goal is realistic is to evaluate each of the components or steps that are needed to reach that goal. If these are small enough that you can evaluate them independently and they look achievable, each on their own then the larger goal is probably also achievable.

In looking at the action steps that Sara will need to take to reach her goals, one can identify ones that may not be realistic.

Action	Realistic?
Get access to computer data on timesheets from IT department	Realistic
Register for a course in grammar	Realistic
Show first draft to boss	Realistic
Get marketing dept to create report chart skeleton	May be a problem
Develop time reporting chart	Realistic
Create first draft with contents	Realistic
Create table showing future milestones	Realistic
Create first draft of table with content	Realistic
Get weekly programmer report on obstacles	May be a problem
Create first draft with contents	Realistic

In looking at these smaller steps, there are two over which Sara has no control. She would need to get the cooperation of the marketing department to create a report skeleton. She would also need programmers to complete a weekly report. Of the two, the harder one is probably getting programmers to complete a report so a revised step may be to meet with the programmers weekly to get verbal updates and turn that into a report.

Set milestones & target completion dates.

Finally, in looking at objectives, within the SMART context, they need to be both Timely and Time Activated. All goals should be grounded within a time frame, as with no time connected to it, there is no urgency. By adding a time frame to goals, they move from the important but not urgent quadrant to the important AND urgent quadrant. This move is one of the most important things that you can do to ensure that the goal is actually met.

In Sara's report project, there are no time-delimited goals except for the fact that she wished to put out a project report on a weekly basis. There is no defined time when these projects will start. In order to put time into the mix, we have created the next revision of the chart showing Sara's project management goal. Notice that all of the elements that we have built on are written along with the goal so that they are not forgotten.

	Action
Goal	Improve our ability to complete projects on time by writing a maximum four page weekly report for senior management that identifies project progress, milestones and obstacles.
Why	Improve project efficiency Gain report writing skills
Week 5	Commence circulating weekly
Week 4	Circulate first report to management
Week 4	Show first draft to boss
Week 4	Create first full draft with contents
Week 3	Create first draft of obstacles with contents
Week3	Have weekly programmer report on obstacles
Week 2	Create first draft of milestones table with content
Week 2	Create table showing future milestones
Week 2	Develop time reporting chart
This week	Get marketing dept to create report chart skeleton
This week	Register for a course in grammar
This week	Get access to computer data on timesheets from IT department

Accountability

Of all the things that you can do to set and meet your goals, perhaps the most powerful is to find a person to whom you can report your goals on a regular basis. Research by the American Society of Training and Development shows how being accountable to someone else actually affects goal achievement. The research measured the likelihood of completing a goal, with each bullet showing the percentage odds that change will happen.

Action	Likelihood of Success
Hear an idea	10%
Consciously decide to adopt an idea	25%
Decide when you will do it	40%
Plan how you will do it	50%
Commit to someone else that you'll do it	65%
Have a specific accountability appointment with the person you committed to	95%

To make being accountable entirely successful you will need to meet on a regular basis and produce written reports.

Try out your new behavior

As with many things, if you try to do too much at one time, you'll fail. You would be much better off to make only one change in your behavior at a time, let it sink in and be part of your natural behavior and then move on to change the next behavior. As you start to experiment with your new behavior, it works best if you try it out three or four times. Don't try to judge whether or not the behavior is worthwhile until you have tried it out a few times. In trying out new behaviors, don't look to get anything perfect, just to do it frequently, perfection will come with practice and practice is needed to make it stick.

Reward yourself

Finally, you must make sure you reward yourself for success. Meeting the objective isn't reward enough. Make sure you have a planned reward and make sure that you implement it.

Good Luck.