

SMART GOAL SETTING

Some people have wonderful visions for their life which are on incredible scales like ending child poverty, saving endangered species or ending slave labour. Whilst these are admirable ambitions in life, they lack specificity and scale. If we become too immersed in our chunked-up reasons why we have grandiose ambitions, we end up lacking actionable steps to make our vision a reality.

SMART goal setting is where we critique and analyse our best intentions so that we can become more effective and start making progress.

SPECIFIC

We first have to ask ourselves the following questions about our visions: what, how and why. All of us start at the beginning with at least one of these known: we may know what we want to do, but we don't know how to do it or even why we want to do it; or we may know why we want to do something (like standing up for animal rights), but we may not know what to do about it or even how to; or maybe we know how to run a campaign or start a company, but we don't know what company we'd like to start to why we would want to start it.

So many of us get trapped in doing something for the sake of doing something or keeping ourselves busy just to feel we're being busy. Without a 'why', you will lack motivation; without a 'how', you will lack momentum and without a 'what' you will lack a direction.

MEASURABLE

Once we know why we are pursuing what we're pursuing and how and what we're doing, we need to be able to measure the goal and our progress towards it. Realistically, we can only ever measure a goal as we see examples of our impact taking effect.

When determining the measurability of a goal we need to ask our clients the following: What are your short-term, medium and long term goals? What are the milestones you're aiming for and how will you know when you get there? How are you going to know when you start to make progress or make a difference?

ACHIEVABLE

We also need to check in on ourselves about whether or not our goals are realistically achievable. Whilst you may want to end world poverty, can you honestly expect so much from yourself, particularly considering there are billionaires across the world who have enough money to buy millions of people food, yet even with their status, wealth and power cannot positively influence global politics and systematic poverty? How can one person achieve so much?

Whilst it's good to have challenging goals, they need to be practical and pragmatic. Rather than strive to end world poverty, could you instead look into joining a charity, political party or organisation to tackle poverty in your city? If a client sets goals which are unachievable and spend years pursuing this goal, they'll be less open to pursuing more achievable goals because they'll assume what they've pushed themselves through (and failed at) is the standard experience for all goals they set themselves.



RESULTS FOCUSED

Results focussed goals are dependent upon their relevance to you. Only you can decide whether or not what you're striving for genuinely matters to you and also aligns with other goals you're pursuing.

Your client will also need to ensure with a results focussed mindset that they are measuring their progress in terms of outcomes rather than activities. Whilst they will likely need to adopt new skills, collect new resources and produce new plans to accomplish their goals, it's easy to get bogged down in the details and suddenly transform their 'accomplishing X skill' as their priority goal, rather than a sub-goal which is necessary to accomplish their priority goal.

The only way to keep people on track when it comes to adopting new skills, training, resources, etc is to establish a set objective outcome before commencing a new sub-goal. For example, say your client wants to become a graphic designer and they know they need to study graphic design and learn how to use certain programs and tools. If they measure their goal by the number of activities they're doing (i.e. learning Photoshop, Indesign, taking a nigh class, taking an online course, learning Illustrator etc) they may feel productive, but they're not going to be productive for long because they could carry on learning forever but never get closer to their end goal. Rather, they need to measure their outcomes like producing twelve pieces of art for a portfolio and seeing each completed piece as their outcome. The studying will be necessary and they are measurements of growth, but they can't count their hours of study and practice as measurable progression, only an outcome of that growth.

TIME-BOUND

Goals should be confined to a time limit which creates a sense of urgency. Time is money, so the last thing we should be encouraging our clients to do is waste it or treat it lightly. Keep your client accountable to their time-frames and boost their morale when they hit goals or demonstrate genuinely committed to meeting their deadline. However, it's important to keep time limits flexible and realistic as too much pressure can jeopardise productivity and cause your client a lot of stress and panic.

