

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

1. Set Goals That Motivate You

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

To make sure that 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, what 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 the goal happen.

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 goals to be powerful, they should be designed to be SMART. There are many variations of 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 unhelpful because they don't provide sufficient direction. Remember, you need goals to show you the way. Make it as easy as you can to get where you want to go by defining precisely where you want to end up.

Set Measurable Goals

Include precise amounts, dates, and so on 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 have been successful? In one month's time if you have a 1 percent reduction or in two years' time when you have a 10 percent reduction? Without a way to measure your success you miss out on the celebration that comes with knowing you have 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 hard for can be anticlimactic 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. Again, this means that you know when you can celebrate success. When you are working on a deadline, your sense of urgency increases and achievement will come that much quicker.

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 percent this year," not "I would like to reduce my operating expenses by 10 percent this year." The first goal statement has power and you can "see" yourself reducing expenses, the second lacks passion and gives you an excuse 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. (See last page for example.)

Post your goals in visible places to remind yourself every day 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 Club forum, and share them with other members for added motivation.

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.

5. Stick With It!

Remember, goal setting is an ongoing activity, not just a means to an end. Build in reminders to keep yourself on track, and make regular time-slots available to review your goals. 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.

So, what will you decide to accomplish today?

