Set SMART Goals to Get Ahead in Your Career

Where would you like to be in one year? In five years? What experiences will help you achieve that? What interests and skills would you like to use in your career? Setting a career goal is about deciding where you want to head in your career, and noting the steps needed to reach that point.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF TYPICAL CAREER GOALS?

1. Increase professional knowledge and training.

Whether taking a college class, a workshop offered by an employer, getting a certification, or other, this is a common goal. It can be useful both if you are looking for work or are already employed.

2. Increase earnings.

Being underpaid often detracts from motivation and performance. Making changes to earn more increases enthusiasm for most jobs and motivates a job search.

3. Improve low-functioning work processes or relationships.

This goal area can make the daily work experience more positive and rewarding.

4. Have new experiences.

Whether volunteering in your community or at work, joining a professional association to meet new people in your field, or introducing yourself to people you never talk with, new experiences fuel interest in your career.

5. Attain a leadership role.

Many people feel their ultimate goal is to lead in their career or organization. Establishing the steps to achieve a leadership role makes it possible.

HOW TO SET GOALS

SMART is a popular acronym that can help you write effective goals. Try the SMART system for your career goal.

Specific – Aim for a specific, concrete area for your goal or steps. For example, "make ten job search calls following up on my LinkedIn connections" vs. "make some networking connections."

Measurable – To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as: how much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?

Attainable – Goals are most attainable when steps are thought out clearly and allow enough time. How do you intend to accomplish your goal? Which actions follow on other actions? Is the goal realistic given where you're starting from? It should be a challenge, but also achievable.

Relevant – A relevant goal is one that really matters to you and to the end result. Is it worthwhile? Is this the right time? Does your goal relate to other efforts or timelines? Does it require resources that are currently available?

Timely - A goal should be grounded within a defined time period, both for clarity and to give your action urgency. When do you want to begin? When do you want to complete each step?

TIPS TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL

- Write down the steps. Write down your career goal and the steps to get there. This will help you remember and achieve each step. Post your list where you will see it often.
- Set deadlines. Give yourself a date to complete your goals by. Write the date when you actually finish each step.
- Reward yourself. Taking steps toward goals is hard work. Think of small rewards to give yourself when you complete any step, to help you stay motivated.
- Have a goal partner. Find someone to help you stick to your plan: a friend, co-worker, a job coach, or someone else. Discuss your goals and check in with them when you complete steps. If possible, do the same for your partner!

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