

Using SMART Criteria to Develop Goals and Objectives

A useful way of making goals and objectives more powerful and measurable is to use **SMART criteria**:

- S** Specific
- M** Measurable
- A** Achievable (attainable, action-oriented)
- R** Relevant (realistic, reasonable)
- T** Time-bound

Specific

This criterion stresses the need for a specific goal/objective rather than a more general one. This means the objective is clear and unambiguous; without vagaries and platitudes. To make objectives specific, they must tell a team exactly what is expected, why it is important, who is involved, where it is going to happen, and which attributes are important.

A specific objective will usually answer the five 'W' questions:

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

Measurable

The second criterion stresses the need for concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the objective. The thought behind this is that if an objective is not measurable, it is not possible to know whether a team is making progress toward successful completion. Measuring progress is supposed to help a team stay on track, reach its target dates and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs it on to continued effort required to reach the ultimate goal.

A measurable objective will usually answer questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?
- Indicators should be quantifiable.

Achievable

The third criterion stresses the importance of developing goals/objectives that are attainable. While a goal/objective may be ambitious, it cannot be unachievable. That is, it should be neither out of reach nor below standard performance, since these may be considered meaningless. Setting objectives at the right level is key.

An achievable objective will usually answer the question “How?”

- How realistic is the goal based on other constraints?
- How can the goal be accomplished?

When you identify goals/objectives that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills and resources to reach them. The theory states that attainable objectives may cause goal-setters to identify previously overlooked opportunities to bring themselves closer to the achievement of their goals.

Relevant

The fourth criterion stresses the importance of choosing goals that matter. A bank manager's goal to "Make 50 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches by 2pm" may be specific, measurable, attainable and time-bound but lacks relevance. Many times you will need support to accomplish a goal: resources, a champion voice, someone to knock down obstacles. Goals that are relevant to your boss, your team, your organization will receive that needed support.

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

A relevant goal can answer yes to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match our other efforts/needs?
- Are you the right person?
- Is it applicable in the current socio-economic environment?

Time-bound

The fifth criterion stresses the importance of grounding goals/objectives within a time-frame, giving them a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps a team focus their efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. This part of the SMART goal criteria is intended to prevent goals from being overtaken by the day-to-day crises that invariably arise in an organization. A time-bound goal is intended to establish a sense of urgency.

A time-bound goal will usually answer the question

- When?
- What can I do six months from now?
- What can I do six weeks from now?
- What can I do today?