

The S.M.A.R.T. Goal Worksheet

When it comes to managing your tasks, it is very important to have clear goals of what you want to achieve. Without well-defined goals, it is easy to get off track or succumb to procrastination.

However, what is a “clearly” defined goal? Introducing: S.M.A.R.T. Goals

S.M.A.R.T. Goals are commonly associated with Peter Drucker but were first mentioned by George Doran (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria).

There are two important benefits to S.M.A.R.T. Goals over “unstructured” objectives: One - they tend to be easier to understand. That can help you avoid costly mistakes and time spent following unimportant rabbit holes.

Two - you always know exactly if you have achieved them. There is no ambiguity, no maybes or I-believes. You are either there or you are not.

To achieve these two important benefits, S.M.A.R.T. Goals need to have a series of properties. They are identified by the S.M.A.R.T. acronym: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely

If you look at the above-linked Wikipedia article, you’ll see that there are actually many interpretations of what these letters stand for. However, the interpretation listed here is in my experience the most effective.

On the following pages, you’ll find a detailed explanation of what each of these properties is about and why it is important. There’s also ample room to work out your own goal.

Achievable

Achievability is important for your own (or your team's) morale. If you know that you cannot succeed at a particular task, it becomes a dreaded experience even thinking about it. I am sure you've experienced this before.

To make sure that morale stays high and everybody involved is enthusiastic about the task at hand, answer the question: How realistic is it that I can actually accomplish this goal within the given constraints (like time or number of team members)?

If the answer is that it is not highly realistic, break the goal into sub-tasks that are achievable, extend the time frame, or add additional resources or team members.

Stretch Goals

One word of caution: Managers love to ask their teams to achieve stretch goals. A stretch goal is a goal that is just a little more challenging than the team can currently handle. While it is important to challenge a team to grow, it can be incredibly demotivating if all you are handing them are stretch goals that lead to failure in the end.

The human brain is wired to release pleasure hormones if a task is achieved. If you never allow your team to experience this, morale will drop and in the end, you'll achieve the opposite of what you wanted.

So make sure, that your goals are balanced. While it is OK to throw in a stretch goal from time to time, make sure there are ample occasions, where the team can celebrate a real win.

Oh, and just to clarify, this is equally important if you are a team of one.

Action Step

Answer the question: How realistic is it that I can actually accomplish this goal within the given constraints (like time or number of team members)?

If the answer is not favorable, break down the goal into sub-tasks or adjust the available resources.
