



## Setting Goals - QUICK TIPS

### Goal Setting Theory

Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory is arguably the most important organizational behavior theory ever conceived, and certainly the most important and practical of all motivation theories. It is applicable to individuals, units, and universities. It can be used to direct and improve professional and personal aspects of your life. An implementation of this theory is called SMART Goals. While there are many versions of "SMART," most commonly it stands for Specific, Measurable, Aggressive & Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

### Specific

*Vague goals do not give marching orders.* Specific goals more naturally lend themselves to breaking down into individual steps needed to reach the goal. They communicate what is expected—to yourself and to your unit members. Specificity can help avoid role ambiguity, where those around you do not know what they are supposed to do, and role conflicts where people collide as they attempt to perform a task. Both lead to frustration, wasted time, and decreased motivation and productivity.

**DO YOUR BEST**  
is an ineffective goal

### Measurable

*If you cannot measure the achievement of the goal, it is a bad goal for two reasons.* First, you can never know to what degree you achieved it. Second, you cannot identify opportunities for improvement. The existence of metrics that can be used to assess progress to a goal is a good check that the goal is sufficiently specific. Vague goals usually cannot be measured. This can pose challenges in academic units, because progress in research can be so fluid. However, individual goals can be measured: for example, how many steps have been initiated or completed on a project, how much time has been devoted to writing, the number of proposals developed, numbers of donors contacted.

### Aggressive & Achievable

*Achievement research shows that productive people perform better with "stretch" goals.* Static performance and expectations can become boring, easy, and monotonous, and can lead to discouragement and underperformance.

*While aggressive goals are important, if the goal is not attainable, it can be self-defeating.* If you were assigned to write a 50-page, journal-quality manuscript in a day, would you even try? Healthy motivation is directly related to perceived ability to accomplish a task. This is known as self-efficacy. The more people fail, the lower their self-efficacy, and the less willing they are to engage a similar task in the future. Assuring that you and your unit members have realistic goals is a critical step to asset yourself and others improve their efficacy, motivation, and performance.

**SELF-EFFICACY**  
Past success strengthens  
Past failure weakens

### Relevant

*Strategy research shows that good goals contribute to a larger strategy and mission.* Ask "how does the goal fit in to the larger picture?" If your unit has an article culture, goals related to book writing may miss the intent, that is, a successful bid for tenure. If faculty retention is the strategy, goals related to student enrollment may be unhelpful distractions. It is easier to "sell" a goal to yourself and your unit members if it builds toward a compelling vision of the future.





## Timebound

*Deadlines are critical for the completion of projects.* Creating a sense of urgency can motivate and support focusing time and attention on the task. Even if the deadline is arbitrary, it goes on the calendar so the task is not lost in the press of everyday demands.

