A Quick Guide to

**Goal Setting**

**What are goals?**

Goals are the most important way to set expectations for an employee that include both key RESULTS of what needs to be accomplished and BEHAVIORS, or how the results are accomplished over the next year.

Note: depending on the work, some goals can span several years or have a shorter time-span. Use your judgement to set the goals that do not fit an annual time frame.

**Why should I set goals?**

- Well-designed goals guide an employee’s priorities and efforts over the course of the year.
- Setting meaningful goals is one of the most powerful ways that you can motivate employees, focus their efforts, and help them improve their performance.
- Clear and relevant goals are the foundation for effective coaching and feedback as well as for performance evaluations.

**How do I set goals?**

Simply follow the steps which outline the best practices below.

1. **ASK FOR INPUT**
   
   Ask the person for their thoughts and suggestions on their goals. Goal-setting is a two-way street and employees will be more likely to find the goals meaningful and motivating if this is a collaborative exercise.

2. **IDENTIFY THE 3-5 MOST IMPORTANT EXPECTATIONS**
   
   Identify three to five expectations that are most important for the employee over the next year. Include expectations for both results and behaviors (the “what” and the “how”).

   - Describe the most important results this person needs to achieve. Example:
     
     **Result:** Complete the student services process improvement project by the end of October.
     
     **Result:** Determine two viable options for replacing the current data analysis tool and evaluate the pros and cons of each by the end of February.
   
   - Describe how this person needs to achieve these results. In other words, identify and describe the behavioral competencies* (i.e., skills, knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics) that will be most important. Example:
     
     **Behavior:** Effectively looks beyond the surface to identify underlying issues and root-causes of problems.
     
     **Behavior:** Is able to proactively keep others informed of important updates, information, and issues.

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*Do not have a behavioral competency model? Go to z.umn.edu/competencies to learn more about the competency model developed at the University of Minnesota to support talent development discussions.*

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A Quick Guide to Goal Setting (Cont.)

03 CONNECT TO BROADER PRIORITIES

Describe how these three to five goals will contribute to the broader priorities and goals of the department, college, or unit. Discuss these connections with the employee. Example:

**Impact:** If successful, the student services process improvement project will not only save the college money, but it will also remove a big source of frustration for students.

**Impact:** Finding a good replacement for our data analysis tool will allow us to analyze data much faster, so our lab will be more productive and better able to take on larger projects.

04 BE SURE THE GOALS ARE CHALLENGING, SO THAT SUCCESS IS MEANINGFUL

Goals should be challenging enough that they push employees outside of their comfort zones, but are achievable with significant effort.

You can do this by defining what success looks like for each goal. Goals that are not challenging enough will not support growth and a high level of performance.

Ask yourself if achieving a particular goal would be a meaningful and significant accomplishment. If not, consider making the goal more challenging. Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not challenging enough</th>
<th>Challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete the process improvement project.</td>
<td>The process improvement project will be successful if everyone understands the benefits of the new process and feels their concerns are addressed, if students experience an improvement in the process, and if everyone adheres to the new process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a replacement for our current data analysis tool.</td>
<td>A replacement for our data analysis tool will be successful if it provides the specific capabilities each graduate student and faculty member need for their specific project, if the cost is within the budget, if it is implemented before next September, and if everyone is adequately trained in how to use it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

05 CHECK-IN TO REVIEW PROGRESS, UPDATE GOALS, AND SET MORE SPECIFIC, SHORTER-TERM GOALS

Have ongoing check-ins* on a regular basis to discuss progress toward the broad annual goals, to update and revise them, and to create more specific, shorter-term goals. Avoid the “set-and-forget” trap of writing goals and not looking at them again until review time. Even if annual goals are not set, it’s never too late to set goals as they should be ongoing and flexible.

Be specific and detailed in setting goals, but avoid spending more effort than it’s worth.

- SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound) are a common practice in many organizations and can take a lot of time and energy to create. However, for many roles, changes in the work over the course of a year will render SMART goals obsolete.
- Instead, once you have set annual goals, use ongoing check-ins to update and revise goals as well as to create more specific, shorter-term flexible goals.

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* See the Quick Guide to Ongoing Check-Ins for structure and best practices on conducting ongoing check-in discussions.