

Lesson 2

Goals and Goal Setting



Key Words

goal
goal setting
long-term goal
mid-term goal
short-term goal

What You Will Learn to Do

- Develop a personal goals action plan

Linked Core Abilities

- Build your capacity for lifelong learning
- Take responsibility for your actions and choices

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Define goals
- Differentiate between short-, mid-, and long-term goals
- Analyze goals to determine what makes them meaningful
- Identify criteria for well-defined goals
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

Have you ever gotten into the car and started driving with no destination in mind? How would you know which route to take if you didn't know where you wanted to go? How would you know when you had arrived?

Think of a **goal** as your destination. The most efficient way to get from one place to another is to identify the final destination and follow a map that will guide you in your journey. Goals give you direction and keep you focused on a purpose. If you go through life without goals, you will probably waste a lot of time and energy. Time wasted can never be recaptured. Sometimes it is important to discuss your goals with friends in order to determine what is most important to you (see Figure 10.2.1).

Setting and achieving goals is one way to achieve a more fulfilling life. This lesson not only introduces you to types of goals and to the concept of **goal setting**, it also explains why goals are important and how to set them.

What Is a Goal?

A goal is an end to which an effort is directed. In other words, you establish a target and then take careful aim and shoot for it. A goal should also be something that is important to you and consistent with your values. Some goals are more difficult and time-consuming than others, and sometimes you may initially fail to achieve your goal. When this happens, you can modify the goal somewhat and try to hit it again. You cannot succeed if you do not keep trying.



Key Note Term

goal – an aim or purpose; an end to which effort is directed

Key Note Term

goal setting – planning done to reach a desired goal

Figure 10.2.1: Discussing your goals with friends can help you determine what is most important to you.

Courtesy of Larry Lawfer.

Writing Goals

It is important to write your goals down. A written goal can be read over and over again until it becomes imprinted on your brain. If a goal exists only in your head, it is just a dream and may be forgotten; but a written goal statement is a declaration of the outcome one plans to achieve. For a goal to be effective, however, it must be **Specific, Positive, Achievable, and Measurable**. You can use the acronym S-P-A-M to evaluate the goals you set against the following criteria.

- **Specific.** It must be explicit, clearly defined and have a specific plan of action. For example, “I will be a better student” is too vague to be a useful goal; however, “I will get an A on my next history exam” is more specific and therefore a much better goal.
- **Positive.** You are telling yourself that you will do something, not that you *might*, or you *think* you can. For example, “I want to do 60 sit-ups in a minute” is only a desire; however, “I will do 60 sit-ups in a minute” is a positive goal. A positive goal statement is very powerful.
- **Achievable.** The goal has to be within your power to make it happen through your own actions. It must be something you have a reasonable chance of achieving.
- **Measurable.** The goal must be defined in terms of results that are measurable or actions that can be observed. If your goal is not measurable, you will not know if you have attained it.

Why Goals Are Important

If you allow only outside forces to rule your life and set goals for you, you might feel bored, overwhelmed, or unsure of the decisions you face. By setting and achieving your own goals, however, you have the means to establish a framework that will build confidence, reduce stress, and ease decision making.

Some goals may seem overwhelming; however, by setting interim goals you can break down a goal into tasks that are more manageable, reducing your level of stress and anxiety. This process also enables you to explore and plan out all the steps necessary to reach the goal. When you have a map, the journey does not seem as daunting.

Accomplishing the goals you set for yourself gives you a good feeling and builds self-confidence. You can feel proud of a job well done. This is another benefit of setting goals. By setting goals, you can avoid wasting your time, energy, and effort. Goal setting makes the difference between mediocrity and excellence.

Types of Goals

Goals are divided into three categories: **short-**, **mid-**, and **long-term**. You can accomplish short-term goals in an hour, a day, or a week. They may often be the beginning steps to mid-term or long-term goals. Short-term goals do not require

Key Note Terms

short-term goal – a goal that can be accomplished in a short period of time, often without much planning or effort

mid-term goal – an intermediate goal; sometimes a step to a long-term goal

long-term goal – a life goal; a goal that requires a lot of time and planning to accomplish

much planning because you can usually accomplish them in very little time. An example of a short-term goal would be, “I will complete my homework assignment for algebra class and turn it in on time.”

Mid-term goals are of intermediate length that often require more time and planning than short-term goals, especially if they lead to another goal. A mid-term goal may also be a step that leads to achieving a long-term goal. An example of a mid-term goal would be, “I will get an A in algebra this semester.”

Long-term goals require a lot of time and planning to accomplish. They are usually your life goals. Setting a goal to become a doctor is a long-term goal. The planning for these goals may begin early in your life, even if you do not realize it. These goals may even begin as things you wish for instead of things to do. An example of a long-term goal would be, “I will get accepted to a top-rated engineering school.” As you can see, this goal would take years of planning and work to fulfill.

Learning to Set Goals

Think about what your life would be like if you had everything you wanted. If that was ever the case, you would not have any goals to accomplish, and without goals, life would not have any direction or commitment. By setting goals, you are able to direct your life and commit to that direction. The kind of life that you have in the future is closely related to the goals you set today. Therefore, you must constantly strive to set meaningful and realistic goals for yourself and to do your best to achieve them.

Developing a goal plan begins with deciding which goals are important to you. After you have clearly defined a goal (consistent with S-P-A-M criteria), you need to begin planning how to achieve it. If a goal is too big, plan various smaller, interim steps that will enable you to reach the long-term goal. Never put yourself in a position where your goals are overwhelming; you may fail simply because the steps involve too much effort at one time. Keep your goals challenging, but realistic. The feeling of accomplishment that comes with completing each small step can inspire you to reach your larger, long-term (or life) goals. Figure 10.2.2 shows one way to write out a plan for achieving your goals.

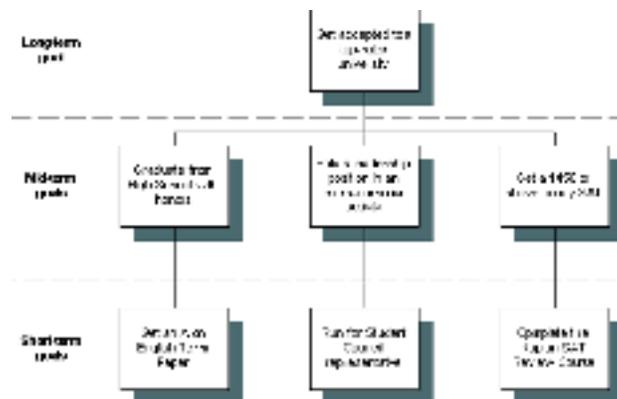


Figure 10.2.2: Writing out and mapping your goals can help you succeed.

Courtesy of CACI and the U.S. Army.

Goal setting is an ongoing process. Goals are also a source of motivation as seen in Figure 10.2.3. Because goals get you through every day of your life, you must continually reevaluate your goals. Some mid- or long-term goals require sacrifices now so that you can achieve your objectives later. You must discipline yourself to reach long-term goals, resulting in greater happiness and self-fulfillment.

Figure 10.2.3: This student has set his goals and is now motivated to move forward.

Courtesy of Prentice Hall.



Conclusion

Goals are very important to your life's development; without them, you would have no direction or commitment. Goals fill the need for disciplined work, play, study, and growth. They provide a framework that will help you organize and prioritize the events in your life. When you set and achieve a goal, you feel a sense of personal satisfaction and pride.

Time management will be covered in the following lesson. You will learn how to schedule your time to better be able to meet your goals.

Lesson Review

- 1. Why is it important to write down and list your goals?**
- 2. Compare and contrast short-, mid-, and long-term goals.**
- 3. List three personal goals—one short-, one mid-, and one long-term goal.**
- 4. Why are the three goals you just listed important to you?**