

S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting Your Road Map to Success

We don't all need fancy programs, day planners, or electronic devices to make our goals a reality. The fact is people were successful at setting goals before the electronic age using just paper and pencil. I think it's safe to say that we can do the same thing, potentially even better without all the white noise that computer software, the Internet, and technology provides.

SMART Goal Setting

The system of S.M.A.R.T. Goal setting has been used for decades. It's difficult not to find a self improvement program from the eighties or nineties that didn't incorporate SMART goal setting as a key factor to success. Why is that? Well more than likely it's because the system works. Follow the rules laid out in the SMART system and it ensures that the goals your set are realistic, timely, and achievable.

S. M. A. R. T. Overview

S is for Specific

This is the foundation of your goal. You need to set a very specific goal just as you need a strong foundation when building a house. If your goal isn't specific enough you'll have a difficult time achieving it to your satisfaction. The same way if you pour a faulty foundation for a new building the rest of the structure will suffer.

Setting specific goals is all about avoiding ambiguity. Goal statements need to be concise, to the point and measurable. A goal of saving money or losing weight can be a SMART goal, however phrased in this fashion won't set you up for success. Try to quantify goal statements: I want to save \$1000.00 dollars, or I want to lose 20 pounds. If you create an open ended goal it's easy to avoid achieving it. By applying a quantity or number to your goal you can measure your success, set a deadline, and break your progress down into smaller steps.

Once you have a specific goal in mind write it down. Once a goal is written down you'll find it's more concrete in your mind.

M is for Measurable

If you've taken the advice above and set a specific goal that is some how quantified then this second step should be easy. If you're unable to measure a goal how will you know when you've achieved it? Might sound stupid but consider the above example, if you set a goal to lose weight how will you know when you've achieved your goal? When you've lost one pound, ten pounds, one hundred pounds? Starting to see the point.

For some goals, such as the weight loss example, you might very well begin to lose weight but you're never quite sure when you've achieved your goal. It's human nature to want to achieve things, we enjoy setting a goal working towards it and knowing that we completed our task. There doesn't have to be any big prize at the end of a journey, but in the case of goal setting there are benefits we'll recognize upon completion. This only makes sense other wise why would we set that goal? Why is all this important? Because it illustrates why your goals need to have a finite end point, they need to be measurable. Without a form of measure we can't evaluate our progress.

Example:

I want to lose 25 pounds before June (this is a measurable goal)

I want to lose weight this year (not that measurable)

A is for Attainable

When you set a goal that you have a burning desire to achieve you'll discover you're willing to go that extra mile, make that little sacrifice, and notice opportunities you might not have noticed before. You're committed to the goal, and are motivated by the outcome once you achieve it. What does this have to do with making attainable goals? EVERYTHING. Consider this, if you set goals that are difficult to achieve, and you somehow know that it's a long stretch for you to accomplish, 9 times out of 10 you won't do it. When setting SMART goals you should make a conscious effort to set goals that are a little bit of a stretch for you, but not out of reach.

For instance, losing 15 pounds in one week just isn't possible right. This isn't an attainable goal you might really want to achieve it, but the fact is no one can lose 15 pounds (in a healthy way) during one week. Now in contrast you could lose 1 pound per week for 15 weeks. This would be an attainable goal that will keep you motivated because you want the outcome of losing the weight, and feeling better about your health and appearance.

The point, challenge yourself enough so you're driven to achieve the goal. However don't set yourself up for failure by setting a goal that you subconsciously know is out of reach.

R is for Realistic

Now I know we just talked about setting attainable goals, and making a goal realistic, they somewhat go hand in hand. Don't confuse setting realistic goals with "easy" goals. We're not suggesting you shouldn't challenge yourself. What you should pay attention to is, based on your current situation is this goal realistic. Let's look at an example.

Saving \$100 per week is an attainable goal based on average income etc. However if you have student loans, credit card debt, a big car payment and struggling to make ends meet week to week it's not realistic for you. Where would you find another \$100 per week out of your cash flow for savings. A more realistic goal might be to pay \$100 a week on your highest interest credit card for 15 weeks until it's paid off.

Goals need to be doable for you in your current situation. You need to write out a plan that makes each goal realistic in your terms, detailing each step you need to do to accomplish it.

T is for Timely

Timely is probably the most important step behind setting a specific goal. While creating goals that are measurable is a must, if the goal isn't timely then it's tough to measure. Every goal you set should have a time frame attached to it. That time frame might be 1 day, 1 week, 1 month, or even 1 year but a time for completion must be set.

Without a completion date/time set your goal really isn't specific. A goal of losing 15 pounds "sometime" isn't

very specific is it. If you tie in a time frame of 3 months to lose that weight you set smaller checkpoints of losing 1 pound, 5 pounds etc. by week or month.

Bringing it all together

I hope after reading this far you can see how all five points of the SMART goal setting system tie together and cover all loose ends for the goal setting process. By creating specific goals you should also ensure that they're both timely and measurable. By setting a time line for completion you cover the basis that the goals are attainable and realistic.

The one thing that cannot be covered by the system is you. You need to police yourself to ensure you're being realistic with what you can accomplish. No system can do this for you. If you know you're not going to have a lot of free time in coming weeks then setting a goal to read 3 books in the next six weeks by reading for 1 ½ hours per day isn't realistic for you. You need to be able to recognize when you're being too ambitious with your goal setting, and when to re-schedule and re-evaluate a given goal.

Goal setting takes an immense amount of self discipline, and honesty. When we skip steps, get lazy, or don't accomplish a goal we're only hurting ourselves. Don't expect any goal setting system, software, or program to help you overcome your own lack of discipline.

Goal Setting Software and Tools to Help

The most simplistic tool you can use to help plan your smart goals is a pen and paper. The last page of this report has a sample table outlining the 5 steps to creating a successful SMART goal. However as we move further into our age of technology there have been several software and computer based tools to come along that help us manage and set goals.

For those of us that love organizing things with our computers goal setting software is perfect. Most programs will organize your thoughts in creating a specific, measurable, and timely goal. Breaking a large goal down into smaller more manageable steps is simple with software and many programs will provide daily, weekly, and monthly reminders of what needs to be done when, and when you should review your progress.

The downside to using goal setting software is that some of us who love to organize can get tied up in the details of ensuring everything is perfect in the software and never really starting down the path of achieving our goal. This is sometimes known as analysis paralysis, where you analyze the goal to death break it down into the smallest most manageable parts, but never actually take action on the plan. Remember goal setting is a wonderful tool to help you achieve success in every area of your life, but you need to be prepared to take action on the things that need to be done to make the goal a reality.

Wrapping it up

Armed with your new understanding don't hesitate set a goal today. the best thing you can do for goal setting success is take action. This isn't the same as not thinking things through, but don't procrastinate because life won't wait. Success comes to those who take action, so don't be left behind. Use the SMART system outlined in this report to set a small to medium sized goal, then do it again, again, and again. Once you begin to achieve you're goals with this simple system you'll wonder what you ever did without it.

SMART Goals Worksheet Form

<i>S-Specific</i>	<i>M-Measurable</i>	<i>A-Achievable</i>	<i>R-Relevant</i>	<i>T-Timely</i>