

How to Use SMART Goal to Become Highly Successful in Life

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As a track and field runner in middle and high school, every year I would sit down with my coach and set a series of goals for the season. What times would I like to run that year? Which races would I like to win? etc. Once we had set my goals for the year, we would create a training plan and race schedule so I could achieve those goals.

Before I got a coach, I used to run aimlessly. No plan, no target races. I would just run in races whenever I was asked to by my club or school. More often than not I would end up injured and find my season ending in achieving very little.

Once I got a coach, everything changed. We worked together to set my goals and target races, and my times over 800 and 1,500 meters tumbled down. I started winning races that mattered and began enjoying my sport. This annual process taught me from a very early age that goals are important if I want to achieve the things that are important to me.

How Goals Lead You to Success

If you do not have any goals, you drift. You get pushed and pulled in all sorts of directions by your work, your colleagues, your friends and your family. Often, these directions are not the direction you want to go in and you end up right back where you started, or worse, in a place you never wanted to be in the first place.

Just about anything you want to achieve in life, making a plan and a goal to achieve it is the only way you will make progress and give yourself a chance to achieve it.

Goals give you a direction, they give you a purpose to wake up in the morning. They help you to see things from a completely different and more positive perspective.

Why Do People Fail to Reach Their Goals?

Setting and achieving goals is not easy, many people fail. A study by Scranton University found that only 8% of those who set new year goals actually achieve them, meaning 92% who set new year goals fail. Why is that?

The problem is that many people see goals, such as new year resolutions, as hopes and wishes. They hope they will lose some weight, they wish to start their own business or they hope to get a better job. The problem with “hoping” and “wishing” for something is there is no plan, no purpose and no time frame set for achieving the goals. Once these hopes and wishes come face to face with the realities of daily life, they soon dissolve into lost hope and wishful thinking.

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So in order to really achieve something, you need a concrete goal — a SMART goal is a good one.

How to Set Your SMART Goal

The foundation of all successfully accomplished goals is the SMART goal. Originally conceived by George T Doran in a paper he wrote in 1981 called *There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives*, this formula has been used in various forms ever since.

SMART is an acronym for **Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic** and **Time-related**. It has been used by corporations and individuals to achieve their goals and objectives and is a formula that, on the whole, works well.

The strength of SMART goals is that they set a clear path to achieving goals and they have a clear time frame in which to achieve them. Let's look at these in a little more detail:

Specific

For a goal to be achievable, it needs to have a very clear outcome. What you are asking is “what exactly do I want to achieve here?” The clearer the goal, the more likely it is you will achieve it.

For example, if you just say “*I want to lose weight*”, then if you went one day without eating dinner you would achieve your goal — you would lose weight.

But that is probably not what you had in mind. You need to be much more specific: “*I want to lose twenty-pounds in weight by the end of July this year.*”

Now that is much more specific and allows the other parts of the SMART goal formula to come in to play.

Measurable

For you to have achievable goals, you need to be able to measure them. Take the example above, “I want to lose twenty-pounds in weight by the end of July this year” that is measurable.

All you need do is weigh yourself on 1 January, then deduct twenty-pounds from that and set that weight as the target for 31 July. Then, each week you weigh yourself to track your progress.

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Assignable

Being assignable means: who is responsible for making this goal happen?

In our example of losing weight, the only person who can be responsible is you. So you need to take full responsibility for losing that weight. If you fail at achieving your goal, it will be no one else's fault but your own. Accept full responsibility for achieving the goal.

Realistic

For any goal to be achieved, you need to set something that is realistic.

If you try to lose those twenty-pounds in one week, you are setting yourself up for failure. While it might be theoretically possible, the likelihood of you achieving that goal is very low.

Losing twenty pounds over a six month period is realistic for most people, losing twenty pounds in one week is not.

Time-Related

And finally, you need a timeline. All your goals need to have an end date because it creates a sense of urgency and gives you a deadline.

In our example of losing twenty-pounds, a timeline of six months would be specific, measurable, realistic, have a timeline and as you are accepting full accountability for achieving that goal, it is assigned—all elements of the SMART goal formula.

How to Reach Your SMART Goal

Is this really enough for you achieve your goals? Perhaps not.

The problem I have always found with the SMART goal formula is it does not take in to account the human factor. We need motivation. We need a reason for achieving these goals. If you have no real motivation—no “why”—then you will fail.

Losing twenty-pounds in weight, for example is not easy. You are going to spend many months feeling hungry. Hunger is not something that can easily be ignored and unless you possess super-human mental strength, you are going give in to the pizza, chocolate cake and ice cream temptation.

All SMART goals can be distilled down to three words — **What? Why? How?:**

- What do you want to achieve?
- Why do you want to achieve it?
- How are you going to achieve it?

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When you simplify your goal in this way, achieving the goal becomes much easier.

Visualize What You Want

Another part to making your goals achievable is to visualize the end result. When you write out your mission statement, you should be imagining what it will be like once you have achieved the goal.

In our weight loss example, you would close your eyes and imagine walking down from your hotel room in Ibiza in July with your towel, sunscreen, sunglasses and swimwear on. You would imagine walking past all the other sunbathers and imagine the feeling you have. The pride in the way you look and feel. Your head held high. Go deep into every tiny detail. Look at the gorgeous blue sky, feel the temperature, smell the air, heavy with the scent of sunscreen and feel the warm concrete by the side of the pool on your feet.

Try to invoke as many of the five senses you possibly can. Every time you read your mission statement go through the same visualisation technique.

Top athletes go through similar visualisation techniques every time they perform. They visualize every step they take on the field of play, every shot they make on the golf course and every pitch they throw on the baseball field. They visualize every move done perfectly. This visualization has been proven by science to work because it rehearses the moves in your subconscious brain. When the time comes to perform, your mind takes over to make sure you perform at your very best.

Every shot golfer Jack Nicklaus made on a field was rehearsed days before he made it.

“I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp in-focus picture of it in my head.”

Identify Your “Why”

If you take losing twenty-pounds as an example, once you have made the decision you want to lose twenty-pounds, the next question to ask yourself is “why?” Why do you want to lose twenty-pounds? The more personal your why, the better.

Your why could be “because I want to look and feel fantastic by the pool in Ibiza this summer”. That is a strong “why”.

If your “why” is “because my doctor told me to lose some weight” that is not a good “why”. That “why” is your doctor’s “why”, not yours.

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You could be very happy with your weight as it is which would mean your motivation to continue with your weight loss programme over a sustained period of time would diminish rapidly.

Write your mission statement.

To help with setting achievable goals, when working with my clients, I always ask them to complete the following mission statement:

I will (STATE GOAL CLEARLY) by (DATE YOU WANT TO COMPLETE THE GOAL)
because (YOUR REASON WHY)

So in our weight loss example, our mission statement would be written: *“I will lose twenty-pounds in weight by the end of July this year because I want to look and feel fantastic by the pool in Ibiza”*

Contained in that simple sentence, you have all the elements of a SMART goal. It is specific, it is measurable (lose twenty-pounds), it is assigned (you will do it), it is realistic and it has a time frame and it now has a motivator—your ‘why’.

Never write a ‘mission statement’ that is full of vague, Latinate words. The words you use should be simple, direct and clear.

For example, do not write “We will build an asynchronous, holistic messaging app that resonates with millennials” The words “asynchronous”, “holistic” and “millennials” mean different things to different people. These words might sound good, but are not clear enough to motivate a team to focus on building what you want. A better way would be “We will build a messaging app that appeals 18 to 30 year olds that allows them to message each other across different time zones without annoying notifications”

Figure Out Your “How”

Before you can begin achieving your goal, you need to create a list of steps you can take to make it happen.

For this, I always recommend to my clients they take a piece of paper and write down everything they can think of that will achieve their goal. It does not matter what order you write these tasks down, what matters is you write down as many action steps you can think of that will achieve the goal. I always aim for around one hundred small steps. This makes it much easier to assign tasks for each day that not only moves you forward on your goal, but also keeps you focused every day on achieving the goal.

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Once you have your list, you can then create a to-do list for the goal. You can allocate the steps to different days in the right order so you create momentum towards a successful outcome.

Bonus: Make a PACT with Yourself

There is one more part needed to really make sure you achieve the goals you set for yourself and that is something I call PACT. PACT is another acronym meaning Patience, Action, Consistency and Time. You need all four of these to achieve goals.

Patience

Without patience, you will give up. To achieve anything worthwhile requires patience. Success does not happen overnight. Be patient and enjoy the process of stepping a little closer towards achieving your goal each day.

When you set your goal, look at the time line you have set for yourself and create a number of milestones. If you have given yourself a six month time frame to achieve your goal, then divide your project into six areas. In each area give yourself two or three milestones. This will then keep you motivated to continue even when you feel little or no progress is being made.

Action

If you do not take action on any goal, then no goal will be achieved. You need to make sure each day you remind yourself of your goal and why you want to achieve it. Read your mission statement and then take the necessary action to make sure you move a step closer each day.

Your action steps should be clear and direct. For example, "run five kilometres today" and this should be put onto your calendar. Make it a non-negotiable task.

Consistency

The action you take each day towards achieving your goal needs to be consistent. You can't follow your diet programme for a week and then have three weeks off. It does not work like that. Jim Rohn said it perfectly when he said, "Success is a few simple disciplines practised every day."

At the beginning of the week, sit down with your calendar and create tasks related to your goal for each day that will move you closer towards achieving it.

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Time

Of course, you need to allow enough time between where you are today and where you want to be in the future. Be realistic about time and don't be disheartened if you miss your deadline.

Remember, if you have followed the steps and have moved yourself closer towards achieving whatever goal you set for yourself, continue on until you reach the goal, just readjust your timeline.

The fact that you started means you are now closer to achieving your goal than you were yesterday. Do not give up. Readjusting your time line does not mean you failed. It just means you did not get your time line right first time.

Bottom Line

The key to success is to put everything together. When you put all these elements together, you create an environment where achieving SMART goals becomes much more attainable. When you have a strong personal "why" for your goal, your motivation to keep going stays strong.

When you visualize every day what it will be like once you have achieved your goal, you are preparing yourself for success.

And when you mix in PACT and are patient, take action consistently every day over a period of time, nothing can stop you from achieving your goals!