

Skillbook

Personal Goal Setting



Personal Goal Setting Skillbook

This Skillbook is published by:

Emerald Works
Level 1
50 Frederick Street
Edinburgh EH2 1EX
UK

Copyright © Emerald Works 2011-2020.
All rights reserved.

Emerald Works Limited (Company Number SC202102,
VAT Number: GB 665 3593 06) is a company registered
in Scotland.

Version H1.0.

This Skillbook is protected by international copyright law.
You may use it only if you are a member of the MindTools
Club™ or have received it under corporate license. Please
contact copyright@emerald.com if you've received this from
any other source.

Cover image © iStockphoto/vernonwiley.

Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Why Set Goals?	2
3.	How to Set and Manage Goals	3
4.	SMART Goals	7
5.	Obstacles to Achieving Goals	9
6.	Key Learning Points	10

1. Introduction

Have you ever felt that you're drifting from day to day without any sense of direction? Or are you someone with firm ambitions for your career, family or sporting achievements?

Almost everyone wants to make progress in life, in some way. We might have dreams of promotion, travel or going on a spending spree. We could aspire to learn a language, or to spend more time with our grandchildren. Or maybe we're itching to use our leadership skills to transform our neighborhood!

Our ambitions are often many and varied, and can be big or small. So, why do we struggle to achieve them? Often, we fail because we haven't made and followed a definite plan for our success.

In this **Skillbook** session, you'll learn how to create just such a plan, based on high-quality goals. We'll take you through:

- How you can use goal setting to realize your ambitions while building your self-confidence and motivation.
- How to break down lifetime goals into manageable shorter-term ones.
- What SMART goals are, and how you can use them to increase your chances of success.
- The importance of reviewing your goals, checking your progress towards them, and looking out for any obstacles in your path.

If you're ready to apply careful thought and follow the process step by step, you'll likely make great progress towards turning your dreams into reality.

Note:

This Skillbook will teach you how to set powerful goals, and should take around an hour to complete. However, you'll need to spend another two to three hours actually setting your goals.

2. Why Set Goals?

Goal setting gives you long-term vision and short-term motivation. And it helps you organize your time and your resources, so that you can make the most of your life. After all, you don't want to waste your effort on things that aren't really important to you!

You'll be able to recognize, and take pride in, your progress towards your goals – and celebrate when you achieve them. All of this will boost your confidence and spur you on to greater things. In contrast, a lack of goals can drain your motivation.

For instance, let's imagine a novelist who's just signed a book deal. The deadline is a whole year away, so it's easy to procrastinate. Without focus, they keep finding more enjoyable or urgent tasks to work on. But as time begins to run out, the pressure gradually mounts, their confidence falters, and they find it harder and harder to write. Eventually, their publisher stops calling.

But they **will** be able to achieve their goal if they break it down into chunks. They might aim to write one chapter each month for nine months. They'll need six weeks to research and plan their plot first, and at the end they could spend three weeks reviewing and proofreading their work. That leaves a month for family commitments, holidays and any unforeseen issues.

This timetable will keep them on track. They'll see their progress, gain satisfaction at each small success, and be able to sustain their energy to the end. And if their editor knows about these intermediate goals too, they too can have confidence.

Similarly, you'll need to crystallize **your** goals to stay focused and motivated.

Action:



Write down two tasks you needed to complete yesterday. Did you succeed?

Two Tasks for Yesterday	Complete?

3. How to Set and Manage Goals

Imagine seeing yourself moving closer to your dreams, at last! With high-quality goals in place, and a plan to achieve them, you'll be able to identify and reject activities that distract you from your ultimate aims. And you'll more than recoup the time and effort you invested in setting those goals in the first place.

Setting Lifetime Goals

This part of the process can be both daunting and fun!

Take your time to consider the “big picture.” Ask yourself where you want to be and what you want to be doing in the distant future. As ideas start to come into focus, check that they are **your** goals, not what other people want you to achieve – let yourself dream!

Action:



Brainstorm the important areas of your personal and professional lives, then set yourself goals in each area.

It's crucial that you write down these goals, so use the table on the next page. (We've included some examples to guide you.)

Tip:

Be sure not to let self-doubt limit your aspirations.

For example, you might believe that you have little control over your own destiny. Or you may feel like an unworthy impostor.

Take a look at the Thought Awareness video in your toolkit to get you on the right track.

Category	Lifetime Goal
Career	What kind of work would you find most interesting and worthwhile?
Family	How and where would you like to live with the people you care about?
Finance	What do you need your financial position to be, to achieve your other goals?
Physical	Do you need to improve your health or could you win a sports trophy?
Education	What knowledge and skills do you want to acquire and to what level?
Attitude	Is any part of your mindset holding you back and what would you like to change?
Leisure	Would you enjoy learning a language, or joining a choir?
Public Service	How could you make your street, your town or the world a better place?

Look through your long-term goals carefully. See whether you can remove any, for example because they are not truly significant, or because you can merge some closely related ones. You should be left with a list of goals that you care about and that excite you.

Setting Smaller Goals

By definition, lifetime goals involve a long-term approach: you cannot achieve them in one grand action. Instead, you will need to complete a series of smaller actions that take you forward gradually. Once you have crystallized your lifetime goals, these smaller steps are quite easy to identify. As you take each step, you will gain the sense of wellbeing that makes goal setting such a powerful technique.

Action:



Consider someone graduating from school. Their lifetime career goal is to own a chain of award-winning fine dining restaurants. In five years, their goal is to become a head chef. Suggest a one-year and six-month goal for them, below.

Time Frame	Career Goal
Lifetime	Own a chain of award-winning fine dining restaurants
Five Years	Become a head chef
One Year	
Six Months	

Action:



Consider **your** lifetime career goal from the earlier exercise. Break this down into five-year and one-year goals, on the next page.

Time Frame	My Career Goal
Lifetime	
Five Years	
One Year	

Tip:

Choose time frames that suit your situation. For instance, if you are about to spend the next six years studying for a degree, a six-year goal might be more appropriate than a five-year one.

Once you've broken down your lifetime goals into smaller time frames, think about the actions that will take you there. Break large tasks down into smaller action steps to make them manageable – ideally, action steps should take no longer than one to two hours to complete.

Make sure to keep your actions on a To-Do List or Action Program. By using such tools, you'll remember to carry out all your tasks, you'll tackle your most important actions first, and you won't get stressed by unimportant demands on your time.

Now you can work with purpose and get satisfaction from completing each action.

Setting Non-Work Goals

It's very easy to become engrossed in career and financial goals. But beware – are you so focused on these areas that you miss a friend's birthday or cancel the gym?

Occasionally, it's useful to take a "helicopter view" of your life to spot any areas that are off-balance and in need of some attention. So don't be afraid to repeat the process of brainstorming the parts of your life that are important.

If you put energy into **all** the key areas of your life, each will support the others, and you'll be doing everything in your power to achieve your long-term vision.

4. SMART Goals

You can use the SMART mnemonic to make your goals even more powerful. While there are plenty of variants (some of which we've included below), SMART usually stands for:

- **S** Specific (or Significant).
- **M** Measurable (or Meaningful).
- **A** Attainable (or Action-oriented).
- **R** Relevant (or Rewarding).
- **T** Time-bound (or Trackable).

Let's look at each letter in more detail:

Letter	Implications
S	Specific goals are unambiguous and behavioral. They state precisely what is expected, without leaving any "wiggle room."
M	Measurable goals include a detailed statement of what the end point is, so that you know when you have achieved them.
A	Attainable goals are actually possible to achieve and within your control. (Challenge must be part of this – you'll gain little motivation, or satisfaction, when you complete a task that's too easy!)
R	Relevant goals are those that support your life plan.
T	Time-bound goals state exactly how long they should take to complete. (If you don't achieve a goal in the time frame you specified, you should amend the goal, or dismiss it and move on.)

An example of a non-SMART goal might be: "Get a promotion." When it's written like this, it won't help you very much and you'll get little motivation from it.

However, the goal becomes much more powerful when you write it as: "Have the qualifications and experience to be eligible for promotion to the level of department director at the January review meeting." This is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

Action:



Look again at your lifetime, five-year, and one-year career goals on page six. Are they SMART? If not, re-write them below so they meet all the criteria.

Time Frame	My SMART Career Goal
Lifetime	
Five Years	
One Year	

5. Obstacles to Achieving Goals

Once you've set your goals, there should be nothing to stop you achieving them. However, in reality, there **are** things that can get in the way. Let's look at some of the most common obstacles and how to manage them.

Be sure to keep your goals and your To-Do List or Action Program up to date and relevant. Don't let them fade away – instead, look at them every day and use them as a tool to keep you on track. Then you can be sure that all your energies are going into what's most important to you, for today and for your future.

Despite your best intentions and some great planning, you could still suffer from self-sabotage. You might also hold yourself back through fear of failure, or equally fear of success. Meanwhile, your co-workers and managers might be negative about your plans or even undermine your efforts.

You can help protect yourself against unhelpful thoughts and behaviors by seeking the support of a coach or mentor. They will give you honest and objective feedback about your performance, and help you to come up with fresh strategies for solving any problems.

You might also be able to spot connections between your thoughts, experiences and achievements if you keep a journal. Use these insights to regain a sense of control. Many people also find that practicing mindfulness and other stress-reduction techniques can help them to concentrate better. Their productivity rises and they begin to feel more successful and hopeful.

Lastly, but just as importantly, remember to reward yourself, and celebrate every time you achieve a goal – you deserve it!

Tip:

Keep your lifetime goals in mind by displaying them, as big and as colorful as you like, where you will see them every day. Be inspired!

Go hi-tech with your shorter-term goals though, so you can easily access, review, edit, and back them up, wherever and whenever you need to. There are many software packages and apps to help you, some of which are free and some of which your employer might be able to recommend.

6. Key Learning Points

Effective goal setting will bring you a long-term vision, better day-to-day focus, increased self-confidence and motivation – and the achievement of your goals! Indeed, goal setting is widely considered to be the most powerful tool we have for personal planning, even though it requires a substantial investment of time and thought to get it right.

The process goes beyond a professional setting. You should brainstorm and set goals for all the important areas of your life so that they support one another. You can then break these down into five-year goals, one-year goals, and shorter-term targets. When you have such direction, you can avoid distractions, and you can be sure you're doing everything you can to achieve your long-term vision.

Make your goals even more powerful by ensuring they are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Once you have a set of high-quality, formalized goals, and have cleared any obstacles from your path, you will see your life accelerating in your chosen direction. You'll wonder how you ever managed without goal setting!