

What is Effective Goal Setting?

Paul Newton



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Contents

| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| | Preface | 6 |
| | Visit Our Website | 7 |
| 1 | Introduction | 8 |
| 2 | Why it is Important to have Goals | 10 |
| 3 | Goal Setting Theory | 12 |
| 4 | Method 1 – 4C F | 15 |
| 4.1 | Clarity | 16 |
| 4.2 | Challenge | 17 |
| 4.3 | Complexity | 18 |
| 4.4 | Commitment | 19 |
| 4.5 | Feedback | 19 |

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| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 5 | Method 2 – SMART | 22 |
| 5.1 | Specific | 22 |
| 5.2 | Measurable | 25 |
| 5.3 | Attainable or Achievable | 25 |
| 5.4 | Relevant | 26 |
| 5.5 | Time Bound | 28 |
| 5.6 | SMART Summary | 28 |
| 6 | Method 3 – Backwards Goal Setting | 30 |
| 7 | Prioritizing Your Personal Goals | 32 |
| 8 | References | 36 |



Preface

This eBook will teach you proven strategies for setting goals that will inspire you and your team to make things happen in your organization. It explains how to use the theory of goal setting to set practical targets for you and your team members.

You will learn:

- The theories that underpin goal setting and motivation.
- The two most popular goal setting methods, 4CF and SMART.
- How to turn aspirations into clear ‘goal statements.’
- The key to persuading team members to buy into the goals you set.
- How to recognize situations where traditional goal setting won’t work.

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1 Introduction

Many people begin their career in management with high hopes of making an impression on their bosses by developing the business or by implementing new and better ways of doing things. Unfortunately, most of them find that they are so busy handling day-to-day issues that there never seems to be time for anything else.

Furthermore, comparatively few people have tangible goals; most have the awareness that things could be improved but only vague ideas about how to achieve these improvements.



All tasks are either reactive or proactive. Reactive tasks are when you react to situations that occur, and are driven by events and the actions of other people. Conversely, proactive tasks are when you seek opportunities to make a positive impact in the workplace and are driven by you.

This eBook will illustrate that to be an effective manager, it is far more beneficial in the long term to be proactive. Behaving proactively revolves around anticipating events and using initiative to predict the likely outcome, whilst being in a position to respond and take the appropriate action when needed.



Those who gain recognition and promotion in organizations are usually those who are proactive; they are those who use their initiative to make things happen. In order to truly be proactive, however, there are two things that need to be addressed.

The first is that a certain amount of time needs to be freed up from handling routine tasks, resolving crises, and handling interruptions. You can discover how to do this for yourself by reading the other personal productivity eBooks on this website.

The second thing that you need to do is to be able to set goals that will inspire you and your team to make things happen. Setting goals that motivate people is not easy and requires effort and good judgment.

2 Why it is Important to have Goals

Many people confuse goal setting with wishful thinking and you can see examples of this in organizational and departmental mission statements that are usually so vague as to be virtually meaningless. Some examples, taken from Fortune 500 companies, include:

‘To achieve profitable growth through superior customer service, innovation, quality and commitment.’

‘To combine aggressive strategic marketing with quality products and services at competitive prices to provide the best value for consumers.’

‘Be the best in the eyes of our customers, employees and shareholders.’

These mission statements are fairly typical and whilst there is nothing wrong with them per se, they seldom inspire anyone to do anything specific to help achieve them.

If a goal is to be motivational then it must have an objective that is clear and well specified in what should be achieved; it must identify exactly what needs to be done and in what timeframe. It must also define a clear outcome that is measurable and can be assessed.

As well as setting goals for your team as a whole, you will usually be expected to set targets for each team member as part of their annual appraisal process. How successful you are in doing this will have a big influence on not only their productivity but also on how they perceive you as a manager.

If you set goals that are unambiguous and measurable then most people will rise to the challenge or at least strive to achieve them to the best of their ability. On the other hand, nothing destroys morale faster than not knowing what you’re expected to achieve or how your efforts will be measured.



As a manager, it is very time consuming to try to keep track of an employee's work and to motivate them on a continuous basis. Goals are, therefore, an important tool, since they function as a self-regulatory mechanism that provides each team member with clear objectives.

Goal setting can aid individual performance in four ways:

1. Goals allow team members to be focused and committed to achieving the end result.
2. Goals serve as an energizer; goals stimulate people to make an extra effort to achieve them.
3. Goals encourage team members to use their initiative to make effective decisions with long-term impacts. This often results in more efficient and successful working practices that are driven from the bottom up rather than by management.
4. Goals motivate employees to organize their time efficiently to maximize productivity.

Remember, the attainment of your own targets is highly dependent on your staff achieving the goals you have set them, so be careful to set goals that are constructive as well as productive.

Key Points

- The people who get recognition and promotion in organizations are usually the people who implement productive changes.
- Organize time efficiently by learning to delegate, minimize disruptions, and negotiate your workload.
- Learn to set goals that will inspire you and your team to make things happen.
- As a manager, you will be expected to set targets for your team members as part of their annual appraisal process.
- Properly specified goals are also essential to maintain team morale.
- The attainment of your own targets is highly dependent on your staff achieving the goals you have set them.

3 Goal Setting Theory

Professor Edwin A Locke (born 1938) is an American psychologist and a pioneer in goal setting theory. The American Association for Psychological Science has praised him, saying,

'Locke is the most published organizational psychologist in the history of the field. His pioneering research has advanced and enriched our understanding of work motivation and job satisfaction. The theory that is synonymous with his name, goal-setting theory, is perhaps the most widely-respected theory in industrial-organizational psychology.'

Locke developed his Goal Setting Theory in 1968 in order to explain human actions in specific work situations. The theory argues that goals and intentions drive human behavior. They also are determined by our values and beliefs.

The two most important findings of this theory are that setting specific goals (e.g. I want to earn \$500 more a month) generates higher levels of performance than setting vague goals (e.g. I want to earn more money). Goals that are more specific, and thus more challenging and harder to achieve, often have a direct and positive impact on performance. This relies on the notion that the harder the goal, the more a person will strive to work towards it. However, such influences on performance are mediated by two conditions:



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Firstly, the goal must be accepted and acknowledged; and secondly, feedback must be used to develop areas of weakness. Giving feedback on the strategies that are used to obtain goals is very important, especially for complex work, as challenging goals place emphasis on the final outcome rather than on performance strategies.



This allows weaknesses in performance to be overlooked which can be detrimental in the long term. Feedback is crucial to optimize results from setting goals by overcoming weaknesses as well as sustaining motivation and commitment to achieving the target.

Good feedback should:

- Be given in a positive context.
- Use constructive and positive language.
- Focus on behaviors and strategies.
- Be tailored to the needs of the individual.
- Be a two-way communication process.

The effectiveness of goal setting may be limited if team members cannot evaluate and improve upon their performance. It is therefore vital that people are aware of their performance level and if they are on track, to allow them to progress, as well as alter their performance strategies in areas of weakness.

There are three goal-setting methods detailed in this eBook:

- **4C F** – *Clarity, Challenge, Complexity, Commitment & Feedback.*
- **SMART** – *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic & Timely.*
- **Backward Goal Setting** – *work back from the end goal.*

These methods complement each other. The first, '4C F' is derived from the academic research of Dr Edwin Locke and Dr Gary Latham in the 1960s. This method encourages you to think about a goal in its widest sense and is complemented by using the second method, SMART, to then state the goal in a specific way.

Each method in isolation has both advantages and disadvantages, and so it is important to use these two methods together, as it is entirely possible that using one method on its own will produce a goal that is deficient in some way. Using both methods in tandem also gives the additional benefit that you can produce a 'goal statement' that best suits your circumstances and the culture of your organization.

For example, if a goal is set using the SMART method it may be either too complex or too simplistic. On the other hand, when using the '4C F' a goal statement may be produced that is not as clear as one produced by the SMART method.

The third method we will discuss is known as 'Backward Goal Setting' and as the name suggests, it uses the strategy of working backwards from what you want to achieve, which makes it easier to determine the individual steps that are needed.

This method is useful where the goal is either too complex to specify in one 'goal statement' or to see how realistic your goal is within the timeframe you have. It is also useful when the goal has been set for you and you need to break it down into manageable tasks before starting.

Key Points

- Goal-setting methods have their origins in the academic research of Dr Edwin Locke and Dr Gary Latham in the 1960s.
- Use the '4C F' method and the SMART method together to produce a 'goal statement'.
- Backward goal setting can be used where the goal is either too complex to specify in one 'goal statement' or it can be used to see how realistic your goal is within the timeframe you have.

4 Method 1 – 4C F

The work of Dr Edwin Locke and Dr Gary Latham in the 1960s stated that there are five fundamental principles for setting effective goals. They also said that the extent to which these principles existed within the goal related directly to the achievement of that goal. Those principles are:



If you choose to use this method to help set your goals then you will need to consider each principle in turn.

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4.1 Clarity

To help understand what you wish to achieve at this stage it is useful to look at the definition of the word 'clarity':

'Clearness or lucidity as to perception or understanding; freedom from indistinctness or ambiguity.'

Your goal should state in a clear and concise way exactly what you want to achieve. There should be no room for ambiguity. It also needs to specify a finite period of time in which you can accomplish this goal.

By stating clearly what your goal is, you are motivated to fulfill it and can easily identify the reward you gain with its completion. There is no disillusion or disappointment, because you know exactly what is required. There can be no misunderstanding as your goal is easy to measure.

To demonstrate the importance of having a specific goal, below are some examples of goals that lack clarity, with an example of how to alter them to ensure they are clear and easy to understand.



4.2 Challenge

Now that you have your clear goal it is important that your goal is also challenging. A challenge can be defined as:

‘A call or summons to engage in any contest, as of skill, strength.’

The greater the reward we will gain on attaining our goal, the more we are motivated to do so. This motivation becomes larger the more the goal is perceived to be challenging, allowing a greater sense of accomplishment once you have fulfilled the goal.



Whilst the goal needs to be ‘challenging’ it must also be a goal that you have sufficient confidence that you can achieve. If the challenge is seen as too great, then there will be a negative effect on your willingness to work towards the goal, and in some cases you may not even try! Any reward offered needs to be appropriate for the task and exceed your normal expectations.

Setting a goal that has the right degree of challenge is an essential skill for ensuring all your team members are motivated. With the correct reward being offered to a member of staff on completion of a goal, other team members will also become motivated to gain this reward too.

For example, consider the following goal:

‘Ensure 95% of sales orders are completed first time to gain maximum commission.’

This would be reasonably challenging if the current rate of orders completed were 75%, with the reason for most of the failures being incomplete data due to incorrect collecting and transcribing on the part of the sales person.

But, if instead the goal ‘20% of this month’s orders must include product X for the extra bonus to be awarded’ is set in an environment where product X normally accounts for 5% of all sales, then this goal could be seen as impossible. This goal would then have a negative effect on motivation rather than a positive one.

It could also reflect a poor understanding of product sales and the proportions of each in the overall sales figures. This illustrates the importance of having sufficient knowledge of the subject area when setting your own and others’ goals.

4.3 Complexity

One definition of the word complex is:

‘Complex – composed of many interconnected parts.’

A goal can comprise any number of interconnected parts as long as they form a coherent whole, which can be sensibly viewed as a single unit in its broadest terms.

The problem comes when a goal is too complex and the team member becomes confused about how best to achieve the goal. These feelings then result in poor motivation and often people resist and can even obstruct attaining the goal. The greater the degree of stress that results because of these feelings, the less likely it is that the individual will fulfill their goal.

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This increased complexity can often be a result of unforeseen circumstances that come to light whilst working to achieve the goal. To avoid these problems, communication between the person who set the original goal and the one who needs to attain the goal is essential. This is especially true in more technical roles.

For example, this could be true of the goal *'20% of this month's orders have to include product X for the extra bonus to be awarded'* where due to the technical nature of product X only 10% of all existing customers have systems capable of using it. This would make the goal unachievable.

Also, if the price of this product requires a board-level decision in 80% of sales, then this means that four weeks is an unrealistic timescale. This goal could be modified by saying *'...this quarter's orders...'* which would allow adequate time for a purchase of product X to be agreed at the appropriate level.

4.4 Commitment

Before anyone commits himself or herself to a goal they will probably want to see evidence that there are sufficient resources available. Without these resources they will not be able to achieve the desired goal and this is an essential element in gaining commitment.

The most productive way in which to obtain commitment to a goal is to actively involve the team member in the goal-setting process. By sharing your knowledge during this process the goal is likely to be clearer, be sufficiently challenging, and have an appropriate level of complexity.

One of the most effective ways management gain commitment from their staff is through the annual appraisal system where goals are discussed and agreed. As part of this exercise, the goals set will adhere to established expectations and rewards that can be offered.

For example, if you are the new manager of the sales team and from your investigations you know that the quality of order-taking is poor due to lack of detail, you can decide to set a goal to *'Ensure 95% of sales orders are completed first time to gain maximum commission.'* You can discuss this at your next team meeting and gain everyone's acceptance to commit to this goal.

4.5 Feedback

Once you have set a goal and delegated the task, it is vital that you not only monitor progress but also provide regular feedback to the team member. This is particularly important in the first few days because team members often feel uncomfortable asking for guidance once they have been delegated the task, assuming that it will reflect badly on them if they don't just 'get on with it.'

This can cause unnecessary anxiety if, as is often the case, they are unsure how exactly to proceed once they examine the task in detail. This usually happens when it becomes clear that there are several options available or when they become aware of an unforeseen problem.

Team members must have the opportunity to give you regular updates on their progress and have the chance to inform you of any unplanned obstacles that may have arisen, which need to be addressed.

The trick is to ask for and provide feedback without being viewed as interfering unnecessarily or showing any impatience if the team member is confused by something that you think should be clear. It is also important that feedback is given while there is still time to act upon it.



Feedback is a major contributor to motivation and empowers people by enabling them to build upon their successes; it also allows them to know that their efforts are appreciated. This should improve their performance and enable them to keep their problems and concerns in perspective.

For example, if the goal you have set is to '*Ensure 95% of sales orders are completed the first time to gain maximum commission*,' one of the causes for sales orders not being completed first time could be, hypothetically, that the IT system has insufficient lines in the address field to allow for customer's complete details to be entered, resulting in orders being returned.

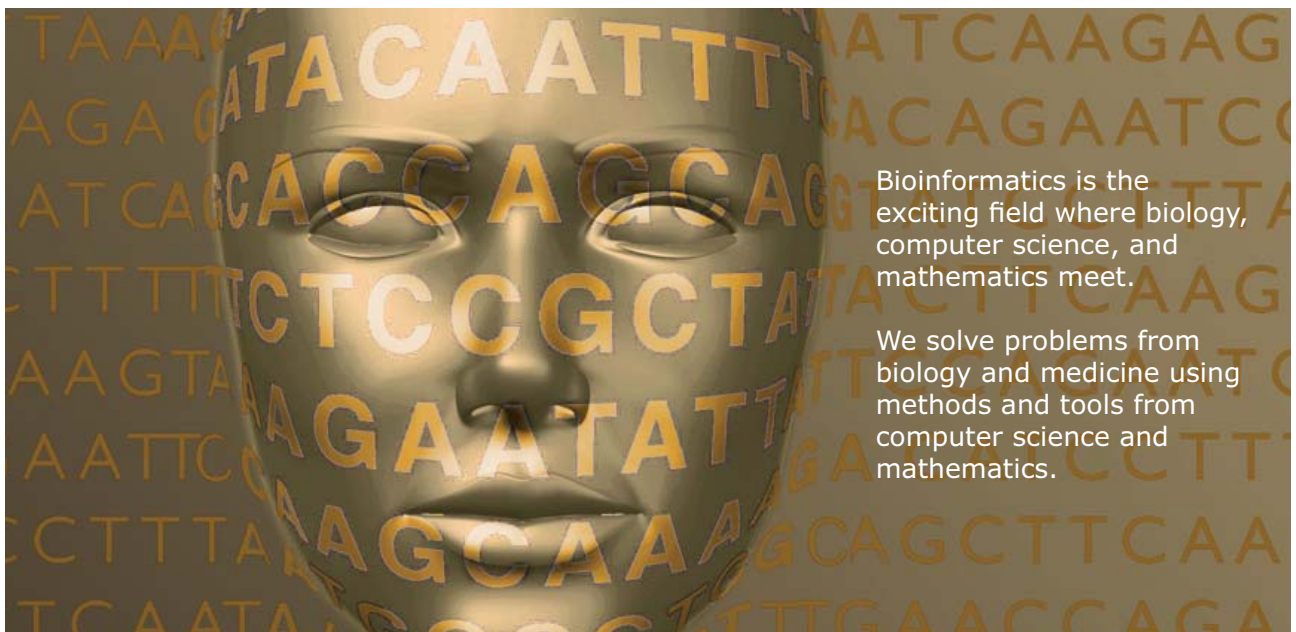
Without resolving the limitations of the IT system your team can never achieve the goal and this issue may never have come to light without feedback.

Key Points

- Locke and Latham's five principles should exist within the goal.
- Goals should be clear and concise with no room for ambiguity.
- The goal should be sufficiently challenging to engender a sense of accomplishment.
- There is nothing wrong with a complex goal provided that the interconnected parts form a coherent whole.
- Whoever is being set the goal must be committed to it.
- Once the task is underway, two-way feedback is necessary to keep it on track.



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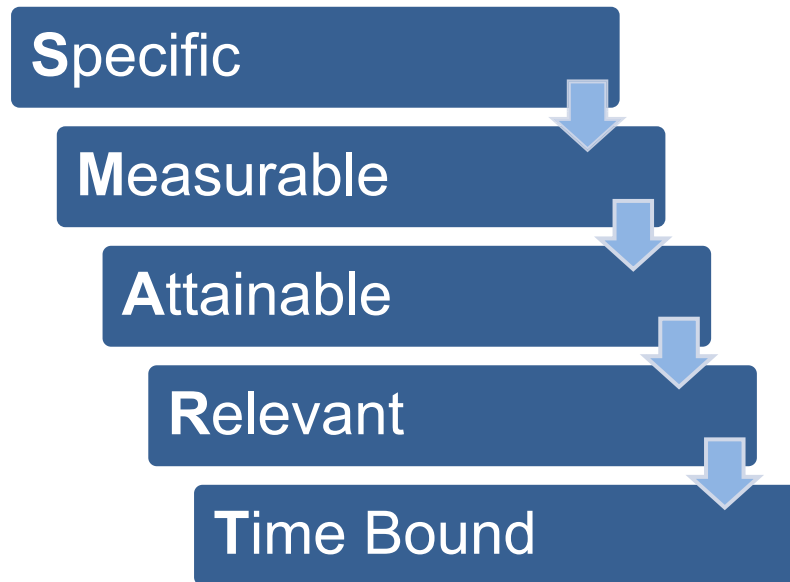
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5 Method 2 – SMART

The term SMART is an acronym for:



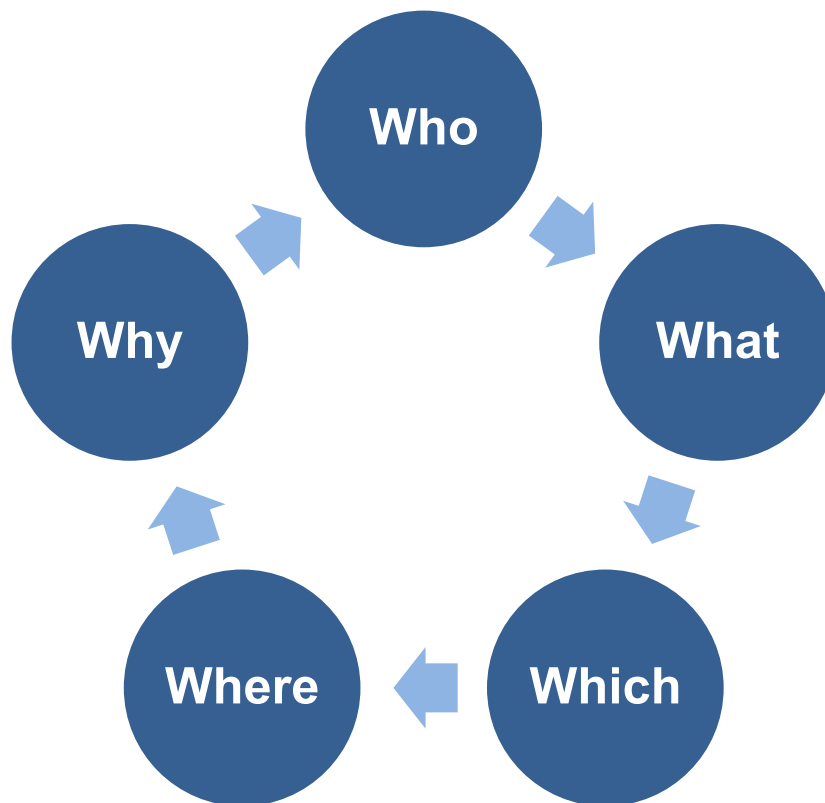
5.1 Specific

Very often, when you examine a particular goal, you will find that it can be broken down into separate, more specific goals. The first step in this process is to ask the five ‘W’ questions:

- **What:** What do I want to accomplish?
- **Why:** Specific reasons for, or purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.
- **Who:** Who is involved?
- **Where:** Identify a location.
- **Which:** Identify requirements and constraints.

In most cases only some of these will be relevant but you should mentally check through all of them to make sure that you are not missing anything.

For example, when considering the goal, ‘*Improve customer technical support enquiry processing*’ you should consider all of the following:



- What does ‘improve’ really mean; faster, more accurate, or some other measure?
- Why do we want to do this and what is the benefit to the organization?
- Who needs to take action and who will benefit as a result?
- Where will this be done?
- Which parts of the process will be affected?

In this example, you might decide that the biggest gains to the business will be achieved by reducing the time it takes for a customer to receive a return call from the relevant account manager.

You want to do this because some customers have been complaining about the time it takes to resolve technical issues. This information is appearing on Internet forums as well as user group meetings. You feel that it is damaging the reputation of the company.

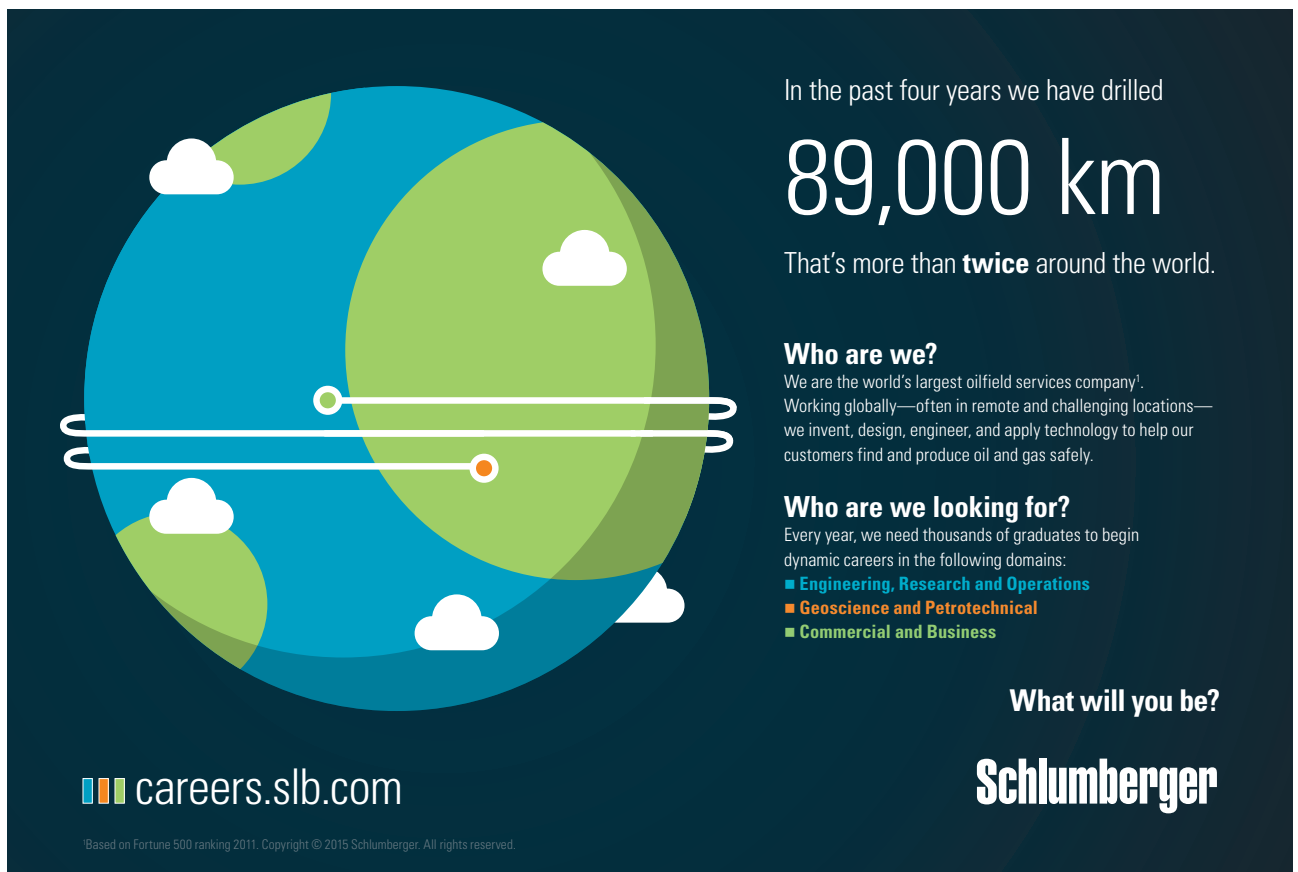
Action could be taken at several points in the process and at several places; the initial customer training could be improved, the website technical support could be more comprehensive, or you could implement a better system for covering the absence of particular account managers, and so on.

In fact thinking in these terms might lead you to consider setting several more specific goals rather than one overarching one. For example:

1. To extend initial customer training to include solutions to the five most frequent technical problems.
2. To update the technical support area of the website within two hours of a new problem becoming apparent.
3. To implement a formal and centralized system of covering the absence of account managers.

Each of these specific goals impacts on different people and different areas within the business. For example, Point 1 would involve the training department and the technical support department; Point 2 would involve the technical support department only; and Point 3 would involve the account managers and an administrator.

In this example, even though your own goal is ‘*to improve customer technical support enquiry processing*’ you have identified three separate tasks, which could be delegated once you have specified them more fully.



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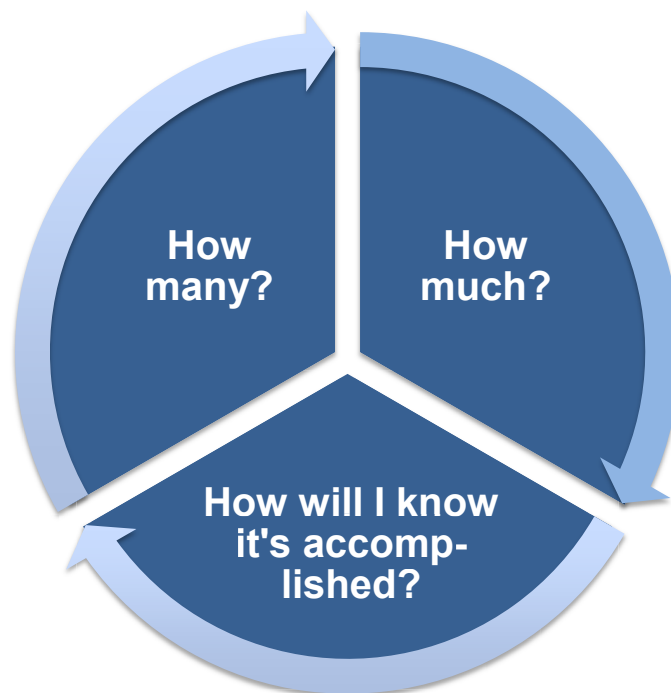
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5.2 Measurable

The second term stresses the need for concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of the goal. The thought behind this is that if a goal is not measurable, it is not possible to know whether a team is making progress towards successful completion.

Measuring progress will help a team stay on track, reach its target dates, and experience the sense of achievement that spurs it on to the continued effort that is required to reach the goal. A measurable goal will usually answer questions such as:



Whatever format best suits your particular goal will enable you to judge and assess your progress, as you move towards attaining it. It also gives you a real focus on what you have to achieve in certain timeframes, and offers you the opportunity to celebrate that achievement.

Using a measurement also allows a continual focal point for you as you work towards your goal, helping you to ascertain if the original deadline is still realistic. It is important to remain flexible throughout this process as often circumstances occur that you could not have foreseen.

5.3 Attainable or Achievable

There is little point in setting a goal that is either too difficult to achieve or beyond your capabilities, as this will only serve to de-motivate you and destroy your self-confidence. The importance of being able to accomplish a goal is equally vital when you are setting goals for others, as it is for yourself.

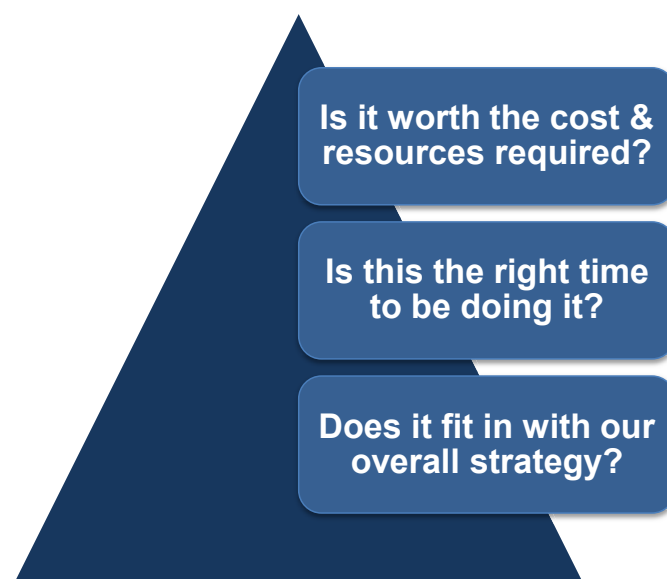
When setting a goal you must use your knowledge and current skills as a barometer for ensuring that the goal is ‘attainable.’

Setting yourself a goal that is too easily fulfilled will leave you feeling cheated once it is attained. This is because you didn’t feel sufficient, if any, ‘challenge’ was present in the process of accomplishing it. The more experience you have in setting your own goals, the more adept you will become at striking the necessary balance between your goal being challenging and it being attainable.

When setting ‘attainable’ goals in the workplace you must also ensure that sufficient resources are at your disposal and that your workload can accommodate this new requirement. If you are unable to alter either your resources or workload then you will need to alter your goal to a lower level, or address the resource constraint, so that your goal is achievable.

5.4 Relevant

Goals that are relevant to your boss, your team, and your organization will receive the needed support. A relevant goal can answer ‘yes’ to these questions:

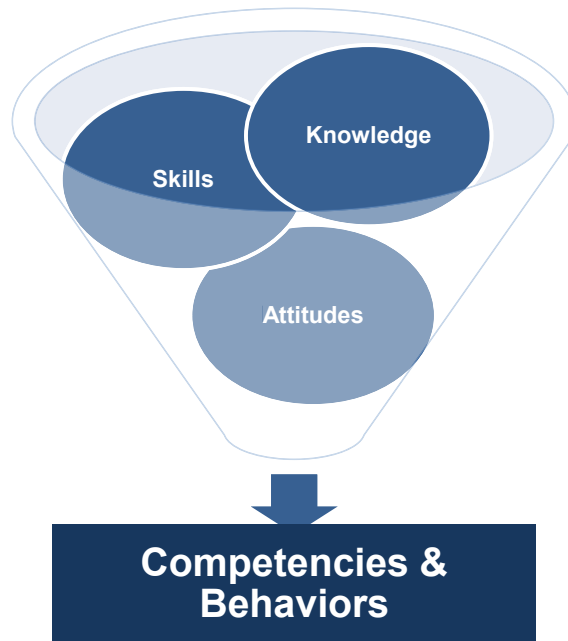


Relevant goals drive the team, department, and organization forward. A goal that supports or is in alignment with other goals would be considered a relevant goal.

It is careful analysis of what you want to achieve and where you wish to be that will determine the relevance of your goals. In the workplace, as part of this process, you will need to review any goal you establish against the organization’s mission statement and your own personal objectives, as well as the role you perform.

You will also have to consider whether this goal is best suited to you and your role, or whether it would be more appropriate for it to be assigned to one of your team.

Any objective you set within the working environment should enhance a person's knowledge, skills, or attributes (KSA) in some way to bring them overall benefit in terms of their competencies and behaviors.



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For example, consider the following: *'I want to understand how to manage a budget before the start of this financial year so that I can apply for a manager's role next year.'*

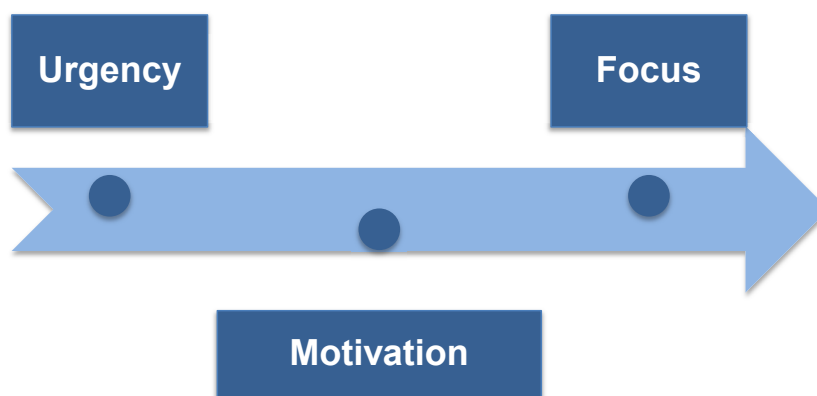
A simple test to discover a goal's relevance can be judged by asking:

'If I don't accept this goal is there any detrimental effect on, or is an opportunity missed for, the organization or an individual?'

If the answer to this question is 'No' then there is no benefit to the goal or relevance and so it should be discarded so that you are not distracted from those goals that bring you a KSA benefit.

5.5 Time Bound

It is essential that goals have a timeframe or target date. A commitment to a deadline helps a team focus their efforts towards completion of the goal and prevents goals from being overtaken by other, unrelated routine tasks that may arise. A time-restrained goal is intended to establish a sense of urgency.



It is this aspect of using the SMART technique to decide upon a goal that brings it into focus and offers a challenge. A deadline forces you to concentrate your efforts with a degree of urgency so that you can celebrate your success when you accomplish the goal. The time restriction you impose provides the necessary impetus to keep you motivated to make things happen.

5.6 SMART Summary

Being able to recognize when you have achieved your goal is the sign that you have set a SMART goal that matches all the five aspects it requires. Clear goals are also extremely useful tools in assisting you in motivating and informing other individuals who may help you to achieve your goal. Indeed, it is for this reason that sharing your goals, especially in the workplace, is highly advantageous and motivates and focuses not only yourself but others too.

In team or project environments, SMART goals are essential. The clarity of the goal, along with its defined measures and relevance to the project, ensure all members know exactly what is required of them and by when. With team goals it is the combinations of each person's KSAs that ensure that the project goal is accomplished.

Key Points

- SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time Bound.
- Goals should be as specific as possible, even if this means breaking them down.
- If a goal is not measurable, it is not possible to know whether a team is making progress toward successful completion.
- A goal needs to be achievable, but at the same time it must not be too easy.
- A goal that supports or is in alignment with other goals would be considered a relevant goal.
- A time-bound goal is intended to establish a sense of urgency.



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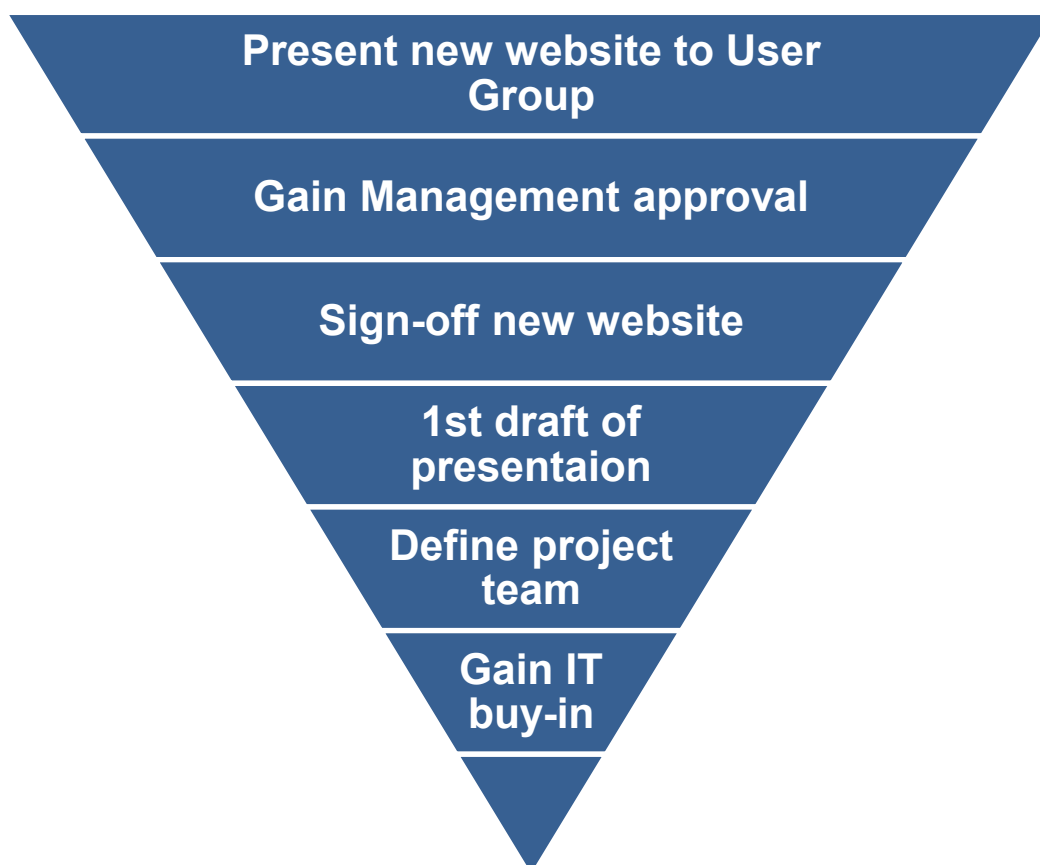
6 Method 3 – Backwards Goal Setting

The third method of goal setting we will discuss is known as ‘Backwards Goal Setting.’ As the name suggests, the principle is to work backwards from what you want to achieve. By working backwards from your end target, you can then establish all of the steps that will be required to be taken.

This method will quickly demonstrate how realistic your goal is within the timeframe you have chosen to work within.

For example, today is March 28 and your goal is – *‘To present the new corporate website at the next User Group, on May 12.’*

Your first step in the Backwards Goal Setting process would take into account the high-level activities needed to attain this goal.



Once this has been completed, the next stage of this process is to take into account **all** of the required activities this would involve, highlight any dependencies, and then finally define necessary timescales for each activity.

The end result could look something like the table below.

| Goal: To present the new corporate website at the Next User Group, on May 12. | | |
|--|---------------------|------------------|
| Details | Dependencies | Timescale |
| Present new website to the User Group | | May 12 |
| Gain management approval of User Group presentation | Mgmt Team | May 9 |
| Show final presentation to manager prior to management meeting on May 9 | Manager | May 7 |
| Sign off final version of new website | IT Project team | May 6 |
| Complete final presentation | | May 5 |
| Review progress with Project team | IT Project team | April 22 |
| Produce second draft of presentation | | April 20 |
| Review progress with Project team | IT Project team | April 12 |
| Produce first draft of presentation | | April 10 |
| Define key benefits to Users of the new website design | | April 2 |
| Gain agreement from IT project team that new website is completed by May 6 | IT Project team | March 30 |
| Agree to present new website at next User Group in May with manager | Manager | March 28 |

Using this method you can also swiftly identify your key milestones and any dependencies that may exist in order for your goal to be achieved. By working in this manner, you may also detect activities that otherwise would have been overlooked if you had not been using the method.

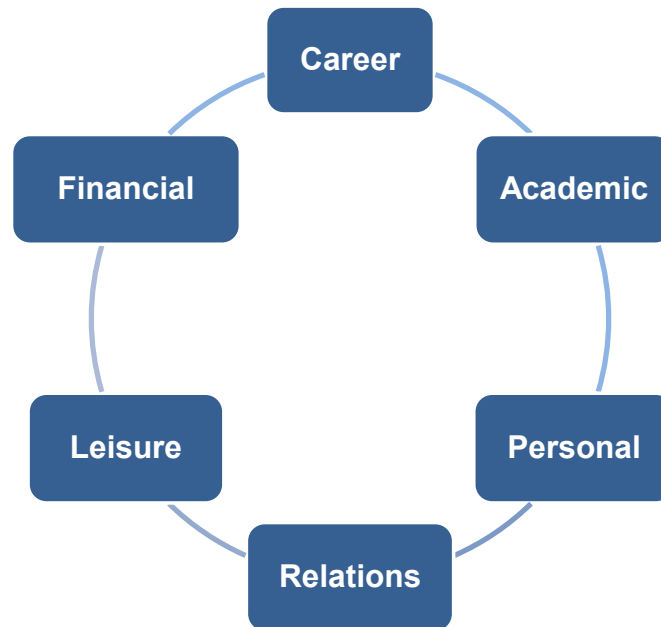
Those who favor this method of goal setting also feel that it keeps you focused on working effectively and incorporates only those resources you currently have at your disposal. By concentrating on the activities in this backwards manner you are not distracted with unnecessary activities and discern only those that contribute to fulfilling your goal.

Key Points

- By using this method you can swiftly identify key milestones and dependencies.
- This method keeps you focused on working effectively and incorporates only those resources you currently have at your disposal.

7 Prioritizing Your Personal Goals

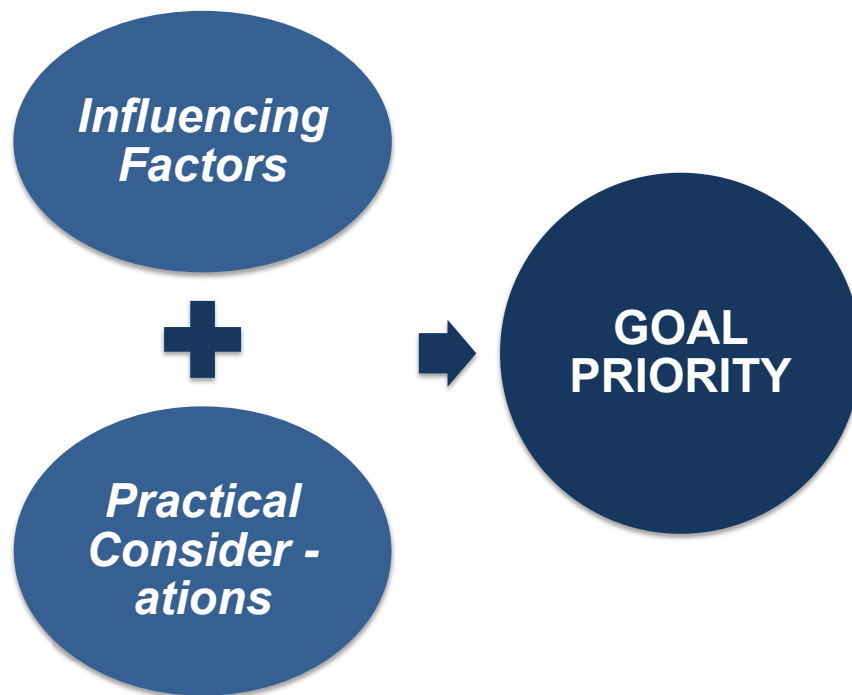
If you have only one goal you need to achieve to successfully realize your aspiration then life is simple.



However, for most people, there will be several different aspirations, which cover each aspect of their life. Some examples could be:

- Career – *become a director by 35 years old.*
- Academic – *attain an MBA.*
- Personal – *become fit or lose weight.*
- Relationship – *find a partner or start a family.*
- Leisure – *visit Australia or go on a cruise.*
- Financial – *pay off car loan or mortgage.*

It is unrealistic to expect to be able to achieve all of these simultaneously, so it is fundamental to decide which aspirations are the main priorities. Some of your aspirations may be linked to each other (e.g. you may want to become a director but know this will be accomplished much more easily if you have an MBA), or they could conflict with one another (e.g. you can't go to Australia this year because of your car loan payments).



To be able to turn these aspirations into goals using one of the above methods, you will have to assign a hierarchy to them. This ranking enables you to work effectively and rationally in attaining those goals that are most important and aid in you completing others.

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Each person's individual circumstances will influence how they prioritize their goals.

As you work through the process of putting your goals into a hierarchy you will take into account the practicalities you face in attaining each goal. You will also look at how many factors that may be influencing your successful attainment of a goal are within your own control.

As you weigh each goal against these two categories you will develop a ranking for each goal. By working through all your goals in this fashion, the resulting list will provide you with your goal priorities.

When you arrive at your list of goals ranked by the order of importance, you then have to determine whether there are too many. It is important to remember that having too many goals can become distracting, and is often unrealistic.

By concentrating your effort on the goals that are the most achievable within your set timescales, and for which there are available resources, you will be able to focus on the correct number of goals that enable you to work effectively. It is important to inform others of your intent, which can then help prevent interruptions.

Finally, by listing the actions required to meet your goal, you will be provided with an action plan. This plan may look something like the example below and will help you to monitor and review your progress, whilst highlighting where it may be necessary to make amendments.

So, for example, your action plan to 'become a director by the age of 35 years,' could look something like this table:

| Goal: To become a director by the age of 35 years. | | |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| Action Required | Target Date | Actual Date |
| 1. Research best places to obtain MBA in your specialist subject. | End January | January 21 |
| 2. Ask your director where he obtained his MBA. | Mid-January | January 10 |
| 3. Choose best place to enrol for your MBA course. | End February | March 3 |
| 4. Sign onto an MBA course. | End May | May 28 |
| 5. Ask your director to recommend a mentor for you whilst on MBA. | End June | |
| 6. Etc. | | |

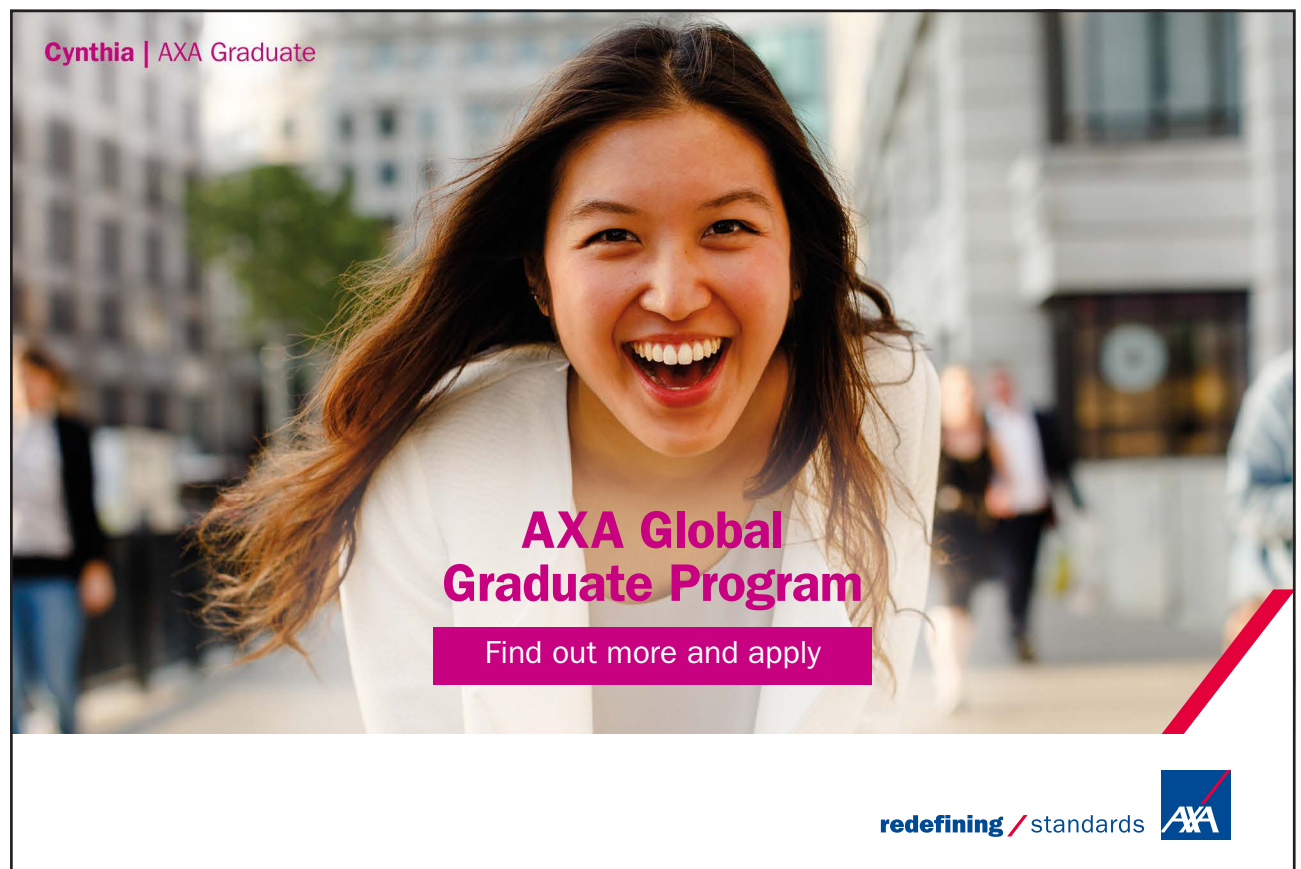
Using the following assumptions that:

- You are 28 years old.
- You have a first class degree.
- You know your director plans to retire in 4 years.
- You know he hasn't yet chosen his replacement.
- Today is June 2.

Your action plan then shows that your planning has proven to be almost 100% accurate so far, with all but one of your deadlines being achieved ahead of your set date. The only action you were late on was Action 3, which although three days late, has not impacted any of the subsequent actions. You also know the reason for this delay was, for example, the fact that you had flu, and so was a circumstance out of your control.

This is a very simplistic example but illustrates how this visual reminder of your goal and actions maintains your focus and motivation effectively, so that you will attain your MBA. It would also quickly show you any problems that may arise, that could potentially distract you from attaining your goal and would therefore allow you to ask for the cooperation of colleagues or friends to help prevent these issues from arising.

Finally, remember that by setting yourself goals, you will work more effectively and be motivated towards achieving them. Having a goal will also help you to focus your efforts on what is relevant and productive, whilst avoiding unnecessary distraction.



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