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The value of goal setting is so well recognized | | | that entire management systems, like Management by Objectives, have goal setting basics incorporated | | | within them. | | | In fact, goal setting theory is generally accepted as among the most valid and useful motivation | | Being Assertive | theories in industrial and organizational psychology, human resource management, and organizational | | | behavior. | | Many of us have learned – from bosses, seminars, and business articles – to set SMART goals. It seems | | | natural to assume that by setting a goal that’s Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and | | The next steps for my goal setting| Time-bound, we will be well on our way to accomplishing it. | | | But is this really the best way of setting goals? | | To answer this, we look to Dr Edwin Locke’s pioneering research on goal setting and motivation in the | | | late 1960s. In his 1968 article “ Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives,” he stated that | | | employees were motivated by clear goals and appropriate feedback. Locke went on to say that working | | | toward a goal provided a major source of motivation to actually reach the goal – which, in turn, | | | improved performance. |  | This information does not seem revolutionary to most of us some 40 years later. This shows the impact | | Quick Start | his theory has had on professional and personal performance. | | Store: | In this article, we look at what Locke had to say about goal setting, and how we can apply his theory | | Download Site | to our own performance goals. | | Career Community | Goal Setting Theory | | Leadership Training | Locke’s research showed that here was a relationship between how difficult and specific a goal was and| | Time Management Training | people’s performance of a task. He found that specific and difficult goals led to better task | | Stress Training | performance than vague or easy goals. | | Career Direction | Telling someone to “ Try hard” or “ Do your best” is less effective than “ Try to get more than 80% | | Coaching & Help | correct” or “ Concentrate on beating your best time. Likewise, having a goal that’s too easy is not a | | Top Skills Areas: | motivating force. Hard goals are more motivating than easy goals, because it’s much more of an | | Top Articles | accomplishment to achieve something that you have to work for. | | Achieve More | A few years after Locke published his article, another researcher, Dr Gary Latham, studied the effect | | Lead Effectively | of goal setting in the workplace.

His results supported exactly what Locke had found, and the | | Manage Stress | inseparable link between goal setting and workplace performance was formed. | | Improve Memory | In 1990, Locke and Latham published their seminal work, “ A Theory of Goal Setting and Task | | Find Direction | Performance. ” In this book, they reinforced the need to set specific and difficult goals, and they | | What we do: | outlined three other characteristics of successful goal setting. | Free help | Five Principles of Goal Setting | | Self-Study Courses | To motivate, goals must take into consideration the degree to which each of the following exists: | | Career Community | Clarity. | | Training Programs | Challenge. | | Coaching & Help | Commitment. | | Who we help: | Feedback. | | Managers & Owners | Task complexity. | New Managers | Let’s look at each of these in detail. | | Professionals | Clarity | | Employees | Clear goals are measurable, unambiguous, and behavioral. When a goal is clear and specific, with a | | Career Starters | definite time set for completion, there is less misunderstanding about what behaviors will be rewarded. | | Practitioners & HR | You know what’s expected, and you can use the specific result as a source of motivation.

When a goal is| | About us: | vague – or when it’s expressed as a general instruction, like “ Take initiative” – it has limited | | About Mind Tools | motivational value. | | Contact Us | | | What’s New? | To improve your or your team’s performance, set clear goals that use specific and measurable standards. | Site Services |” Reduce job turnover by 15%” or “ Respond to employee suggestions within 48 hours” are examples of clear| | Directory | goals. | |  | | | Relevant | When you use the SMART acronym to help you set goals, you ensure the clarity of the goal by making it | | Courses & Resources | Specific, Measurable and Time-bound. |   | Challenge | | | One of the most important characteristics of goals is the level of challenge. People are often | | Maximum | motivated by achievement, and they’ll judge a goal based on the significance of the anticipated | | Achievement! | accomplishment. When you know that what you do will be well received, there’s a natural motivation to | |   | do a good job. | | | |  | Rewards typically increase for more difficult goals. If you believe you’ll be well compensated or | |[pic] | otherwise rewarded for achieving a challenging goal, that will boost your enthusiasm and your drive to | |  | get it done. | | | |  | Setting SMART goals that are Relevant links closely to the rewards given for achieving challenging | | Time CAN be on Your Side with | goals. Relevant goals will further the aims of your organization, and these are the kinds of  goals | |” Make Time for Success! ” Discover | that most employers will be happy to reward. | the 39 essential tools needed to | | | map out your goals, maximize your | When setting goals, make each goal a challenge. If an assignment is easy and not viewed as very | | effectiveness, and win control of | important – and if you or your employee doesn’t expect the accomplishment to be significant – then the | | your time and your life. | effort may not be impressive. | More >> | Note: | |  | It’s important to strike an appropriate balance between a challenging goal and a realistic goal. | | | Setting a goal that you’ll fail to achieve is possibly more de-motivating than setting a goal that’s | |  | too easy. The need for success and achievement is strong, therefore people are best motivated by | |  | challenging, but realistic, goals.

Ensuring that goals are Achievable or Attainable is one of the | |  | elements of SMART. | | | | |  | Commitment | | Career Excellence | Goals must be understood and agreed upon if they are to be effective. Employees are more likely to “ buy| | with a Mind Tools | into” a goal if they feel they were part of creating that goal.

The notion of participative management | | Coach | rests on this idea of involving employees in setting goals and making decisions. | |  | | | | One version of SMART – for use when you are working with someone else to set their goals – has A and R | |  | stand for Agreed and Realistic instead of Attainable and Relevant.

Agreed goals lead to commitment. | |[pic] | | |  | This doesn’t mean that every goal has to be negotiated with and approved by employees. It does mean | | | that goals should be consistent and in line with previous expectations and organizational concerns.

As | |  | long as the employee believes the goal is consistent with the goals of the company, and believes the | | Mind Tools Career Coaches give you| person assigning the goal is credible, then the commitment should be there. | | the focused personal help you need| | | to find direction, think through | Interestingly, goal commitment and difficulty often work together.

The harder the goal, the more | | your goals, and make the very most| commitment is required. If you have an easy goal, you don’t need a lot of motivation to get it done. | | of your life and career. | When you’re working on a difficult assignment, you will likely encounter challenges that require a | | Find Out More >> | deeper source of inspiration and incentive. |  | | | | As you use goal setting in your workplace, make an appropriate effort to include people in their own | |  | goal setting. Encourage employees to develop their own goals, and keep them informed about what’s | |  | happening elsewhere in the organization.

This way, they can be sure that their goals are consistent | |  | with the overall vision and purpose that the company seeks. | | | Feedback | |  | In addition to selecting the right type of goal, an effective goal program must also include feedback. | | Maximum | Feedback provides opportunities to clarify expectations, adjust goal difficulty, and gain recognition. | | Goal Setting! It’s important to provide benchmark opportunities or targets, so individuals can determine for | |  | themselves how they’re doing. | | | | |  | These regular progress reports, which measure specific success along the way, are particularly | |[pic] | important where it’s going to take a long time to reach a goal. In these cases, break down the goals | |  | into smaller chunks, and link feedback to these intermediate milestones. | | | |  | SMART goals are Measurable, and this ensures that clear feedback is possible. | | Decide how you’ll focus your life,| | | and then set the clear, vibrant, | With all your goal setting efforts, make sure that you build in time for providing formal feedback. | compelling goals that power you to| Certainly, informal check-ins are important, and they provide a means of giving regular encouragement | | achievement. | and recognition. However, taking the time to sit down and discuss goal performance is a necessary | | Start Now ;; | factor in long-term performance improvement. See our article on Delegation for more on this. | |  | Task Complexity | | | The last factor in goal setting theory introduces two more requirements for success.

For goals or | |  | assignments that are highly complex, take special care to ensure that the work doesn’t become too | |  | overwhelming. | |  | | | | People who work in complicated and demanding roles probably have a high level of motivation already. |  | However, they can often push themselves too hard if measures aren’t built into the goal expectations to| | Mind Tools Ebook | account for the complexity of the task. It’s therefore important to do the following: | |  | Give the person sufficient time to meet the goal or improve performance. | | | Provide enough time for the person to practice or learn what is expected and required for success. |  | The whole point of goal setting is to facilitate success. Therefore, you want to make sure that the | |[pic] | conditions surrounding the goals don’t frustrate or inhibit people from accomplishing their objectives. | |  | This reinforces the “ Attainable” part of SMART. | | | Key points: | |  | Goal setting is something most of us recognize as necessary for our success. | The key tools on the Mind Tools | | | site, brought together into one | By understanding goal setting theory, you can effectively apply the principles to goals that you or | | easily downloadable, easily | your team members set. Locke and Latham’s research emphasizes the usefulness of SMART goal setting, and| | printable PDF. | their theory continues to influence the way we set and measure performance today. | More>> | | |  | Use clear, challenging goals, and commit yourself to achieving them. Provide feedback on goal | | | performance. Take into consideration the complexity of the task. If you follow these simple rules, your| |  | goal setting process will be much more successful . and your overall performance will improve. | |  | MindTools. om – Join Our Community! | |  | In our next article, we look at the golden rules of goal setting – five useful things that you can do | | | to maximize your achievement. To read this, click “ Next article” below. Other relevant destinations are| | | shown in the “ Where to go from here” list underneath. | | |[pic]Was this article helpful? | |[pic][pic] | | | | | |[pic] | | | | | | Spread the Word: | | |[pic]    [pic]    [pic]    [pic] | | |[pic] | | | | | | | | |[pic] | | | | | | | | | Where to go from here: | |[pic] | | | Join Mind Tools | | |[pic] | | | Free Newsletter | | | | | |  | | |[pic] | | | Download & Print | | |[pic] | | | Next Article | | | | | |  | | |  | | | New Articles (Not included in the Mind Tools E-book. | | |\* Shows articles available in full only to Career Excellence Club members | | | Golden Rules of Goal Setting – Five rules to set yourself up for success | | | Backward Goal-Setting – Using backward planning to set goals | | | New Year’s Resolutions – Planning for a year of achievement | | | Prioritization – Making best use of your time and resources | | | Action Priority Matrix – Making the most of your opportunities\* | | | The Art of Filing – Managing your documents… nd your time | | | The Urgent/Important Matrix – Using time effectively, not just efficiently\* | | | Treasure Mapping – Visualizing your goal for greater achievement\* | | | How Good is Your Time Management? – Discover tools that can help you\* | | | Pickle Jar Theory – Make your schedule work. Leave time for fun! \* | | | Managing Interruptions – Maintain focus. Keep control of your time. | | | In Flow – Maximizing productivity through improved focus | | | Costing Your Time – Understand the real value of your time\* | | |  | | | A full list of Mind Tools articles is available here. | | | return to top | | | Learn to manage the stress in your life with our sister site, stress. mindtools. com. | | Online Training | | | Mind Tools Store: Mind Tools Ebook, Make Time for Success | | | Stress Management Masterclass, How to Lead | | | Relaxation MP3s | | |© Mind Tools Ltd, 1995-2010, All Rights Reserved | | | We welcome appropriate reprinting and reuse of Mind Tools material, | | | however, you must get our permission first! | | | To do this, please visit our Permissions Center. | | | Store · Search · Newsletter · Downloads · Advertisers · Affiliates |