



Goal Setting

Fact Sheet

Whether you are employed, retired, or a stay-at-home parent, chances are very good that you have been tapped at one time or another to “help out” in a volunteer capacity. A tremendous amount of work is done in this country by unpaid volunteers. The needs are many, the causes are worthwhile and often vital. The trick is finding the willing hands to juggle all the tasks that need doing. You probably know then, if you are one of those individuals who can’t turn down a call for help, how easy it is to get caught in the trap of trying to do it all.

Between managing your personal life, and involving yourself in the needs of the community, it sometimes seems impossible to keep all the balls in the air at the same time. That is where a sense of balance becomes important. When too many things are competing for your time, energy, talents and skills, it is necessary to stop and step back for a moment. It is time to set some balancing goals, to help you know where you are going and how you will get there. The very act of goal-setting will point you in the direction of those activities in your life which you feel to be most important.

This fact sheet discusses ways you can develop a more balanced lifestyle, which allocates time and energy for community activities and volunteer work, as well as personal activities and other commitments.

Begin With The End In Mind

Goals are the end results which individuals, families, or community organizations are willing to work toward. In simple terms, goals are the bottom line. They may be goods, money (relief supplies or cash donations for victims of a storm), activities (a church dinner), or something less tangible (a better way of life). Goals develop from values — our ideas about what is important and worthwhile.

Values and Goals

People with multiple responsibilities who have realistic expectations of themselves are more likely to experience success in reaching their goals. It is difficult, if not impossible to be the best at everything you do, since time and other resources are limited.

How do people set realistic goals and expectations? One way to make goals more realistic is to begin by examining values.

Values guide our day-to-day ways of feeling, thinking and behaving. Values represent the ultimate reason people have for acting as they do.

Values are expressed:

- By the ways in which people talk and act.
- By the ways in which people use their time and energy.
- Through the way they interact with other people, either at work or in volunteer activities.

- Through choices in the market place.

A value is always important to the person who holds it. Values are desirable and satisfying, and tend to endure. What changes with time and growth is the ranking of that value in relation to other values. Two people may have the same values involving a decision, but they may choose differently because of what comes first for them. Understanding values is important. You need to know what is most important to you in order to set reasonable goals.

A goal is an object or end which a person can reach, and is usually based upon something he or she values. Goals can be short-term (accomplished in hours or days) or long-term (a year, or a lifetime). Reasonable goals are individual and can be broken down into short, intermediate and long-term goals.

Advantages of Setting Goals

There are many advantages of using goals to guide your activities. Research in the management area shows that people who set goals and work toward them are happier and feel more successful. By setting goals you can gain, not only a sense of balance, but:

- A sense of direction.
- A sense of purpose.
- Feelings of success — even when accomplishing very short-term goals.
- Insight into your failures so you can change plans as necessary.

Strategies for Setting Goals

Maybe you think that you are setting goals when you make statements like:

- “I’m going to get involved in church activities.”
- “I’m going to spend more time on community issues.”
- “I’m going to get more organized.”

Have simple statements like these helped you move in the direction you want to go? Probably not.

Goal setting can be difficult because most of us are not used to thinking in specific, measurable terms. A key element in managing your goals is designing a method or strategy for reaching them. When you are working on setting goals in the context of making time for community involvement, you will also need to distinguish your own goals from those of the group, committee, or organization. These two types of goals must be consistent, but your focus is on how you can contribute to the big picture. In the four steps listed here, a group goal setting strategy is described. Now consider how you yourself fit into these plans.

A Group Goal-Setting Process

In the four steps listed here, a group goal-setting process is outlined. Then you will go on to consider how you yourself fit into these plans.

1. Identify the goal to be achieved or the problem to be solved.
“The old school house is going to be taken down. But everyone in town has gone

to that school at one time or other. It is a valuable piece of the town's history. Can we save it?"

2. Obtain information and examine possible courses of action.

"The property is going to be sold to a developer for a parking lot. But the historical society is also interested in saving it. If enough organizations in town were to raise money, could we purchase the property ourselves, and refurbish it for use as a community center?"

3. Consider the consequences of each alternative.

"Are enough of the organizations in town willing to go to bat for the old school house? If they are not interested, can the historical society generate enough interest to acquire the necessary funding, possibly from outside sources such as the National Trust? If local support isn't forthcoming, is it worth our time and effort to save an old building?"

4. Select the best one.

"Enough local people have expressed an interest in saving the building that it is now time for members of the historical society to make public their ideas for a rebuilding campaign."

Through this process the group can come up with reasonable ways of meeting goals.

An Individual Goal-Setting Process

Think through these questions to see if you have a solid goal and a true commitment. Identify the ways you can best contribute to the group's achievement. Remember to balance your priorities.

- Is your goal realistic? Is the goal practical and personally believable? Do you have the resources in terms of time, money, dedication, etc., to achieve the goal?
- If you have competing goals of spending more time with your good friends during the summertime, but still helping out in the community, there would be ways to achieve this by volunteering your services to the organizations to which they also belong. That way you help both the community and yourself. You have balanced some of your goals.
- Choose realistic goals instead of impossible ones. Attaining a goal that has cost you a great deal in time, money or effort may not be as satisfying as you might think.
- For instance, a realistic goal for a person on a limited budget of time and/or financial means would be to volunteer to guide children through the local historical museum once a month, or to teach a class offered by the summer recreation program. An unrealistic goal might be to become editor of the monthly newsletter for your local historical society. This is something which would require an abundance of time and may lead into the need to purchase equipment. Little time and/or financial means would be left to enjoy your own life.

Realize that not all of your personal goals are achievable within a short time. On the other hand, goals should not be too easy. Stretching goals require some effort; they are neither too easy nor too hard. They challenge your abilities, encourage personal growth and promote skill development.

- Is your goal specific? Is it measurable in real terms? Is your goal clear and concise?

The more specific the goals can be stated, the better the chance of achieving them. Some very general personal goals might be, “to become financially secure by age 65 and enjoy life in the process,” or “to earn just enough income to live on and devote my life to public service.”

If your goal is, “to save stray animals,” it may be difficult for you because the goal is not very specific. If the goal was, “to contribute \$50 a month to my local animal shelter, or volunteer 5 to 10 hours at the animal shelter,” you may find it easier to meet the goal because it is both specific and measurable.

- Does your goal include a completion date? Do you have a time frame to accomplish your goal?

Goals are more difficult to complete if you do not have a plan. One helpful way to think about goals is to think in terms of the time needed to achieve them.

If your goal is to, “throw a centennial bash for the old court house,” list all the tasks that need to be done and state when they will be done. This is an example of a short-term goal, a goal that can be achieved in a few months. A long-term goal, such as joining other like-minded people to see that the local library gets a new reading room, might take several years to accomplish.

Short-term goals are often set to meet the ultimate or long-term goal. For example, if organizing a writers’ conference is the long-term goal, a short-term goal might be to gather a committee of like-minded volunteers.

A related goal might be to interest local bookstores in assisting with funding and publicity.

In addition to both long-term and short-term goals, many people find it helpful to set daily objectives. Daily action will be necessary to move toward a long-term goal. For example, saving all your pennies or nickels at the end of every day can add up to substantial savings over a period of time. Similarly, setting daily objectives can help you manage your time and productivity.

- Is your goal flexible? A good plan is like comfortable shoes. It serves its purpose and flexes to accommodate the needs of the user. Revisions and modifications may be necessary, especially when working with long-term goals.

For example, if you are contributing to the animal shelter, unexpected expenses may prevent you from giving \$50 during certain months. But, another month you may be able to give \$75, or even \$100.

- Is your goal written down? Written goals provide a sense of “ownership.” Writing down your goals helps you remember what you are striving for and may prevent you from going off track.

Measuring Your Progress

Standards are needed to measure progress toward your goals. They tell you “how much is enough,” and indicate when you have accomplished what you set out to do.

Without standards, it is difficult to tell when goals have been reached. For example, everyone may agree they want to help with a tourism conference, but everyone has a different idea of what kind of help is needed. Analyze your time, ability and interest carefully. Do not over commit.

Is everything that is worth doing, worth doing well? The answer may be “no,” when resources are limited. Individuals sometimes make plans to achieve certain standards, but later they find they must make adjustments. Balance is the key.

Standards should be evaluated in terms of cost. They could be measured in terms of money, resource usage (including time), or effect on other people. The person who volunteers his or her free time outside the home may find that the standards for housecleaning, laundry, etc., must be changed. The standards followed before agreeing to a request for help might require too much time and energy now.

Standards differ from group to group, as well as among individuals within a group. Each person has different values, goals and resources. Conflict and stress can result when people try to develop new standards in order to meet change in their lives.

Identifying Priorities

People always have more than one goal. Because goals compete with each other and resources are limited, it is necessary to balance these goals. When the goals are articulated and listed by priority, it is easier to see which are the most important.

Since individuals have competing wants choices must be made. Deciding which goals and standards are the most attainable and desirable takes time and thought.

People who decide which goals are most important and then work toward achieving them, are more likely to feel more satisfied about what life brings them. Setting priorities involves rethinking goals and resources, moving from general to specific. Some examples of general goals are:

- Raising citizen interest in the town’s past history.
- Electing good candidates to the school board.
- Building a new church annex.

If possible, the general goals should be defined in specific, measurable terms. “Raising citizen interest” might be defined as:

- Gathering information from “elders” on what they know about the town.
- Putting together a booklet about the town’s history.
- Organizing a centennial celebration focusing on the old court house.

Goals and standards should be reviewed periodically, or when changes in your financial situation, family, health, or outside events occur. A goal that seemed important at one point in life may not be as important five years later.

One goal might be to acquire a club house for a civic organization. Several years later you may realize that most of the activities take place elsewhere, the space you gained is not worth the extra time, energy and funds it takes to maintain, and it might have been wiser to utilize a group meeting space made available by a local business. Reviewing your goals and standards on a regular basis allows you to keep track of your goals and balance them against other competing goals.

Conclusion

Setting goals which are realistic, specific and measurable, will help you feel happier and more successful. Do not take on more than you can handle, either personally or as a volunteer. You can make time for your community by balancing your efforts and focusing on first things first.

Adapted from:

Work Smarter — Not Harder, Balancing Work and Family. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Cooperative Extension Service.

Walker, Doris “Katey.” *Setting Goals for Resource Management and Consumer Purchases.* Manhattan, Kansas: Cooperative Extension Service, Kansas State University, MF-874.