

Employee Goal Setting: Collaborating to Climb the Mountain

By Vistage Chair [Tim Shaver](#) (ghost written by Paul Diamond)

Clearly defined goals and plans serve as the central nervous system for all personal and professional performance. --Gary R. Blair, author, consultant and goal coach.

Recently, executive coach/mountain climber David Lim compared running a company to climbing a mountain in a *Wall Street Journal* article: “In the context of mountain climbing, all team members have to be engaged in the process months before the climb -- testing equipment, suggesting routes, collectively deciding on rules to obey on the mountain. If everyone isn't on the same page before the climb, we won't be when we're on the mountain, which can be disastrous. The same applies to reaching business goals.”

Goals are not just for the leaders of the company. When employees are asked to set their own goals, they become more engaged in their work, take more ownership of their contributions, and become invested and motivated in getting better results. From a chief executive's point of view, goals help to ensure that delegated work is being done correctly, effectively, and on time.

What Exactly is a Goal?

There are two types of goals: those with measurable end results and those with unmeasurable end results. An example of an unmeasurable goal is *be productive on Mondays*. An example of a measurable goal is: *Complete new client mailing each Monday*. A measurable goal is clearly defined and easy to determine when it has been achieved.

In *Goal Setting 101: How to Set and Achieve a Goal*, author Gary R. Blair defines a goal as a “measurable accomplishment to be achieved within a specific time frame.” Note that in his definition there are three critical elements: 1) it is measurable, 2) it is a specific accomplishment, and 3) it has a time frame.

Benefits of Setting Goals

Why should we set goals? Blair identifies six reasons:

- Goals establish direction.
- Goals identify results and help measure progress.
- Goals challenge us to grow.
- Goal setting gives us confidence. (Goals replace vagueness and doubt with focus and concentration).
- Goal setting forces us to be specific.

Help Employees Set Goals

When it comes to setting goals, the CEO and managers should lead by example. They

should not only write out their own goals, they should have copies of each other's goals. Once they have gone through the goal setting process themselves, they are ready to lead a collective goal-setting session where each team members sets three short-term goals and three-long term goals. Here are steps to cover in a goal-setting session:

- **Write out the goal.** Having employees write out a goal serves two purposes. It gives the goal an element of permanence, and it allows one to revisit or share the goal on a regular basis. The goal should describe an action, task or end result that can be measured in some form, and have a time-frame associated with it. Use action verbs in the goal statements such as create, launch, design, improve, or organize.
- **Focus the goal.** A goal should focus on specific tasks or objectives that the employee wants to achieve. Goals should not focus on negative ideas or things that the employee wants to avoid.
- **Clarify the goal.** Ask the employee to pick one colleague in the room to share their goals with. The colleague should review the goal to make sure that it is measureable, has a time frame, and that its purpose and objective are clear.
- **Read the goals out loud.** Once each employee's goals have been defined, they should communicate their goals to the other members. Overlapping or conflicting responsibilities can be identified and ironed out. When employees know each other's goals, they can hold each other accountable and help each other to reach those goals.
- **Set a group goal.** After employees complete their individual goals, it's time to collaborate and set group or team goals. For large or complex goals, use a timeline to break the process into small steps.

After each team member's goals have been determined, create a master copy containing each person's goals and the team goals. Then post the goals in the office and discuss them in meetings. Employees will talk to each other, encourage each other, and help each other to complete their goals.

Following Up

Periodically, ask team members if they have completed their goals. As employees complete short-term goals, ask them to replace the completed goal with a new goal, and provide incentives to those who meet or exceed their goals.

Because most people feel good about themselves when they have accomplished their goals, this system usually results not only in useful dialogue, but in a more fulfilling work environment. Employees feel good about creating better results. And that's one route up the mountain of business success.

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