The Difference between Goals & Objectives

Often in business and education we talk about goals and objectives, indeed sometimes we use the terms interchangeably – but are they the same?

Goals & Objectives in a modern business & educational sense

It has been said that Goals without objectives can never be achieved while objectives without goals will never get you to where you want to be. Indeed the two concepts are related and yet separate. Using both can enable you (or the organization) to be and do what you want to do.

Some management academics would say that the difference between goals and objectives is that a goal is a description of a destination, and an objective is a measure of the progress that is needed to get to the destination.

In this context goals are the long term outcomes you (or the organization) want/ need to achieve. More often than not, these goals can be broken into “chunks” or objectives. Goals are often open and unstructured in nature. Goals can be fluid and are directional in nature.

Objectives tend to be single achievable outcomes. They are concrete in statement and purpose. There is no ambiguity as to whether they have been achieved or not.

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| --- | --- |
| **Goals** | **Objectives** |
| Broad in scope | Narrow in scope |
| General intention or direction | Specific/ Precise |
| Intangible or “soft” | Tangible |
| Abstract | Solid/ Concrete |
| Can’t be easily measured/ validated | Can be easily measured/ validated |
| Large in size | Chunks |
| The end | Ends in themselves |
| The result | The means to the end |
| The whole | Part of the whole, often with milestones |
| Longer term | Shorter term |

**In practice what does this mean?**

The site [diffen.com](http://www.diffen.com/difference/Goal_vs_Objective) has this useful table:

|  | **Goal** | **Objective** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Plan:** | Broad plan | Narrow plan |
| **Action:** | Generic action | Specific action |
| **Example:** | I want to achieve success in the field of genetic research and do what no one has ever done. | I want to complete this thesis on genetic research by the end of this month. |
| **Measure:** | Goals may not be strictly measurable or tangible. | Must be measurable and tangible. |
| **Time frame:** | Longer term | Short to medium term |
| **Meaning:** | The purpose toward which an endeavour is directed. | Something that one’s efforts or actions are intended to attain or accomplish; purpose; target. |
| **Principle:** | Based on ideas | Based on fact |

**What do Goals and Objectives look like if they are different?**

*Examples of Goals and Objectives*  
Goals:

1. I want to be the best musician in the school
2. We will be the number 1 supplier of….
3. I want to maintain a good knowledge of the profession.

Objectives

1. we will sell xxx units by June next year.
2. I will pass my stage 3 business French assessment.
3. We will deliver 90% of the contract by…

In coaching, agreeing the direction of goal, which can often be seen as softer, emotional and more engaging first, helps both the coach and the individual to narrow down the actions into specific SMART Objectives.