

Why SMART Goals are not ‘Smart’ enough?

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Abstract: *Having goals in life is very important, may it be in personal life, business world or in any other area. This paper discuss about understanding the meaning of goals and its impact on person’s life. It also further discuss about how the concept of SMART Goals evolved and its benefits. Also it critically examines the lacuna in SMART goals, the missing of ‘Why’, many times we set goals but miss why of it and then we realize that after certain period we are not interested in achieving the goal, take example of new year’s resolution, how many days it last for? The reason is not motivated of lack resources or don’t do hard work, but the reason is many times we do all the things consciously but our sub conscious mind doesn’t understand why we are behaving in certain way. The paper also discusses about various mistakes in goal setting process and tries to give solutions about avoiding the same.*

1. Introduction

Goals have a pervasive influence on employee behavior and performance in organizations and management practice (Locke & Latham, 2002). In today’s era every modern organization has some form of goal setting in operation. Programs such as management by objectives (MBO), high-performance work practices (HPWPs), management information systems (MIS), benchmarking, stretch targets, as well as systems thinking and strategic planning, include the development of specific goals.

Also it is important to know that goal setting is the underlying explanation for all major theories of work motivation—whether that be Vroom’s (1994) VIE theory, Maslow’s (1970) or Herzberg’s (2009) motivation theories, Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, or operant-based behaviorism (Skinner, 1979). Managers today widely accept goal setting as a means to improve and sustain performance (Du Brin, 2012). Based on various studies, the major finding of goal setting is that individuals who are provided with specific, difficult but attainable goals perform better than those given easy, nonspecific, or no goals at all. Also it is important to understand that time bound goal setting is surely an added advantage. However, the individuals must have sufficient ability, accept the goals, and receive feedback related to performance (Latham, 2003).

1.1 What is Goal ?

Goal setting involves the development of an action plan which is designed to motivate and guide a person or group toward a specific goal. Goal setting can be guided by goal-setting criteria (or rules) such as SMART goal setting. Goal setting is always a major component of self-development and management literature.

Studies by Edwin A. Locke and his colleagues have shown that more specific and ambitious goals lead to increase in performance as compared to easy goals. As long as the person accepts the goal, and thinks that he has the ability to attain it, and does not have conflicting goals, there is a positive relationship between goal difficulty and task performance.

The first empirical study regarding goal setting was carried out by Cecil Alec Mace in 1935. It was carry forward by Edwin A. Locke in mid 1960s and was continued for more than 30 years. Locke derived the idea of goal-setting from Aristotle’s form of final causality. Aristotle speculated that purpose cause action; thus, Locke began researching the impact goals have on human activity. Locke developed and refined his goal-setting theory in the 1960s, publishing his first article on the subject, "Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives", in 1968. This article established the positive relationship between clearly identified goals and performance.

Locke and colleagues (1981) examined the behavioral effects of goal-setting, concluding that 90% of laboratory and field studies involving specific and challenging goals led to higher performance than did easy or no goals.

Locke and Latham (2006) argue that it is not sufficient to urge employees to "do their best". "Doing one's best" has no external referent, which makes it useless in eliciting specific behavior. To elicit some specific form of behavior from another person, it is important that this person has a clear view of what is expected from him/her. A goal is thereby plays an important role because it helps an individual to focus his or her efforts in a specified direction.

For decades, goal setting has been promoted as a halcyon pill for improving employee

motivation and performance in organizations. Across hundreds of experiments, dozens of tasks, and thousands of participants across four continents, the results are clear (Locke, Latham, Smith, & Wood, 1990). Compared to vague, easy goals (e.g., "Do your best"), specific, challenging goals boost performance. In a review of four decades of goal-setting research, Locke and Latham(2006) claim, "So long as a person is committed to the goal, has the requisite ability to attain it, and does not have conflicting goals, there is a positive, linear relationship between goal difficulty and task performance."

Goals that are deemed difficult to achieve and specific tend to increase performance more than goals that are not. A goal can become more specific through quantification or enumeration (it should be measurable), such as by demanding "...increase productivity by 50%," or by defining certain tasks that must be completed.

Setting goals affects outcomes in four ways:

1. **Choice:** Goals narrow attention and direct efforts to goal-relevant activities, and away from goal-irrelevant actions.
2. **Effort:** Goals can lead to more effort; for example, if one typically produces 4 widgets an hour, and has the goal of producing 6, one may work more intensely towards the goal than one would otherwise.
3. **Persistence:** Someone becomes more likely to work through setbacks if pursuing a goal.
4. **Cognition:** Goals can lead individuals to develop and change their behavior.

1.2 What's the Difference Between a Personal Goal and a Business Goal?

Goals of business and personal goals have different purposes (business goals aim to improve your business rather than some aspect of your personal life) but there's no difference as far as the goal setting process is concerned. The same goal setting formula and strategies that works for business goals will also work for personal goals - with the one difference that applying the strategies that are often used to set business goals will give you greater success with achieving personal goals than is often the case.

Business Goals

Business goals are typically set on an annual basis and should be aligned with your long term goals.

For example, if your five-year plan is to increase sales by 100% then at the beginning of each year you might set a goal to increase your sales by 20% for the current year. Your goals should be worked into your business plan and (in this case) your sales forecast.

Throughout the year, you might have weekly, monthly, or quarterly sessions where you review your progress towards the annual goal. Writing down the results is essential for staying on track.

At the end of each day, you might review what you have accomplished for the day and think about what you would like to achieve on the following day. Whether you prefer to do it at night or in the morning. Daily planning is a highly recommended way to increase your business success. Regularly reviewing your progress towards achieving your goals and your goals themselves keeps you focused and motivated.

Personal Goals

Common personal goals include losing weight, achieving success, making more money, purchasing car, house etc.. The strategy for goal setting begins with the big picture; taking a look at the big picture before breaking it into smaller components allows one to focus on the primary goal. Once the main goal is set, breaking it up into smaller, more achievable components helps in the planning portion of setting the goal. These smaller, more obtainable objectives promote self-esteem and provide instant feedback to keep the individual on task.

Managing time is the practice of systematically finishing tasks assigned by superiors or one's self in an efficient and timely manner. Time management steps require identifying the objective and laying out a plan that maximizes efficiency and execution of the objective. There are many useful methods to do so like using apps in mobile or using planner available on various websites.

2. SMART Goals

What Does SMART Mean?

SMART is an acronym that you can use to guide your goal setting.

Its criteria are commonly attributed to Management by objectives concept designed by Peter Drucker. The term was first used in the November 1981 issue of *Management Review* by George T. Doran. After that it was found in an article for The Society

for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, written by Professor Robert Rubin from Saint Louis University who wrote about SMART in an article. He stated that SMART has come to mean different things to different people, as shown below.

To make sure your goals are clear and reachable, each one should be:

- **Specific** (simple, sensible, significant).
- **Measurable** (meaningful, motivating).
- **Achievable** (agreed, attainable).
- **Relevant** (reasonable, realistic and resourced, results-based).
- **Time bound** (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive).

Professor Rubin also notes that the definition of the SMART acronym may need updating to reflect the importance of efficacy and feedback. However, some authors have expanded it to include extra focus areas; SMARTER, for example, includes **E**valuated and **R**eviewed.

2.1 How to Use SMART

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"

1. Specific

Your goal should be clear and specific, otherwise you won't be able to focus your efforts or feel truly motivated to achieve it. When drafting your goal, try to answer the five "W" questions:

- **What** do I want to accomplish?
- **Why** is this goal important?
- **Who** is involved?
- **Where** is it located?
- **Which** resources or limits are involved?

Example

If you want to purchase a big car, then only thinking about big car will not do the task. You need to think about which brand, which model, color, and such other details as possible.

2. Measurable

It's important to have measurable goals, so that you can track your progress and stay motivated.

Assessing progress helps you to stay focused, meet your deadlines, and feel the excitement of getting closer to achieving your goal.

A measurable goal should address questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?

Example

In continuation of the example mentioned above, you need to understand how you are going to measure the goal of purchasing your dream car? Say if you are planning to purchase it by end of this year, every month what you are doing to achieve such goal, like saving money or getting into more details of car by visiting showroom etc.

3. Achievable

Your goal also needs to be realistic and attainable to be successful. In other words, it should stretch your abilities but still remain possible. When you set an achievable goal, you may be able to identify previously overlooked opportunities or resources that can bring you closer to it.

An achievable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How can I accomplish this goal?
- How realistic is the goal, based on other constraints, such as financial factors?

Example

At this point of time you need to see if the goal (purchasing your dream car) is really achievable? Is it within your financial reach? It is really required?

4. Relevant

It should be relevant, relevant in all aspects like in line with your life style, current and future requirement, related to your job or profession etc. It is about ensuring that your goal matters to you, and that it also aligns with other relevant goals. You will need support and assistance in achieving your goals, but it's important to remember that you should have ultimate control over it. So, make sure that your plans drive everyone forward, but that you're still responsible for achieving your own goal.

A relevant goal can answer "yes" to these questions:

- Does the goal seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match your other efforts/needs?
- Am I the right person to reach this goal?
- Is it applicable in the current socio-economic environment?

Example

Purchasing a dream car might be your goal but if your job involves a lot of travelling within or outside the country and your major time spend is in travel for business, you will hardly use your 'Dream Car'. In such a case think that if it is really going to make sense to purchase such a thing or else you can invest the amount in some other activity.

5. Time-bound

If it is your goal it has to be time bound or else it will remain a day dream only. 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. You need to break down all relevant activities in such a manner that your goal is achieved step by step. You need to make provisions in terms of finances, or other resources so that at the time of goal achieving it is easy to achieve.

A time-bound goal will usually answer these questions:

- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

Example

In case of your goal of dream car, you have to make a good amount of financial provision. So here you need to fix a date, month and year in which you will be purchasing your dream car. You need to take stock of your current situation ranging from your finances to even parking space.

3. Why SMART Goal Fails

Why SMART goals fail to deliver on lofty aspirations. As simple as the SMART method appears, it doesn't allow a person to forge an emotional connection to the goals. Without this, a person is not going to be motivated as it will be a

dry goal or else it may convert into mere series of tasks.

Part of the problem is that SMART goals are too focused on outcomes.

Say a person wants to lose 30 kg of his weight by the end of the year. In a very active mode he joins gym on 1st day of January and starts working out and eating better. He loses 5 kg by the end of two months and feels great. Then in March, he takes a vacation. Relaxing on the beach, he is hardly thinking about going to the gym and eating healthy.

He returns home only to realize he regained 3 kg and feels terrible, guilty and defeated. Eventually, he succumbs to the old habits and gives up.

What went wrong? Minor setbacks can put a big damper on outcome-focused goals (such as trying to lose 30 kg by the year's end). Plus, SMART goals often fail to fuel someone's inner fire, and it is proved that intrinsic factors are much more likely to lead to long-term behavior change.

So the question is why our so-called SMART goals fail?

Mistake 1: Setting Unrealistic Goals

When you're exploring possible goals, you need to unleash your imagination and ambition, put your reservations aside, and dream big dreams. However, once you've decided on a goal, make sure that it is realistic, and that you can actually achieve it in the time frame that you have set for yourself.

For instance, if your goal is to run a marathon, it's wildly unrealistic to sign up for one next month, unless you've already done several months of training. Or, if your goal is to become CEO of a company, but you have no experience, this goal might not be practical – at least not yet!

Mistake 2: Focusing on Too Few Areas

Imagine that you've just written your list of goals for the next year. You've committed to increasing your income by 15 percent, getting a promotion, and reading one motivational book each month.

Although this is an ambitious but achievable list of goals, there's a potential problem: these goals focus

only on your career. You've completely omitted goals from other parts of your life.

Many people focus solely on their work when they set goals. However, you can't neglect activities that bring you joy. Goals like writing a book, competing in an adventure race, or starting a home garden might also be incredibly important for your happiness and well-being.

So, when you set your goals, make sure that you strike the right balance between different areas of your life. And remember that "balance" is different for everyone. You may consider career, family, health, social, religion as various aspects for setting goals.

Mistake 3: Underestimating Completion Time

Many times you might have experience that a task or project takes longer than you thought? Probably more times than you can count! You may also say the same for goals that you've set in the past.

If you don't estimate goal completion time accurately, it can be discouraging when things take longer to achieve than you think they should. This can cause you to give up.

So, while planning your goals take some more time into consideration and always pad your timelines to account for delays and setbacks. If you add extra time into your estimate, you'll feel less pressure to rush and finish by a certain date.

Mistake 4: Not Appreciating Failure

No matter how hard you work, you will fail to achieve goals from time to time. We've all been there, and it isn't fun!

However, your failures are what ultimately determine your character. They also contain lessons that can change your life for the best, if you have the courage to learn from them.

So don't be too upset if you fail to achieve your goals – just take note of where you went wrong and use that knowledge to reach your goals next time around.

Mistake 5: Setting "Other People's Goals"

Some people – family, friends, or even your boss – may want to influence the goals you set. Perhaps they feel that they know what's best for you, or maybe they want you to take a certain path or do certain things.

Clearly, it's important that you have good relationships with these people, and you need to do what your boss asks, within reason.

However, your goals need to be your own, as it should come from within, it should be something very near to your heart.

Mistake 6: Setting "Negative" Goals

How you think about your goal can influence how you feel about it, and whether you achieve it.

For instance, many people have a goal to "lose weight." However, this goal has a negative connotation; it's focused on what you don't want – your weight. A positive way to reframe this goal is to say you want to "get healthy." Similarly many people say that 'I don't want to be poor', instead can we say that 'I want to be rich'.

Another example of a negative goal is to "stop staying late at work." A positive way to rephrase this is to "spend more time with family."

Negative goals are emotionally unattractive, which makes it hard to focus on them. Reframe any negative goals so that they sound positive: you may be surprised by the difference this makes!

Mistake 7: Setting Too Many Goals

When you start setting goals, you may see many things that you want to accomplish. So you start setting goals in all areas.

The problem with this is that you have a fixed amount time and energy. If you try to focus on many different goals at once, you can't give individual goals the attention they deserve.

Instead, use the "quality, not quantity" rule when setting goals. Work out the relative importance of everything that you want to accomplish over the next six to twelve months. Then pick no more than, say, three goals to focus on.

Remember, the success of your work towards a goal rests on focusing on just a few things at a time. If you limit the number of goals you're working on, you'll have the time and energy you need to do things really well!

Mistake 8: Not Reviewing Progress

It takes time to accomplish goals. And sometimes it can feel that you aren't making much progress.

This is why it's important to take stock of everything that you've accomplished on a regular basis. Set small sub-goals, celebrate your successes, and analyze what you need to do to keep moving forward. No matter how slow things seem, you probably are making progress!

You can also take this opportunity to update your goals, based on what you've learnt. Have your priorities changed? Or do you need to set aside some extra time for a particular goal activity? Goals are never set in stone, so don't be afraid to amend them if you need to.

Mistake 9: Fear of Success/Failure

The fear of failure can be a huge potential pitfall in the act of goal setting. The key to avoiding the negative feelings around potentially not reaching a goal is to create an environment and a process that supports the involved act of goal setting. This can mean breaking down the goal into attainable steps and following designated check points to ensure you remain on track and that you are experiencing morale boosting success on your journey.

Having an open and honest discussion with your team can also do a lot for alleviating fears of failure. Knowing that others are aware of your goals and are in your corner can help to remove much of the anxiety around the need to maintain progress.

4. Why SMART is not enough? Are you missing WHY?

This is probably the biggest hurdle in achievement of goal. Many times you may set the goal, you are aware of it, you also know about how to achieve it. But the biggest element which you might have neglected that why you want to achieve the goal? The answer should have some emotional connect to it. Purchasing your dream car or dream home or having lot of money in your account will probably

not give you happiness unless it is having a strong 'why'.

You want to make lot of money because you want to help poor in the society, you want to treat them in case of medical problem. You want to purchase a big car because you then you can see a loads of happiness on your child's face. You want to purchase a big home because you want to treat your parents and family with best possible amenities in the world.

If such are the answers for your goal setting, you have hit the target. In case of missing of why, it is a strong possibility that you will end up in between and do nothing.

5. Conclusion

Setting goals and achieving them is the most beautiful thing on earth. If used properly the tools like SMART goal setting can really help you in achievement of your goal. You need to make sure that your goals are your own and not the one imposed by others or influenced by someone else. Also it should be noted that it should not be a kind of revenge against someone or something. All goals should be lifting your life an inch higher. Also one should not focus on money making as the only goal, consider other aspects as well. You might have money but no health to enjoy the same then what is the use? You may have money, health but no time to spend the money, or you have money, health, time but no person with whom you can celebrate or enjoy. In all such cases even achievement of goal will be of no use. So it is also important to attach 'why' with each goal which will give you unending fuel for the process.

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