

Performance Management – Goal-Setting

Performance Goals

A key component of effective performance management is establishing goals at the beginning of a performance period. Goals are measurable indicators of successful work and productivity and help to provide employees with focus and clarity. By identifying goals at the beginning of a performance period, employees and supervisors have objective criteria for guiding, monitoring, improving, and evaluating performance.

In general, employees should have 3 to 5 goals for the year. More than five goals are often overwhelming and compromises the employee's ability to focus. One or two goals do not provide the employee with the opportunity for success if, over the course of the year, the goal becomes unattainable or is deemed no longer a priority or relevant.

Employee performance goals should focus on productivity and 'outputs' and may reflect job responsibilities and/or job competencies. It is also appropriate to include one or two professional development goals or 'inputs' among the five goals.

Writing SMART Goals

Use SMART criteria to write performance goals. SMART is an acronym for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. The following is a description for each SMART criterion:

Specific – a clear action, behavior and/or result to be demonstrated or achieved.

Measurable – a numerical value that can be monitored and tracked.

Attainable – a realistic and achievable objective for the job role/ position and current conditions and environment.

Relevant – an appropriate action, behavior and/or result applicable to the employee's most significant job duties and/or goals of their unit.

Time-bound – a timeframe and/or date when a goal or objective should be achieved.

Below are examples of SMART performance goals. Note that each goal meets all five SMART criteria.

- Respond to 95% of emails within 24 business hours for the entire year.
- Increase customer satisfaction score on surveys by one point by the end of the first quarter.
- Increase the number of printing vendor accounts from 2 to 6 by the 2nd quarter of FY 2022.
- Complete a 2-hour Microsoft Teams course by March 2021.
- Reduce requests for maintenance repairs from 100/month to 50/month by the end of the second quarter.
- Deliver quarterly safety trainings at seven campuses in the coming year.

Job duties that are continuous or repetitive, for example, maintenance repairs, are most effective at guiding employee behavior when they can be divided and tracked in increments, e.g., weekly, monthly, or quarterly.

Conversely, big, major goals, for example, 'raise \$100K by the end of the fiscal year,' are more helpful to employees if they are supported by process objectives or inputs. For example, an indicator that an employee was making progress towards their \$100K target might be if they wrote 3 grants per quarter or called 10 prospective donors each month.

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Cascading Goals

Cascading goals assume that each employee has a role in supporting the overall success of their team, unit, department, division or college, and institution. A cascading goal aligns an employee's individual performance goal with the goal of their supervisor, and, in turn, their supervisor's performance goal supports the goal of their leadership.

Vision and mission statements, strategic plans, service level agreements and/or prior year-end results can serve as the source for preparing goals for the upcoming year. Cascading goals can be expressed as a performance objective for individuals or for a team or organization.

The first example below illustrates cascading goals for individual performance. The second example illustrates cascading organizational goals.

Examples of Cascading Goals:



Preparing Performance Goals

Performance goals should be mutually understood by supervisors and employees. Goals should encourage employees and teams to stretch while simultaneously considering external factors that might inhibit an employees' success. Depending on the business nature of the unit or department, performance goals may be first drafted by the employee or by leadership or drafted together. Fundraising and development units often have defined target amounts that they must raise and, so, unit leaders might define targets for employees. Departments that have prior year data, may use past trends to identify future goals and targets. While professional employees may be better positioned to draft targets for consideration by their supervisor.

Revisiting and Revising Performance Goals

Since performance goals are established at the beginning of a performance period, they must be monitored and revisited to account for changing conditions and circumstances. Human Resources recommends that supervisors and employees review performance goals once per quarter to provide sufficient time to adjust or change goals. Checking in with employees on a quarterly basis also allows supervisors the opportunity to identify barriers to success and the support and resource needs of employees.

Please contact your College/ Division Human Resource Officer and/or Employee Relations at employeerelations@gsu.edu or 404-413-3356.