

How to improve (or start) your career goal setting

So often we hear around campus the importance of setting goals, people speak of how goal setting can help us achieve almost anything. Mostly, that is the case, goal setting is a powerful tool. One of the biggest obstacles to effective goal setting is doing it without a clear reason why. Often in life it can sometimes seem unclear about why we should be doing things that people say will help us in the long term.

Why the value of goal setting isn't always obvious

Let's consider decision making, if you're hungry, you might make the decision to make a sandwich, then eat it. The benefit you receive for the decision to make a sandwich is that your hunger will be satisfied. The reward is obvious, so it's an easy decision to see the value in and take action on.

Goal setting requires us to make an association between a decision and a benefit, just like a sandwich when we're hungry, but unlike a sandwich, the reward for taking action on a goal is more distant, and the actions we need to take first can seem more onerous, sometimes significantly more so.

Goals simply help us plan the decisions we make.

The large benefits of small decisions made earlier

If you can accept that goal setting is in fact worthwhile, then the next challenge is to be able to identify what kind of goals you would be best off to set. One of the most valuable things to consider for goal setting, is how to make the goal, its pursuit and its impact, as tangible as possible.

It's quite possible that you've heard of SMART goals before, it's a well used acronym in the discipline of goal setting, and if you look around, you'll find a few variations of what each letter signifies. We propose that SMART means, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant & Time-bound. If those words by themselves don't quite give you the clear understanding you'd like, then here's another way of presenting it.

- Specific (simple, sensible, significant)
- Measurable (meaningful, motivating)
- Achievable (attainable)
- Relevant (reasonable, realistic and resourceable, results-based)
- Time bound (time-based, time limited, time/cost limited, timely, time-sensitive)

Giving your goals some context

Sometimes it can be hard to work out what kinds of goals you might want to set. If you're a student at TAFE or University with a view to boost your career, then the best place to think about your goals would be in terms of how they can help your employability.

Taking the example of the common fear that people have about public speaking, if you find yourself in this group, then your SMART goal might be the following...

- To speak in front of any audience of at least 15 people within the next fortnight

Your motive for this goal might be...

- "To help me overcome feelings of nervousness when standing and speaking in front of an audience."

The impact of this goal on your career might be difficult to initially see, or that might even be an excuse for not facing the fear of getting up in front of a crowd. With enough practice, setting and achieving your goals, you will be able to notice a big change in your abilities and achievements, especially if you look back at yourself in reflection.

Creating direction early

If you study a discipline and defer the development of your own career direction, you risk future difficulty in job interviews and career growth. One of the most obvious things that a hiring manager, team leader or manager can see is whether you have a clear direction in what you're doing. Putting this another way might be, if you're in an interview setting, the person interviewing you will probably be looking at how you will fit in, and where your skills can be put to use in their organisation. The clearer your direction, and desired career growth, the easier you make it for the person interviewing you to see how you could fit into their organisation.

If you've made this easy for the person interviewing you to see this, and you meet the other considerations they have around the job requirements, then you've given yourself your best chance of success in that interview.

Goals help create direction

Goal setting is an iterative process, in that the longer you do it, the better you'll get at it. As you develop your abilities to set goals, you'll also in turn get better at identifying the next steps you want to take in your career. This will greatly benefit your career direction.

If all this sounds a bit ambitious, then the thing you might benefit from most is actual practice in setting and achieving a goal which is most beneficial to you. To help you do this, we've developed an activity which will assist you in developing SMART goals. We think the best context for you to apply this process is your employability, so that's where we've focussed this task. Of course you can use this process in any of the goals you set in life.

You can find the [activity here](#).

Good luck in your goal setting!