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What Are S.M.A.R.T. Goals and Do You Need Them?



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The new year brings an opportunity for change, which is why many people establish New Year's resolutions during this time. However, sometimes change doesn't stick for as long as we'd like. For example, you decide to lose – perhaps 20 lbs.

Everything starts off great. You set up a plan, join a gym, and buy some home exercise equipment. You start eating healthier. But then what happens after you've worked on your goal for a few months? Something derails you.

We've all been there. Old habits creep back into your lifestyle, and you make less progress than you'd like. Or your goal feels overwhelming and out of reach. Too challenging of a goal might take longer to achieve. So, what harm would a cheat day now and then really do?

Like New Year's resolutions, if you want to be successful and reach your goals, you must set the right goals when you begin.

First, it would help if you had the right plan. A clearly defined plan gives you milestone achievements; it's also a way to accurately measure and track your progress. S.M.A.R.T. goals help you accomplish this.

So, what are S.M.A.R.T. goals, anyway? We're glad you asked.

What is a S.M.A.R.T. Goal?

S.M.A.R.T. goals are specific and highly focused objectives. These goals have a start and an end date. They also give you a way to track your progress. Finally, they help you visualize your end results and provide you with a roadmap to get there. Here's what you should include in your S.M.A.R.T. goals.

Specific

S.M.A.R.T. goals are specific, and you can use them for any area of your life, from weight loss to fitness to **finances** and more. Using our example of weight loss from earlier, you would want to specify or quantify your goal.

"I want to lose weight this year" doesn't tell us much. If you lost one or even half a pound this year, your goal would be completed. However, would you be satisfied with that?

What if you want to lose 20, 40, or 50 pounds?

Be specific with your plan and give it a deadline. For example, "I want to lose 20 pounds by June 1" is much more precise and gives you a way to measure your progress, which we'll discuss next.

Measurable

Goals must be measurable so you can clearly see and track your progress. For example, if you lost 10 pounds by the time March arrives, you'll know you're on track to hitting your 20-pound goal by June.

If March arrives and you haven't lost anything, you should review what changes to make to reach your goal.

Achievable

View your S.M.A.R.T. goal through the lens of step goals. First, break down your large goal into mini-goals. Then decide what steps must you take each month to achieve your S.M.A.R.T. goal in time?

Realistic

Any goal worth doing must also be realistic within the scope and timeframe you established when you created the goal. That is, keep your goals challenging but not overwhelming. Aiming high is okay, but make sure it's something you can reasonably achieve.

Timebound

A time element is an essential component of a S.M.A.R.T. goal. Always have an end date. Without an end date, your goal has the potential to drag on forever, and the objective becomes less critical and less urgent.

Give yourself an end date of when you expect to achieve your goal and stay on top of that date with step goals. The step goals will help you track your progress from beginning to end.

Do You Need S.M.A.R.T. Goals?

Only you can decide whether setting S.M.A.R.T. goals make sense for you. However, this goal-setting method can give you that extra oomph to help you succeed. That's especially helpful if you've struggled to meet [financial](#), health, [career](#), or other life goals.

Revise S.M.A.R.T. Goals When Needed

What if you reach your goal earlier than expected? What if your progress was slowed by something that came up? After all, life has a funny way of interrupting.

Don't let life circumstances derail your hard efforts. If you finish too soon or something comes up that slows your progress, adjust your goal accordingly and keep pushing forward.

If you finish too soon, you may need a more challenging goal next time. Alternatively, adjust your end date to give yourself more time if something arises.

Conclusion

S.M.A.R.T. goals are flexible. They are meant to provide you with a clear guide to reaching your goals. They are also a good option if you're looking for a new way to attack your goals this year. S.M.A.R.T. goals help you clarify your objectives by making them:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Timebound

Finally, this method provides a clearer vision of your end result and when to expect to achieve your goals, big or small.

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