

# A Guide for Writing S.M.A.R.T. Goals

## What are S.M.A.R.T. Goals?

- Statements of the important results you are working to accomplish
- Designed in a way to foster clear and mutual understanding of what constitutes expected levels of performance and successful professional development

## What are the Reasons for Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals?

S.M.A.R.T. goal setting actually drives you to achieve what you want. Goal setting may ensure success, but a S.M.A.R.T. goal definitely achieves much more. Here are some reasons for setting S.M.A.R.T. goals.

### **1. They Let You Focus**

S.M.A.R.T. goal setting has such an appeal because of a focus on goal setting. You can focus and just look at one thing instead of looking at many things at a time. No doubt there are so many things that you need to do every day that might divert your attention; for this reason, it becomes necessary for you to set goals to focus well.

### **2. Gives You a Clear Direction**

When you do not set goals, you are actually driving on a road where you do not know your destination. On the contrary, when you set goals, it provides a straight path and a clear direction as where you need to go. Knowing what you really want will lead toward the path of success. However, you need to ensure that your goal is not ambiguous or vague or else it will confuse you. Explain your goal, choosing the right words to excite and motivate you towards working for it.

### **3. Identifies Priorities**

S.M.A.R.T. goals help you in identifying and reminding you of your priorities. It is very likely that you do not stray away when you set a goal. This is because when you set goals, you are regularly reminded about priorities. You can surely reach your goals by accomplishing your priorities but first, you need to identify those priorities. Also, it is a good way to write them down and post them in front of yourself so that you are reminded about them every day.

### **4. Time Management**

You can be successful in managing your time if you set S.M.A.R.T. goals. The “T” in the S.M.A.R.T. goal trains and helps you manage time, especially for the major projects you are working on. When you set goals, you set priorities too and in this way, you work through the

priorities that are important by completing them in a timely manner and then start working on the others, which ultimately trains you to manage time.

### **5. Gives You a Feeling of Fulfillment**

Nothing can be better and more satisfying than doing something in a timely manner. Recall your school days; were you the first one to finish your class work while the other students were still busy doing it? How did you feel? You felt fulfilled and happy for being the fastest in the class. Similarly, when you set goals and achieve them on time, you feel happy and of course, it fuels you up to do even better in the future, setting up more goals and achieving them all successfully.

### **How do I decide the right scope for my S.M.A.R.T. Goals? (How big? How many?)**

- S.M.A.R.T. goals are meant to address all of your major job responsibilities.
- Remember, goals are intended to focus attention and resources on what is most important so that you can be successful in achieving your priorities.

### **Common types of goals are to:**

- Increase something
- Make something
- Improve something
- Reduce something
- Save something
- Develop someone (yourself!)

### **Where to start?**

1. Start by thinking about your whole job and the broad areas (or “buckets”) of responsibility and results for which you are accountable.
2. Develop a goal statement for each bucket. To get the scope right, remember to focus on end results not tasks.
3. Goals should be high level enough to encompass the core outcomes for which you are responsible, but specific and clear enough so you will be able to measure success.
4. Goals should be on-going job responsibilities and any new projects, assignments, priorities or initiatives that are specific to this performance cycle.
5. Having too many goals can be an indicator that your goals are scoped at too low a level and are focused more on tasks than on end results.
6. If it seems that your goals are becoming too numerous and task-oriented, it may be helpful to consider combining several goal statements into a broader outcome area.

## **S.M.A.R.T. Goal Criteria:**

**Specific** goals are clear and state “what”, the “Why” and the “how” the employee needs to accomplish. Specific goals include detailed scope and nature of what is to be accomplished.

**Measurable** goals define the objective to a definite level of precision. Measures should be credible and quantitative, or at least allow for determining if the goal is completed or not. Metrics may also be qualitative in nature i.e. levels of service; timeliness.

Measurable goals should be measurable so employees have tangible evidence that they have accomplished the goal. Usually, the entire goal statement is a measure for the project, but there are usually several short-term or smaller measurements built into the goal.

**Attainable** goals should be challenging but not impractical. They should “stretch” employee performance. Attainable goals should be challenging, but not impractical. They should stretch the employee slightly so they feel challenged, but defined well enough so they can achieve them. Employees must possess the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to achieve the goal.

Employees can meet almost any goal when the goal is thoughtfully planned and a timeframe is established that allows the employee to carry out those steps. Achievable goals motivate employees. Impossible goals demotivate them.

**Realistic** goals should measure outcomes, not activities and can be accomplished given other goals and priorities. Goals should be prioritized in terms of importance, and the employee should be aware of which goals are most important.

**Time-related** goals include a deadline and milestones for completion. They may also include checkpoints along the way. Time-related goals should be linked to a timeframe that creates a practical sense of urgency.

## How to write your S.M.A.R.T. goal:

### S – Specific

When setting a goal, be specific about what you want to accomplish. Think about this as the mission statement for your goal. This isn't a detailed list of how you're going to meet a goal, but it should include an answer to the popular 'w' questions:

- **Who** – Consider who needs to be involved to achieve the goal (this is especially important when you're working on a group project).
- **What** – Think about exactly what you are trying to accomplish and don't be afraid to get very detailed.
- **When** – You'll get more specific about this question under the "time-bound" section of defining S.M.A.R.T. goals, but you should at least set a time frame.
- **Where** – This question may not always apply, especially if you're setting personal goals, but if there's a location or relevant event, identify it here.
- **Which** – Determine any related obstacles or requirements. This question can be beneficial in deciding if your goal is realistic. For example, if the goal is to open a baking business, but you've never baked anything before, that might be an issue. As a result, you may refine the specifics of the goal to be "Learn how to bake in order to open a baking business."
- **Why** – What is the reason for the goal? When it comes to using this method for employees, the answer will likely be along the lines of company advancement or career development.

▲ "S" actions may include:

Oversee /Update /Write  
Coordinate /Upgrade /Process  
Supervise /Develop /Provide  
Manage /Create /Maintain  
Plan /Implement /Reconcile  
Support /Evaluate /Direct  
Transition /Produce /Administer

**Note** that this list does not include verbs like "improve," "reduce," or "increase" (e.g. "Improve customer service" or "reduce cost." These imply the direction that you want a result to move in, but do not do much to explain the role or specific action that you will take to accomplish this change.

## **M – Measurable**

What metrics are you going to use to determine if you meet the goal? This makes a goal more tangible because it provides a way to measure progress. If it's a project that's going to take a few months to complete, then set some milestones by considering specific tasks to accomplish. Milestones are a series of steps along the way that when added up will result in the completion of your main goal.

- As the “M” in S.M.A.R.T. states, there should be a source of information to measure or determine whether a goal has been achieved.
- The M is a direct (or possibly indirect) indicator of what success for a particular goal will look like.
- Sometimes measurement is difficult and managers and employees will need to work together to identify the most relevant and feasible data sources and collection methods.
- Data collection efforts needed to measure a goal can be included in that goal's action plan.
- Even if a perfect, direct measurement source is not immediately feasible for a given goal, the discussion about the desired end result (why this goal is important) and what the measurement options are (what success might look like) is an important and valuable part of performance planning.
- Measurement methods can be both quantitative (productivity results, money saved or earned, etc.) and qualitative (client testimonials, surveys, etc.).

### **Typical Data Types/Data Collection Methods include:**

- Quality/accuracy rates /Automated reports
- Amounts produced /Audits, tests
- Revenue generated /Surveys
- Productivity rates /Work products, samples
- Customer Satisfaction /Other documents

## **A – Attainable**

This focuses on how important a goal is to you and what you can do to make it attainable and may require developing new skills and changing attitudes. The goal is meant to inspire motivation, not discouragement. Think about:

- how to accomplish the goal,
- if you have the tools/skills needed,
- if not, consider what it would take to attain them.

## **R – Realistic**

Realistic refers to focusing on something that makes sense with the broader business goals. For example, if the goal is to launch a new program or service, it should be something that's in alignment with the overall business/department objectives. Your

team may be able to launch a new program, but if your division is not prioritizing launching those new programs, then the goal wouldn't be relevant.

## **T – Time-Related**

Anyone can set goals, but if it lacks realistic timing, chances are you're not going to succeed. Providing a target date for deliverables is imperative. Ask specific questions about the goal deadline and what can be accomplished within that time period. If the goal will take three months to complete, it's useful to define what should be achieved half-way through the process. Providing time constraints also creates a sense of urgency.

## **The Easiest Way to Write S.M.A.R.T. Goals**

When it comes to writing S.M.A.R.T. goals, ask yourself and other team members a lot of questions. The answers will help fine-tune your strategy, ensuring the goals are something that is actually attainable.

This doesn't have to be a daunting experience; in fact, it should be quite illuminating. Below we demonstrate how to write S.M.A.R.T. goals for two typical business scenarios: completing a project and improving personal performance.

## **S.M.A.R.T. Goal Examples**

### **Ongoing**

- Provide high quality customer service resulting in a 90% customer satisfaction rating from external customers on accuracy, timeliness and courtesy measures on an ongoing basis.
- On an ongoing basis, reconcile the department financial reports by the 15th of every month with no increase in reconciliation errors.
- On an ongoing basis, accurately process and dispatch 95% of high priority calls for police, fire and medical services.
- On an ongoing basis, dispatch 82% of high priority calls for police, fire and medical services within established timeframes.
- Resolve 90% of complaints through a collaborative process without need for formal mediation on an ongoing basis.
- Conduct education, monitoring and enforcement to ensure that 98% of agricultural and pest control businesses are in compliance with all pesticide regulatory requirements on an ongoing basis.
- Manage and support effective performance resulting in achievement of 75% of program and individual performance targets by the end of the fiscal year.
- Manage the department budget to stay within appropriations and accomplish 85% of service results by the end of the fiscal year.
- Coach and support my direct reports resulting in attainment of 85% of all performance plan goals.

### **New Project/Performance Cycle-Specific**

- By March 2019, develop and implement a customer service plan that results in department staff reporting that they are clear about expectations for excellent customer service and have the skills and support to perform at a level that result in customers reporting that they receive excellent customer service.
- Transition to a new automated case management system with minimal effects on customer service by developing a training program that ensures all staff can process 30 cases per day no later than three months after the end of the training classes.
- Reduce overtime in the department from 150 hours per month to 50 hours per month by the end of the fiscal year with no increase in incident reports.
- Develop a quality improvement process for the sanitary sewer system that reduces the failure rate to 1% by December 3, 2018.
- By 11/30/18, update the employee handbook to include a searchable intranet version that employees find easy to use and informative.
- Complete the Energy Watch Program to reduce countywide carbon emissions by 605 tons by the end of the fiscal year.
- Conduct outreach and education that reduces the amount of illegal dumping into the streets and drainage channels by 10% by June 30, 2018.
- Develop and implement vehicle replacement plan to increase the Average Fuel Economy to 30 miles per gallon by 2018 for Midsize and Compact Vehicles and to increase the average miles per gallon on the total fleet to 25 MPG by 2018.
- Implement Evidence Based Probation Service (EPBS) practices in order to reduce recidivism among participants by 10% by June 30, 2018.

### **Development Goals**

- By June 30, 2018, develop and apply upgraded computer skills that enable me to produce budget reconciliation reports each month in a timely and accurate fashion.
- By June 30, 2018, complete course work and attain a credential to enhance my skills as an effective leader as measured by feedback from my supervisor and the accomplishment of my performance plan goals.

# NOTES