

# Set realistic goals for your business

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*The trouble with not having a goal is that you can spend your life running up and down the field and never scoring.* - Bill Copeland.



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Just as technology is the greatest enabler of business endeavours today, goal setting is the inner technology of success. Goal setting is by far one of a business's most important activities. Unless you take this seriously, vital planning tasks will be futile.

Goals and the plans to reach them do not have to be complicated. It is one of my strongest observations that people often fail to reach their goals, not necessarily because their goals are not reachable, but mainly because they do not follow their plans. Plans need to be followed consistently and with dedicated focus.

As a marathon runner myself, I remember the words of a well-known marathon runner of the 1980s, Toshihiko Seko, who articulated his training programme in twelve simple words: "I run 10 kilometres in the morning and 20 in the evening."

Without goal setting, you are likely to produce only high-sounding intentions that don't really get you anywhere and are soon forgotten.

So, how do you go about setting achievable goals? Here are some basic principles to consider:

- **Make certain that your goals are realistic:** Remember that a goal that aims too high or offers a great deal of risk but with little chance of success or achievement leads to frustration and discouragement.

For example, it is very easy to say that a goal for the year is “To double your production or sales”, yet this is quite unrealistic with inadequate resources or unskilled staff. On the other hand, goals that are too low or easily reached offer little challenge or interest. Your goals should stretch you out of your comfort zone and cause you to grow.

- **Keep your goals simple:** Unless your goals are simple, it is unlikely they will be clear and specific enough to focus effort and marshal your resources, human and otherwise. Clear, simple goals give staff an unmistakable vision of what needs to be done.

Are your goals clear enough that my illiterate grandma would understand them? That is how clear your goals need to be. Remember Toshihiko Seko, the renowned marathon runner I mentioned earlier?

- **Develop your goals with others:** When goals are imposed, it is rare to have anyone become committed to them. Develop your goals with those who will be responsible for achieving them... your staff. When you do that you elevate the level of commitment to the achievement of those goals.

Through personal involvement, everyone takes ownership and becomes more motivated to work towards their attainment. Staff will have a personal interest in ensuring that the goals are achieved.

- **Be specific about your goals and know why you have set them:** Be specific rather than vague. Here is a basic example comparing the difference – rather than proposing that you will “become more visible around the factory or with customers”, it is much more focused, specific and measurable to state that you will “spend at least one hour a day interacting with staff and meet weekly with key customers”.

For every goal that you set, ask why you believe that goal is important to your business. Be persistent in getting answers to your why question. If the reasons do not measure up to your business expectations, revise the goal until it warrants inclusion or get rid of it.

- **Set and write goals with accountability in mind:** Successful attainment of goals usually depends on someone being held responsible. This creates a sense of urgency and purpose.

Who are you accountable for your goals? Remember that by committing your goals to paper and making them public, you not only convert dreams into tangible targets, but you also work harder to achieve them or you risk losing credibility.

- **Review progress regularly:** Schedule regular review sessions with key stakeholders. Be candid and forthright in your assessment and do not expect 100% achievement prematurely. Have clear milestones and measure progress against those milestones.

If you find that any specific goal is unreachable, that perhaps it was too ambitious from the word go, modify it to the degree that it becomes attainable. It is prudent to set and monitor sub-goals as a means of providing an ongoing sense of achievement and keeping your people motivated along the way.

- **Face your goals with determination:** Resolve to never give up. Persistence is important for achievement. Set a date on when you aim to reach your goal. After all, “Goals are dreams with deadlines”.

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