

Managing TIME & WORK FAMILY

FACT SHEET

Goal- Setting

Setting Goals to Help Manage a Busy Life

When you are employed full time and are also a spouse, parent, chauffeur, etc., it is easy to get caught in the trap of trying to do everything. It is difficult for working parents to finish everything that needs to be done. That is why goal setting is so important in managing work or time. When too many things are competing for your time, energy, talents and skills, it is necessary to set goals. They will help you know where you are going and how you will get there, and also indicate when you have accomplished what is important to you.

Goals are the end results toward which individuals or families are willing to work. In simple terms, goals are what you want. They may be actual things (a new coat or a car), activities (going on a trip), money (\$1000 in the bank) or something less tangible (children learning responsibility). Goals develop from values—our ideas about what is important and worthwhile.

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:

- 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.

Strategy for Reaching Goals

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

- “I’m going to get up earlier.”
- “I’m going to spend more time with my children.”
- “I’m going to get more organized.”

Have simple statements like these done much to move you 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.

Goal-Setting Strategies

1. Identify the goal to be achieved or the problem to be solved.

"I feel unfit and unhealthy because I do not get enough exercise. I need to find 30 minutes each day when I can go for a walk or run."

2. Obtain information and examine possible courses of action.

"I could get up one hour earlier in the morning, walk over my noon hour, walk after work, or walk in the evening."

3. Consider the consequences of each alternative.

"Getting up earlier would require getting to bed earlier. Walking over the noon hour would require missing the social hour at work with friends. Walking after work would mean that I would have to be organized about supper preparation in the morning before work. Walking in the evening would mean less television or other things I do for free time."

4. Select the best one.

"I think it would be the least disruptive to my life to walk for a half hour in the evenings. I am going to start next Monday and walk three days a week."

Through this process you can come up with reasonable ways of achieving goals.

Characteristics of Good Goals

Think through these questions to see if you have a solid goal and a true commitment.

- Is your goal realistic? Is the goal practical and personally believable? Do you have the resources in terms of time, money, education, etc. to achieve the goal?

If your family has a goal of spending more recreation time together during the summertime, there would be many ways to achieve this, depending on the amount of money available.

Families need to choose realistic goals instead of impossible ones. Even if the goal that costs so much in time, money or effort is attained, it will not be as satisfying as anticipated.

A realistic goal for a family on a tight budget would be to swim together several times a week, or to spend several weekends camping outdoors. An unrealistic goal would be to purchase a new boat for family recreation, which would require both parents to take extra part-time jobs. Little time or energy is left to enjoy the boat.

Often it is not possible to achieve all personal goals, at least not within a short time.

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

Some very general 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 your life to public service.” The more specifically the goals can be stated, the better the chance of achieving them.

If your goal is, “to save money,” it may be difficult for you because the goal is not very specific. If the goal was, “to put \$100 into your savings account on the first day of every month to buy a washing machine,” 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 plan 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 thoroughly clean your house within the next month,” 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 less than one year. A long-term goal, such as owning a home, generally takes several years to accomplish.

Short-term goals are often set to meet the ultimate or long-term goal. For example, if early retirement is the long-term goal, a short-term goal might be to save a sum of money each year to ensure adequate retirement income.

A related goal might be to choose a place to live after retirement. A couple might spend their yearly vacation visiting areas where they might want to live when they retire.

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.

Additionally, setting daily objectives can help you manage your time and productivity.

Good goals will also be:

- **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 saving for a major purchase, unexpected expenses may prevent you from saving \$100.00 certain months. But, other months you may be able to save more than \$100.00.

- **Written.** Written goals provide a sense of “ownership.” Writing down your goals helps you remember what the family is 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, all family members may agree that they want a neat house, but have different ideas of what neatness is.

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.

Standards should be evaluated in terms of their cost. They could be measured in terms of money, resource usage (including time), or effect on other people. The woman who starts to work outside the home may find that the standards for housecleaning, laundry, etc. in her own home must be changed. The standards followed when she was a full-time homemaker might require too much time and energy now.

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

Setting goals as a family

Families will have more than one goal at a time. Because goals compete with each other and resources are limited, it is necessary to coordinate some family goals. When family members communicate openly with each other, it is easier to agree on goals and standards.

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

Families who decide which goals are most important, and then work toward achieving them, are more likely to get what they want from life. Some examples of general family goals are:

- Providing adequate education for all family members.
- Satisfying personal and family relationships.
- Attaining financial security.

If possible, the general goals should be defined in specific, measurable terms. "Adequate education" might be defined as:

- Saving a specific sum of money for a child's college education.
- Participating in continuing education or leisure-time classes.
- Taking a speed-reading course.

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

One family goal was to move to a larger home. Several years later you may realize that since the children will be grown and gone soon, it may be wiser to stay in the smaller home. Reviewing your goals and standards on a regular basis allows you to keep track of your goals and your progress toward achieving them.

Conclusion

Setting goals which are realistic, specific and measurable will help you feel happier and more successful. Families should work together to set and achieve their goals.

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