Developing SMART Goals

Paul J. Meyer describes the characteristics of S.M.A.R.T. goals in *Attitude is Everything*.

**Specific**
The first term stresses the need for a specific goal rather than a more general one. This means the goal is clear and unambiguous. To make goals specific, they must tell exactly what is expected, why it is important, who’s involved, where it is going to happen and which attributes are important.

A specific goal will usually answer the five "W" questions:

- **What**: What do I want to accomplish?
- **Why**: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.
- **Who**: Who is involved?
- **Where**: Identify a location.
- **Which**: Identify requirements and constraints.

**Measurable**
The second term stresses the need for concrete criteria for measuring progress toward attainment of the goal. If a goal is not measurable, it is not possible to know whether you’re making progress toward successful completion. Measuring progress helps you stay on track, reach target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continue the effort required to reach the ultimate goal.

A measurable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- **How much**?
- **How many**?
- **How will I know when it is accomplished**?

**Attainable**
The third term stresses the importance of goals that are realistic and attainable. While an attainable goal may stretch you in order to achieve it, the goal is not extreme. That is, the goals are neither out of reach nor below standard performance, as these may be considered meaningless. When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. The theory states that an attainable goal may cause goal-setters to identify previously overlooked opportunities to bring themselves closer to the achievement of their goals.

An attainable goal will usually answer the question:

- **How**: How can the goal be accomplished?
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**Relevant**
The fourth term stresses the importance of choosing goals that matter. A bank manager's goal to "Make 50 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches by 2:00pm." may be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, and Time-Bound, but lacks Relevance. Many times you will need support to accomplish a goal: resources, a champion voice, someone to knock down obstacles. Goals that are relevant to your field, your graduate school milestones and responsibilities, your advisor and program, will receive that needed support.

Relevant goals (when met) drive the individual (or team, or department, or organization) forward. A goal that supports or is in alignment with other goals would be considered a relevant goal.

A relevant goal can answer yes to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match my other efforts/needs?

**Time-bound**
The fifth term stresses the importance of grounding goals within a time frame, giving them a target date. A commitment to a deadline helps you focus efforts on completion of the goal on or before the due date. This part of the S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria is intended to prevent goals from being overtaken by the day-to-day crises that invariably arise. A time-bound goal is intended to establish a sense of urgency.

A time-bound goal will usually answer the question:

- When?
- What can I do 6 months from now?
- What can I do 6 weeks from now?
- What can I do today?

Modified from: