

The Most Effective Goals are Stated in the Positive and are SMART

Positive goals focus on what you will do, as opposed to stop doing. Examples (stated loosely for now) include being more punctual, completing additional tasks and improving fitness. The negative versions of these goals might instead focus on not being late, spending less time online and not overeating.

It should be fairly obvious that positive goals are superior to negative ones because they are clearer and more motivating. When stated in the positive, goals point us in a specific direction and allow us to measure ourselves continually towards that end.

Using punctuality as an example, we can determine what standard we will set. By "standard," we mean how we are defining "punctual" and the frequency and/or circumstances to which we will measure our performance. Then, take purposeful action to ensure success. If, by contrast, we set out to "stop being late," there is little to drive us to succeed.

One way by which we can get closer towards actualizing our potential is to set SMART goals.

There are a few different versions of the acronym SMART. Perhaps the most popular one is this:

- **Specific:** Well-defined, in that you know exactly what you seek to achieve
- **Measurable:** Quantifiable in a way that helps determine whether the goal has been achieved
- **Attainable:** A goal that is within reach, largely because of your deep desire to attain it
- **Rewarding:** fulfillment of the goals should provide you with a feeling of satisfaction and achievement (Note: many put "realistic" or "relevant" here)
- **Time-bound:** set to a timeframe to ensure continued, focused efforts towards attainment.

SMART can also stand for:

- **Specific:** See above
- **Meaningful:** Something that is important to you and will serve to motivate you;
- **Agreed-upon:** The task should be agreed-to by those tasked to complete it;

- **Results-focused:** The goal should be written in terms of outcomes;
- **Trackable:** Progress should be trackable to determine that efforts are on track.

And then there's this application of the "ART" of SMART:

- **Accountability:** To succeed, you need to be held accountable, such as by a person or a program that you sign up for;
- **Resonance:** The goal should reverberate within you, demanding attention;
- **Thrilling:** It should be big, something that excites you and keeps you going.

As you can see, it works particularly well with a larger, more involved goal. For example, running a marathon for the first time or writing a book. Both are thrilling goals that can easily resonate. To be held accountable, find others that will keep you on track and motivate you, or a program to commit to. The more accountable you feel, the sooner and better you will get the job done.

Perhaps the most important letter in the SMART acronym is "S," which stands for specific. "Specific" is the who, what, why and how of the goal.

- Who will do the work?
- What will be done?
- Why that is important?
- How you will achieve the goal?
- How doing this will make you feel?

Writing out your goals

Goals should be simplistically written and should clearly define what you are going to do.

Say, for example, you seek to concentrate more deeply on a specific task, such as writing a proposal. To do that, set specific goals of what you will do on and for how long. Include elements that will keep you from becoming distracted and/or motivate you to stay on task.

It may read something like this:

*"In order to complete the proposal (specific goal), I will set aside 30 minutes at the outset of each morning for the next four days for in-depth, uninterrupted work. **(what)***

*"By completing this important task first thing in the morning, I can do it while my mind is freshest and still attend to many other tasks and responsibilities afterwards. **(why)***

*"During this time, I will not answer phone calls, respond to emails or texts, or engage in any form of web surfing. **(how it's achieved)***

*"When the proposal is completed, I will feel as if a huge burden has been lifted from my shoulders and that I am infinitely closer to closing this deal." **(how you'll feel)***

Determine how you will measure success, in terms of your ability to work for X minutes without interruption, complete a percentage of the task in Y minutes, or something similar.

Make sure that the goals that you set are attainable and not beyond the pale of what is presently realistic (this, of course, can and should change as you grow in this area). Then, set a timeframe for your goal to keep you on task and moving in the right direction.

Detail how this goal is rewarding. In this example, the reward may be that others get what they need in a timely fashion and/or that you don't need to stay late to get it done.

Now, let's look at how this breaks down in SMART terms.

Components and details

- **Specific?** Yes. (30 minutes of uninterrupted work at the beginning of each day for four days.)
- **Measurable?** Without question. (Did I work for the stated duration without interruption or not? A timekeeping app may be useful here.)
- **Attainable?** Indeed. (I can block out the time on my calendar and leave my phone off or set to silent.)
- **Rewarding?** Absolutely! (What a difference it'll make when I am done with this proposal.)
- **Time-bound?** Check. (30 minutes a day over four days.)

Other "goal-worthy" outcomes might include:

- Becoming more knowledgeable about work-related or other topics;
- Better relationships with co-workers;
- Improved fitness and weight loss;
- Stopping work by 6 p.m. each evening.

The key is the 3 C's -- clarify, contract and commit -- so that this goal does not become another flash of inspiration that quickly fades into distant memory.

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