

# 2024 Guide to Goals for Software Engineers

Lessons on goals done right from a software engineer who hated goals



JORDAN CUTLER

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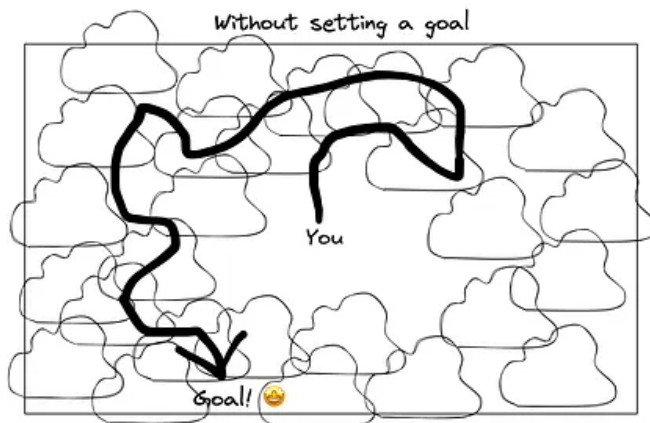
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I didn't like to set goals. I only focused on processes, systems, and inputs.

However, when I set goals, I have a clear focus. I can cut what doesn't matter and more easily say "no."

**Setting goals is just about being intentional about your ideal future.**

If you've played video games, it's like removing the "fog of war" on a map so you know where you're going.



When you don't set a goal, you eventually get there, but it takes much longer.

Another way of thinking about it is that without goals, [you are shooting darts blindfolded](#). Having a goal just removes the blindfold so you can see where you're aiming.



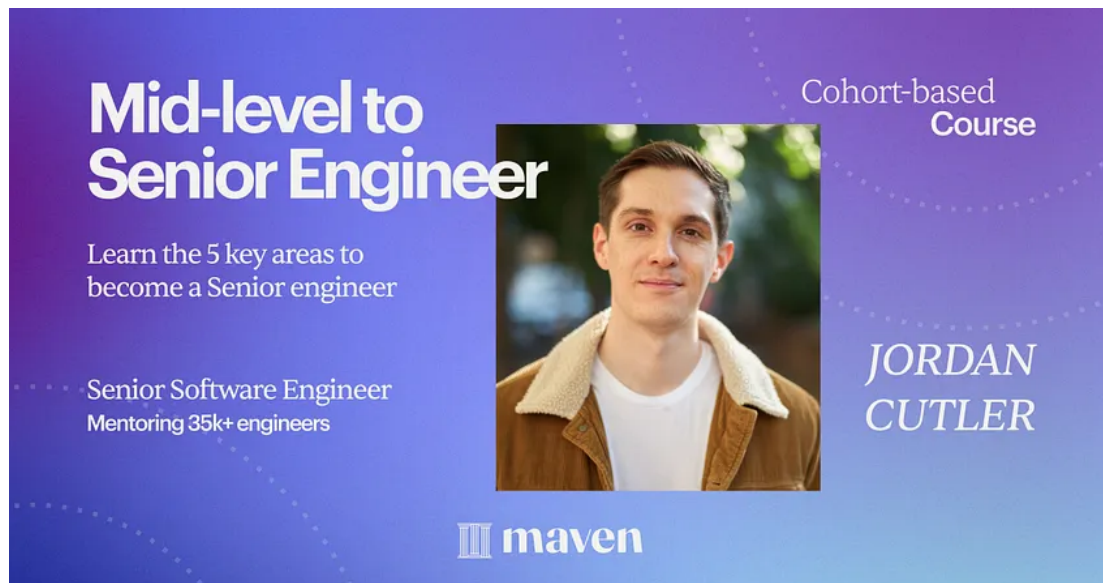
I guess Mike Tyson doesn't need to remove his blindfold...

However, it's also important to build in flexibility. Other things will always come up. **Goals allow you to be intentional about the tradeoff decision and say “no” rather than being overloaded by an infinite amount of tasks.**

In this article, you'll learn what type of goals to set for yourself for 2024 and how to stick to them throughout the year—to ultimately achieve the best version of yourself.

## **Announcement**

The [Mid-level to Senior Engineer 2nd cohort course is live!](#)



[Early bird pricing is available at 25% off](#) until January 8th!

Here is just 1 of the 20+ testimonials from the 1st cohort:

*“I've worked as a mid-level engineer for a long time and feel this was a missing piece of my journey to Senior. **I only wish I'd found this course sooner!** I walked away feeling much more confident in myself and how to continue to progress in my growth.”* - Ryan, Full Stack Engineer III, Calendly

## ★ Main takeaways

- The different types of goals you can set
- How to decide on your goals
- How to achieve your goals by the end of the year

## 🔍 The different types of goals

You've probably heard of SMART goals. We'll talk about that more later, but I'm here to tell you I don't think every goal needs to be SMART.

Here are the types of goals I've identified that you can use:

1. **Objective not 100% within your control:** “Be promoted to Senior Engineer”
  - These are types of goals that rely on others’ actions. While being promoted is partially in your control, it’s ultimately up to your manager and the company. Also, there could be things like budget constraints that prevent this.
2. **Objective 100% within your control:** “Exhibit the behaviors of a Senior Engineer”
  - This type of goal is 100% within your control. It doesn’t rely on the decisions of others.
  - With the previous goal of being promoted, you could have done everything in your power to get promoted, and it still not have worked out for plenty of reasons outside your control.
3. **Action-based checklist:** “Read 25 books in 2024” or “Do 3 database courses”
  - This is a straight checklist. These are okay, but it may be unclear how doing these bring you toward the future you want for yourself. For example, you could complete this goal by reading 25 childrens books, which probably doesn’t help you much.
4. **Recurring pattern:** “I want to read 1 hour per day” or “I want to go to the gym 3 times per week” or “I want to study for interviews 2 hours per day.”
  - This is a great goal for building a system. It’s important to understand your “why” behind this type of goal though, otherwise it’s easy to skip it. The end result you’re expecting should be clear; like gaining knowledge in a particular area, losing weight, or getting a job somewhere specific.
5. **Feeling:** “I want to feel more confident at public speaking.”
  - These are good aspirations but it may be unclear when this is “done.”

**There’s no right or wrong on which of these to use.** It’s just helpful to know which you’re using and what to keep in mind for each to make them effective.

For my 2024 goals, I have a mix of these, but I mostly use the first 3.

We’ll talk about how to decide your goals and how this relates to SMART goals next.

 **How to decide on your goals**

## Start with focus areas

The easiest way to decide on your goals is to do it in layers.

First, decide on a focus area like “Personal growth”, then choose goals within that.

First, you choose focus areas based on which areas of your life you want to improve.

For me, I’ve chosen these:

- Personal growth
- Travel & Fun
- Health
- Side Hustle

If you’re stuck, you can also check out [Ali Abdaal’s Wheel of Life analogy](#). My system is a bit different than his, but he gives a great approach too.

## Ask yourself what you want to celebrate

For each focus area, ask yourself: “What do I want to be celebrating in 1 year?”

Below you can see my answers to each of the focus areas:

Todoist board of each of my focus areas and goals for the year in that area

These goals should be [SMART](#)ish—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound).

I say SMART“ish” because it’s important to paint the picture of achievement as clear as possible so you have a target to work toward.

**BUT**, having **any goal** is better than not writing anything at all. Not everything needs to be a SMART goal. It’s ok to just have a general direction for yourself.

Here’s an example:

- **Non-SMART goal:** Make more friends this year
- **SMART goal:** Make at least 5 new friends this year that I can invite over

I might use the “Non-SMART” goal version if making it SMART comes off too oddly specific or if the goal is a lower priority and more of a “nice-to-have” that I should just keep in mind.

## Answer your “why”

For each goal you create, you should know **why** it’s important to you to complete it.

Without this, you put it off indefinitely because you don’t have a reason to do it.

Here is what I wrote for my “why” on my goal of reading 8 books this year:

My “why” associated with the goal I want to achieve that year.

## How to achieve your goals

**Success = Goals + Systems to achieve those goals**

Now that you have annual goals for each of your focus areas, break them down into quarterly (or every 3 months) goals.

- **Q1 goals:** Jan 1 - March 31
- **Q2 goals:** April 1 - June 31
- **Q3 goals:** July 1 - September 31
- **Q4 goals:** October 1 - December 31

**Note:** You can divide into each month if you prefer (Jan, Feb, March, etc. goals).

Lastly, set action items that work toward each goal.

Below is a partial diagram to show how I break down my 8 books in 2024 goal.

Example flow of how an annual goal turns to a concrete system

**Note: You can add as much or as little structure as it makes sense for you. Too much structure could add stress and reduce flexibility.**

The idea is you start with your end goal and work backwards into smaller, more concrete steps. It works the same way when you plan a technical project at work.

## **Final and MOST IMPORTANT step**

You need a system to check in on your progress.

For me, I use a monthly repeating task in Todoist.

Todoist item for me to plan my month, next month, and check in on goal progress.

You could set a Google Calendar invite for the 1st of the month, use phone reminders, use Notion, or any other app you'd like.

**The idea is to set yourself up for success with a system to check in on your progress.**



## **Closing thoughts**

**You don't have to do any of this.**



For the most part, I got to where I am by only focusing on inputs and not doing this specific exercise. I've moved to this approach because I have a constant stream of new tasks to do and I want to have a clearly defined picture of my end goals and cut out everything else.

Don't feel like this is something you **need** to do or let it be something that stresses you out. You also don't need to follow this exact process.

Even taking 1 minute to write 1 thing you want to accomplish this year then never looking at it again could help you have a clearer picture of what you want.

## TL;DR

- There are many different types of goals. Know which one you're setting.
  - Objectives not 100% within your control: *Be promoted to Senior Engineer*
  - Objectives 100% within your control: *Exhibit the behaviors of a Senior Engineer*
  - Action-based checklists: *Read 25 books this year*
  - Recurring patterns: *Work out 3 times per week*
  - Feeling: *Feel more confident at public speaking*
- When deciding on goals, start with the end in mind. Think about the focus areas you need to grow in to get to your ideal state, then create goals for each focus area.
- To make sure you complete your goals, **break down, break down, break down**. Start with annual goals, then break them into quarterly goals, then for each quarterly goal, create action items for that quarter.
- Finally, set up a recurring reminder to check in on your goals.

## Shout-outs of the week

- [Goals that refuse to die](#) by Taha Hussain on *The Conscious Leader* - See how Taha's goal-setting method took him to become a Principal Engineer.
  - Note: I also have to give credit to Taha for encouraging me to do goal-setting.

- [Soft skills books for developers](#) by Addy Osmani on Elevate - Tons of great book recommendations from someone who has read them all, with main takeaways of each one.
- [How to write an effective self-review](#) by Ryan Peterman on The Developing Dev - Great advice on how to write an effective performance review for everyone deciding your promotion.

**Thank you** for your continued support of the newsletter and the growth to 38k+ subscribers 🙏

- Jordan

*P.S. If you're interested, I'm accepting the following:*

1. Early bird spots for the next [Mid-level to Senior Engineer cohort](#) in late January
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Hey, thanks for this. This is EXACTLY what I needed. You put into words the thoughts I had in my mind. Thank you!!!

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really resonate with this idea, it highlights the difference between wandering and travelling. Great read!

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