

Goal Setting

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

Studies by **Edwin A. Locke** and his colleagues have shown that more specific and ambitious goals lead to more performance improvement than easy or general goals. The goals should be specific, time constrained and difficult. As long as the person accepts the goal, has the ability to attain it, and does not have conflicting goals, there is a positive linear relationship between goal difficulty and task performance.

Imagine you are 30 pounds overweight and want to drop some extra weight. When setting your goal, you have several options. You could say, “I want to lose weight within the next year. I will go on a diet to lose the weight.” This goal is pretty vague and poorly defined; you haven’t specified how much weight you want to lose or what concrete steps you will take to lose it.

Alternatively, you could say, “I want to lose two pounds a week for the next four months. I will exercise for at least 30 minutes, five days per week. I will also change my diet to include three servings of fruits and vegetables as well as whole-grain products. I will also limit myself to eating out just one day per week.” This goal is much more specific and includes actionable steps.

The simple act of setting an effective goal gives you a better chance of realizing that goal. In fact, listed below are several principles crucial to setting effective goals.

Locke proposed five basic principles of goal-setting: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity.

1. **Clarity.** A clear, measurable goal is more achievable than one that is poorly defined. In other words, be specific! The most effective goals have a specific timeline for completion.
2. **Challenge.** The goal must have a decent level of difficulty in order to motivate you to strive toward the goal.
3. **Commitment.** Put deliberate effort into meeting this goal. Share your goal with someone else in order to increase your accountability to meet that goal.
4. **Feedback.** Set up a method to receive information on your progress toward a goal. If losing 30 pounds in four months turns out to be too hard, it is better to adjust the difficulty of your goal mid-way through the timeline than to give up entirely.
5. **Task complexity.** If a goal is especially complex, make sure you give yourself enough time to overcome the learning curve involved in completing the task. In other words, if a goal is really tough, make sure you give yourself some padding to give you the best chance at succeeding.

The theory states that the simplest most direct motivational explanation of why some people perform better than others is because they have different performance goals. The essence of the theory is fourfold.

- First, difficult specific goals lead to significantly higher performance than easy goals, no goals, or even the setting of a conceptual goal such as urging people to do their best.
- Second, holding ability constant, as this is a theory of motivation, and given that there is goal commitment, the higher the goal the higher the performance.
- Third, variables such as praise, feedback, or the involvement of people in decision-making only influence behavior to the extent that it leads to the setting of and commitment to a specific difficult goal.
- Fourth, goal-setting, in addition to affecting the three mechanisms of motivation, namely, choice, effort, and persistence, can also have a cognitive (related to mind) benefit. It can influence choice, effort, and determination to discover ways to attain the goal.

Guidelines for Goal Setting:

1. Goals must be clearly specified.
2. Goals must be set taking into the account the various factors affecting achievement.
3. Goals should be consistent with organizational mission.
4. Goals should be rational and realistic rather than idealistic.
5. Goals should be achievable but must provide challenge to those responsible for achievement.
6. Goals should yield specific results when achieved.
7. Goals should be desirable for those who are responsible for the achievement.
8. Goals should start with the word 'to' and be followed by an action verb.
9. Goals should be consistent over the period of time.
10. Goals should be periodically reviewed.

Advantages of Goal Setting Theory:

- Goal setting theory is a technique used to raise incentives for employees to complete work quickly and effectively.
- Goal setting leads to better performance by increasing motivation and efforts, but also through increasing and improving the feedback quality.