

The Importance of Setting Goals in the Career Development Process

What do you want to do or accomplish? How are you going to get there? Setting goals is an important step in the career development process.

Your personal goals will likely change throughout your life as you enter into different phases of your career journey. Whether you are exploring career options, in the process of pursuing your education, in the middle of a job search, or at the beginning of a new career your goals will evolve as you do. Developing effective goal setting skills will help give you a sense of direction throughout these transitions as well as motivate you to achieve your new goals.

Start with reflection – where are you now?

Your first step in goal setting is to understand what you really want. How clear are you on the direction, focus, achievements you want to realize? The goal setting process starts with a more thorough understanding of yourself. What are your most important values? What are your most cherished dreams?

One strategy for self-reflection on goal setting is to “start from the ending”. Imagine how your life’s story and greatest accomplishments would be told after you have died. What would you like to be remembered for? What legacy do you want to leave this world? Take the time to ask these BIG questions, your answers will help you determine what your next steps should be.

Put your goals in writing

In order to take your ideas from dreams to actual goals, start by writing them down. Create a list of your goals then prioritize them to be in order of your most important. Seeing your written goals will help you clarify your needs and know where to start.

Be sure to frame your goals with positive intent. Focus on what you want to achieve not something you may want to avoid. It is more effective to focus on what you want (“a Human Resources Generalist position”) rather than what you may not want (“don’t get a dead end job after graduation”) because it gives your mind a clear target to focus its energies and helps you to recognize potential opportunities.

Next break down your goals into smaller pieces, labeling them as immediate (within the next few weeks), short term (within the year) and long term (over 1 year) goals. Sometimes our life and career goals seem overwhelming, but breaking down your goals into smaller steps will make achieving them a much more manageable process.

SMART GOALS

When developing goals, make sure they are **SMART** goals. A SMART goal is defined as one that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time- bound.

Specific

Decide exactly what it is you want to achieve. There is no room for vagueness here – be as specific and clear as possible.

Example: I want to be able to speak conversational Spanish while on my vacation to Spain.

Measureable

How will you know when you are being, are have been, successful? What are the measureable elements that stack up together in pursuit of your goal?

Example: Complete a language class at the community college. Hold a basic conversation in Spanish.

Achievable

Before embarking on the pursuit of your goals, you need to think through whether or not your goal is attainable. Be realistic on everything from timing, to perseverance, to financial considerations. The more realistic and achievable your goals are, the more you are setting yourself up for success.

Example: Based upon my current basic language skills, I should be able to build on them and become conversationally fluent. My spouse speaks and writes fluent Spanish and is also willing to assist and support me in this endeavor.

Relevant

What is the reason, purpose, or benefit of accomplishing this goal? You need to be very clear on WHY you are pursuing this goal. Do you actually want the outcome(s) of this goal?

Example: Will be visiting Spain and taking a culinary class that will be taught in Spanish. As a culinary enthusiast it is a lifelong dream to participate in this type of emersion. Upon completion I will have excelled to a level I didn't think possible.

Time-bound

You should have time frames and deadlines for every measurable step along the way. Deadlines are key because they are often what keeps you on track and moving forward. Keep them tight, but be realistic and allow for flexibility. You don't want to give up or quit on the entire goal because of one missed deadline.

Example: I will enroll in a conversational Spanish class at the local community college for the next term. Will take 2 consecutive terms. Will practice with my spouse and other Spanish speakers for 15-20 minutes per day.

Create an action plan

Now that you have written, prioritized and ensured your goals are SMART, it is time to write out your action plan. Consider creating a spreadsheet or table to write down your list of goals, strategies and deadlines. See an example below:

GOAL	DETAIL	DEADLINE
Update my resume	Schedule a meeting with Career Coach	September 2017

Stick with it!

Perseverance is a key attribute of those that reach their goals. Here are a few suggestions:

- Print out your action plan and post it some place where you can regularly see it
- Tell someone you trust about your goals so that they can keep you accountable
- Schedule a meeting with yourself and write it in your personal calendar with an alarmed reminder