

## **Managing Goals and Objectives**

Time management deals with the ways in which you can work more efficiently and effectively. The first step in this process is to define your goals. At first, this might seem odd, but if you don't have a goal, then there's no reason to manage your time. If it doesn't matter whether you finish an eight hour job tomorrow or a year from now and it's the only thing you have to do over that period of time, why manage your time at all?

### **SMART Goals**

SMART goals have specific characteristics with respect to normal goals or objectives. As the acronym indicates, there are five criteria: they must be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Results oriented and Time dependent.

#### **Specific**

As far as specificity is concerned, the goal has to be specific, with a clear definition of what has to be done, how it has to be done and why. A specific goal takes into consideration the five 'W' questions:

- What: What do I want to accomplish?
- Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.
- Who: Who is involved?
- Where: Identify a location.
- Which: Identify requirements and constraints.

#### **Measurable**

The "M" stands for measurable in that you have a means to verify whether you have reached your goal. This means you should have targets and milestones that allow you to track your progress. Your goal should take into consideration questions such as:

- How much?
- How many?
- How will I know when it is accomplished?
- Indicators should be quantifiable

#### **Achievable**

The "A" stands for Achievable or Attainable. Your goal must be realistic and often that means breaking your goal down into smaller, manageable targets within the time line you have set. You have to have possess the knowledge and the skills to reach your goal, which must push you to excel, but must not be impossible. If it is too difficult, you could give up and the experience might be demotivating.

#### **Relevant and Results Oriented**

The "R" stands for Relevant or Results oriented. In other words, the goal should be in line with what you are working on. In addition, reaching the goal is measured in terms of results, not the activities that you undertake. The important thing is the final result.

#### **Time-based**

As far as the "T" is concerned, it means that the objective tied to the time it takes you to reach the goal. You should have a time line for each of the steps

or sub-targets of your goal. Setting deadlines also motivates you to take action rather than procrastinate.

### **Example**

An example of a SMART goal in an academic context could be planning all of your activities before the start of the academic year in order to improve your efficiency and quality of life. This goal is specific, indicating what, how and why you are doing it. It is also measurable because you will have an agenda to follow and you can verify whether your results have been attained. It is also achievable and tied to results because it will improve your efficiency and quality of life. Finally, it's linked to time because you have to do it before the start of the academic year.

### **Prioritizing**

This type of goal, however, brings to light a problem that is often associated with time management: defining your priorities. You can see your goal, but not how to get there. There are a number of systems that you can use. One of the most popular is the Eisenhower method which is based on an excerpt from one of his speeches, "There are two types of problems – the urgent ones and the important ones. The urgent ones are never important and the important ones are never urgent."

This means that problems that are really important have to be dealt with rationally. The Eisenhower approach is based on a matrix which allows you define your priorities based on whether they are defined as important, not important, urgent or not urgent.

	<b>Urgent</b>	<b>Not Urgent</b>
<b>Important</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Unimportant</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

The first quadrant is for problems that are both important and urgent. The problems are confronted immediately and in person. Typical problems of this

sort are crises, impending deadlines and so on. The second quadrant is for problems that are important but not urgent. These too are done personally, but are not confronted immediately, although a deadline is established for when they must be addressed. Examples are exercise, recreation, relationships, etc. The third quadrant is for problems that are urgent, but not important. These problems are delegated to others, and include things such as meetings, interruptions, etc. The final quadrant is for problems that are neither important nor urgent. They are ignored and are typically time wasting activities.

This is a powerful model because it forces you to look at your problems from the point of view of someone who wants to reach a goal. If you view all of your activities in this light, it changes how you define their importance and urgency. In the end, chatting on Facebook or watching the latest episode of your favorite show is not all that important or urgent any more.

### **Planning**

In the example of planning your activities to become more efficient and improve the quality of your life, the Eisenhower matrix can be used to plan your activities once they have been prioritized. Using a paper or digital agenda is a great way to create a time line for the activities you have to undertake. Although most people would classify the time they spend on social media as important to them personally, it is not usually urgent. Within the framework of the Eisenhower matrix, then, you should directly deal with your social media communications, but not immediately. You should set a time and a deadline for responding to messages. So, once you look at the time you spend on social media from this new, different point of view, setting aside time, maybe after dinner, to log on and catch up with your friends is not a giant step to take.

Naturally, one of the great things about social media is its immediacy. True, but according to the Eisenhower matrix and how you prioritize your activities, studying is important and urgent, while social media is important but not urgent. So, if you answer your friends every time they post something while you're studying, you aren't following your priority list. You have to plan your activities based on the priorities you have laid out. Otherwise, you are not making the most of your time.

### **Digital Distractions**

One of the driving forces behind the use of technology is its ability to simplify our jobs and, thus, our lives. However, in today's world, digital distractions are everywhere. Telephones have become portable computers that allow you to be contacted by anyone, anywhere, at any hour. Instead of simplifying our lives, technology seems to have complicated it with myriad concerns we cannot seem to escape. Moreover, we tend to multitask with paired activities, such as checking your Facebook messages while conference calling. Studies have shown, however, that most people are much more efficient when dealing

with one task at a time. So, not only are we overloaded with a constant stream of information, we are also become less efficient in general.

There are ways to deal with the overload of information generated by the digital world. Just as with social media, you should plan your activities so that you compartmentalize the time allotted to tasks such as e-mail, telephone calls, etc. You should avoid checking your mail every ten minutes or when a new message arrives, or answering all of your calls immediately if they're not important. You should set up a time during the day to answer them and then classify your calls and messages based on the Eisenhower matrix.

Most e-mail applications also allow you to filter your messages based on the type of content and who sent the mail. You can use these filters to effectively sort your messages based on the priorities that you establish. This will allow you to be more efficient throughout the course of the day.

We all can become victims of digital distractions if we don't learn how to manage them, and part of the problem is learning how to say no to requests on our time that are not important to reaching the goal we have set.