ARDEN UNIVERSITY

Find out more about

Goal Setting



Psychology
At Arden University

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What is goal setting?

A 'goal' refers to an object or action that an individual wishes to achieve, usually within a set timeframe (Locke & Latham, 2002).

This may include increasing a certain skill, achieving a specific qualification, or obtaining their dream role. Whilst individuals may have abstract ideas about or wishes for their future, the process of 'goal-setting' attaches meaning to their actions, by providing a distinction between their current state: where they are now and their goal state: where they wish to be (Inzlicht et al., 2014). It also facilitates the development of an action plan, which allows individuals to monitor and measure their performance (Grant, 2001).

According to goal setting theory, motivation plays an important role in determining performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). This means that individuals who are highly motivated about their goals are also more likely to achieve them. Furthermore, research has also shown that the highest level of motivation and performance can be obtained through purposeful, well-constructed goal setting – meaning that individuals are most successful "when goals are specific and challenging, when they are used to evaluate performance and linked to feedback on results, and create commitment and acceptance" (Lunenburg, 2011, p.5).



Statistics



In 90% of the studies reviewed, Locke et al. (1981) found that the use of specific and challenging goals resulted in a higher level of performance than simplistic, easy or no goals.



Individuals who made New Year's resolutions were ten times more likely to achieve their goals than those who made no resolutions (Norcross et al., 2002).



Sending weekly updates to friends meant that participants were twice as likely to report goal-related achievements than participants who had unwritten and unshared goals (Matthews, 2007).



Research showed that students were almost twice as likely to maintain a healthy food goal by framing a refusal as "I don't want..." rather than "I can't have..." (Patrick & Hagtvedt, 2012).



Students who identified themselves as 'academically struggling' and took part in a goal-setting intervention saw a 30% increase in their grades once the intervention had finished (Morisano et al., 2010).

How goal setting can help you:

Research has suggested a link between goal setting, planning and increased levels of self-reported wellbeing and life satisfaction (MacLeod, 2008). Likewise, making progress on a goal can help to predict increases in work-related and general wellbeing – especially for those who set themselves more challenging work goals and begin to see achievements (Wiese & Freund, 2011).

Goal setting can also help to reduce an individual's financial anxiety across a short period of time (Archuleta et al., 2019), and goal-related cognitions (such as motivation), action planning and monitoring goal progress can help improve depressive symptoms (Knittle, 2019).



Quotes



“Like all students, I started my studies wanting to do well and graduate. But I didn’t always know what I needed to do to get there. Sometimes I would become overwhelmed with the tasks I gave myself and other times I felt like giving up altogether. But then my lecturer told me about goal setting and the value of putting an action plan in place, and this really helped me to focus my time on what I wanted to achieve and how to get there. Instead of having vague or general goals, I set myself smaller and more achievable ones. I used my feedback and meetings with lecturers to identify areas for improvement, put a plan in place for what resources I could use and set deadlines to complete this by. And by the end of my first year, I not only saw improvements in my work, and felt more motivated and in control of my studies too. This technique has helped me massively! With both my academic skills and my wellbeing.”

Miguel – BSc (Hons) Psychology Student



“There are so many benefits to being future-focused and engaging in goal setting, which is why I demonstrate this technique to my students and use it in my own professional development. Whether it be improving a skill, progressing within a role, or working towards a qualification – goal setting helps me to remain focused, motivated and productive. It also allows me to look back over time and celebrate my achievements – what I’ve done well, what I’ve already completed, and how close I am to my goal state. And this is really important in increasing satisfaction and self-esteem. Goal setting helps me to feel good about myself and more confident in my abilities!”

Abigail – Lecturer

How do I set SMART goals?

SMART goals were first proposed by Doran (1981) as a technique for managers to use when planning, developing and measuring their staff's performance. Specifically, in order for goals to be meaningful, Doran suggested that they needed to be:

- **S - Specific**
- **M - Measurable**
- **A – Achievable**
- **R - Relevant**
- **T – Time-Based**

Since then, SMART goals have been used and applied in a number of settings. With the aim of breaking goals down into smaller, more attainable elements – which are also focused, valuable, quantifiable, and achievable within a set timeframe.



Specific

S refers to goals being specific and focused:

- What do I want to achieve?
- What resources are involved?
- What steps should be followed?
- What makes this goal important?

Measurable

M refers to goals being measurable and allows for progression to be tracked:

- How much work is needed?
- How many people/resources are needed?
- How will I know the goal has been met?

Achievable

A refers to goals being achievable and realistic:

- Can this goal be achieved by myself?
- Can this goal be achieved with the help of others?
- Can be goal be achieved based on my current status/resources/ workload/commitments/finances?

Relevant

R refers to goals being relevant to other aims and important to the individual:

- Is this goal worthwhile/valuable?
- Is this the right time to pursue the goal?
- Is it applicable to my goal state?
- Is it a personal or professional goal?

Time-Based

T refers to goals being time-based and achieved within a certain timeframe:

- When will the plans be implemented?
- When can tasks be completed?
- When does the final goal need completing by?

How do I get SMART-ER goals?

In addition to setting SMART goals, the framework has also been expanded to allow for goals to also be evaluated and reviewed (Yemm, 2013). Thus, forming SMARTER goals, which aim to determine what was worked well, what has not worked so well, and what can be changed to allow goals/plans to be more achievable, beneficial and successful in the future.

Evaluated

E refers to goals, performance and progress being evaluated:

- What has gone well?
- What has not gone so well?
- What have I achieved so far?
- What do I still need to work on?

Review

R refers to goals being reviewed and re-adjusted (where needed):

- What were the main challenges?
- What could be done differently next time?
- What have I learned overall?
- What is the next step for the future?

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Wellbeing Services - What can Arden's Wellbeing Services support you with?

Wellbeing Services aims to enable you to access relevant support to help reduce barriers to your studies. We cover disability, accessibility, mental health, wellbeing, safeguarding and financial support. We have a team of Mental Health & Wellbeing Advisers and Disability & Accessibility Advisers who will work with you to address concerns you have and help you to access the most appropriate support.

As an Arden student you may be able to access free counselling sessions, provided by an external counselling provider. They also have dedicated Mental Health & Wellbeing Advisers who offer one-to-one appointments to talk about how you're feeling and what Arden can do to support you. This support can range from time-limited wellbeing appointments to helping you refer into and access externally specialist support. We would encourage you to complete a referral form for an appointment with an adviser to find out how they may be able to support you. You can also access TogetherAll for free as an Arden student.

How to access support from Arden's Wellbeing Services?

We would encourage you to complete a referral form, which you can find on the Book an Appointment page here https://ardenuni.sharepoint.com/sites/wellbeingservicesportal

You can also attend a drop-in with a Mental Health and Wellbeing Adviser on campus. More information can be found on the Book an Appointment page in the link above.

Alternatively, you can email wellbeing@arden.ac.uk

Support from Outside Arden

Help in a crisis:

Emergency services

Call 999 in an emergency for the Police, Ambulance or Fire service.

NHS non-emergency advice

Call 111 for non-emergency advice.

NHS - find your mental health helpline (England only)

https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline

The Samaritans

Samaritans have a free helpline (116 123) which you can call anytime.

Papyrus

Hopeline (0800 068 41 41) is a confidential service for individuals under 35 who are experiencing thoughts of suicide or anyone concerned that a young person could be thinking about suicide.

Shout

Shout is a 24/7 free text service for support in a crisis. Text 85258 (it's free on all major mobile networks).

CALM

The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is for anyone in the UK who would like to speak to someone for information and support. Their helpline (0800 58 58 58) is open between 5pm and midnight. They also have a webchat service.

Created by members of the School of Psychology

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