

How to Set and Achieve Professional Goals

If you want to accomplish something instead of drifting aimlessly, you have to set goals. Nowhere is this more relevant than in today's workplace.

"Setting professional goals is a game plan for yourself and your company," says Frank Arnold, dean and associate professor of management at Saint Leo College in Saint Leo, FL. "Knowing precisely where you're going and what you want to achieve puts you in the driver's seat. It helps you plan for your training and educational needs."

Moreover, goal setting is important in a team-oriented workplace. "You help your work group by ensuring your skills are current," says Paula deLong, a licensed psychologist and a counselor in the employee assistance program at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

Goal setting is one of life's most difficult responsibilities-not because goals are so hard to establish, but because you may lack the motivation or courage to ask yourself what you want. "If you're like most people, you can't picture yourself outside of the safety and familiarity of your current comfort zone," Arnold says. Yet setting goals and achieving them can boost your effectiveness, increase your satisfaction in your accomplishments and deepen your self-confidence.

Keys To Success

Keep the following guidelines in mind when setting professional goals:

First, ask yourself what will satisfy you and make you happy. Self-reflection requires you to face your dreams, fears, limitations and obligations to others.

Identify which skills you're proficient in and consider whether they can be used elsewhere in the organization.

Research what's involved in meeting your goals. Get a clear understanding of the skills, information or assistance you'll need to attain them.

Identify the incremental steps and deadlines involved in attaining your goals. If you want to attend graduate school for additional credentials, for instance, you must study for the entrance exam, take the exam, then apply for admission to the school.

Set specific goals. Setting goals that are vague or too large can result in frustration and discouragement and cause you to give up. "To become an expert in computers is a broad goal that could be overwhelming. Narrow your goal to make it more manageable," Arnold says. "Completing one course in Microsoft Word at the local community college is more reasonable."

Make your goals measurable. "This allows you to see progress and keeps you motivated," deLong says. "Increase my sales quota by 10% this year," is an example of a measurable goal.



Set a time limit for achieving your goals, otherwise, you'll never see closure, only a long, pointless grind.

Stay Motivated

To stay motivated, acknowledge your progress and reward yourself along the way. Congratulate yourself for completing your first semester toward an advanced degree. Praise yourself for being promoted.

It's also important to remain flexible and positive. Your goals will change as you refine your career plan or as roadblocks appear that cause temporary detours, Arnold says, "goal setting is a dynamic, ongoing process that should always be part of your professional life."

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