When it comes to setting goals, we often don’t know what we don’t know. And what we don’t know can—and most likely will—hurt us by limiting our ability to contribute and succeed.

The ten goal-related “fundamentals” that are critical to achieving professional and personal success are:

1. Understand the Definition of a “Goal”
2. Realize Why Goal Setting is Important
3. Develop a Vision ... and Share It
4. Study the Anatomy of a Goal
5. Accept Your Power of Choice
6. Respect Reality – Face the Facts
7. Be Authentic
8. Make Everything Count
9. Allow for Spontaneity
10. Respect Your Rights and Responsibilities
1. Understand the Definition of a “Goal”

A goal is a desired end toward which you direct specific effort. In this context, the “end” is an exact and tangible result you want – one for which you are willing to invest “sweat equity” in order to achieve. The amount and intensity of effort expended is always dependent on the individual, the organization, and the overall importance of the goal.

The three key elements of a goal are:
1. An accomplishment to be achieved;
2. A measurable outcome;
3. A specific date and time to accomplish the goal.

Therefore, a goal is a specific, measurable accomplishment to be achieved within a specific time frame. Without these elements, all you have are dreams, hopes, and good intentions that undoubtedly will remain unrealized.

2. Know Why Goal Setting is Important

The benefits of goal setting are neither imaginary nor vague. There is meaningful value to be gained from practical goal setting. Here are a few:

- Goals establish direction for you and others in your organization. If you never set a goal, how will you know where you are going?
- Goals identify intended results. If no goal exists, how do you measure your progress?
- Goals challenge you to grow. If you never set a goal, how do you move out of your comfort zone ... out of the “same ‘ol, same ‘ol?”
- Goal setting builds confidence and reduces stress. Frustration is lowered when vagueness and doubt are replaced by focus and concentration.
- Goal setting forces you to be specific. It is the first positive, obvious step to success.
3. Develop a Vision ... And Share It

A vision is a mental picture of what you want to create or achieve — and it’s the single-most important thing to have before you do any goal planning. How can you plan effectively without knowing what you envision for yourself and others? It would be like starting a trip without first determining your destination, the purpose of the trip, and the outcome you expect when you get there.

Think about the end-state you desire. Picture it in your mind. See it. Feel it. And keep that image in the forefront of your thoughts. The better your ability to imagine it, the greater your chances of achieving it.

Once you’ve zeroed-in on the image, DON’T keep it to yourself. For your vision to be translated into action, it must be shared with the people who will be impacted by it — and with those whose help you’ll need in making it happen. Others can’t help you realize your vision unless they know what it is and why it’s important.

One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. Which road do I take? she asked. Where do you want to go? was his response. I don’t know, Alice answered. Then, said the cat, it doesn’t matter.

— Lewis Carroll —
Three components are involved with every goal: the what, the why, and the how. Each has a different role to play – with a separate, yet collaborative, reason for existence.

- The “what” is the goal itself, which provides purpose.
- The “why” is the set of benefits to be gained, which provides fuel to reach the goal.
- The “how” is the plan ... the map that provides the direction and mile markers for achievement.
5. Accept Your Power of Choice

As your birthright, you are given your greatest power – the power to choose. Every moment offers you a choice: to exercise this power by setting and holding a direction, or, allowing yourself to veer off course. Every choice counts! There are no insignificant choices, no neutral actions. Even the smallest gesture has a consequence – leading you toward or away from your goals ... toward or away from ultimate success for you and your organization.

Everything you do – from the actions you take, the decisions you make, the attitudes you display, and the effort you give – is a matter of your choosing. And so it is with the vast majority of goals you set and pursue.

You come to your job with great capabilities, but you cannot achieve your true potential unless, and until, you call upon yourself to fulfill it. Sure, you must rise to the occasion when it presents itself. But to achieve success, stability, and job security, you also must provide occasions to rise to. You do that by choosing the right goals, and then choosing the right actions that will bring those goals to fruition.

Here's one you can take to the bank: The difference between what one person and another achieves depends more on goal choices than on abilities. What separates successful people from the rest of the pack are the goals they choose to pursue ... and the commitment they choose to apply.

Choose wisely!
6. **Respect Reality – Face the Facts**

Recognizing and incorporating “reality” is vital to effective goal setting. It’s essential to understand that reality isn’t necessarily going to be the way you wish things to be — or even the way they seem to be. Reality is the way things actually are. And it’s something that must be considered, respected, and adapted to.

“Getting real” does not equate to accepting the status quo. If that were the case, positive change would be non-existent. But there are undeniable FACTS out there, and they will (and must) influence the goals you choose to pursue.

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**REALITY CHECK**

Here are few “facing the facts” questions that need to be answered in the goal-setting process:

A. **Is the goal really attainable ... and even desirable?**

B. **Is the timetable realistic and “doable?”**

C. **Is the goal in-sync with my organization’s mission, vision, and values?**

D. **Are the resources, assistance, and approvals I’ll need available or acquirable?**

E. **Do I (or others involved) currently possess the skills, ability, and experience required?**

F. **Am I truly committed to devoting the effort it will take to be successful?**

Answer “no” to one or more of the above and, the FACT is, you’re not likely to achieve the goal.
7. Be Authentic

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall .... Beware of the “Snow White Trap”: The wicked witch could never be happy as long as she continued to compare herself to someone else. If a goal is truly your own, proceed diligently without being sidetracked by chasing the accomplishments of others. All too often, people pursue things that they see other people or organizations achieve – only to discover that it’s not right for them. You need to chase your own brand of success ... and your organization’s.

You see, it’s all about ownership and authenticity. If a goal is truly yours, you will take pride in it. If it is a diluted, hand-me-down from someone else’s vision, you’ll likely be short on the commitment needed to see it through.

8. Make Everything Count

Everything Counts! is a philosophy for living – and for succeeding in business. Its meaning is simple, yet powerful: Every thought, decision, and action moves you closer to, or further from, your goals.

When it comes to getting the results you want and need, no action is insignificant, no decision is meaningless, no effort is unnecessary. There are no time-outs, no do-overs, no “mulligans.” Every activity matters. And you need to determine whether or not your behavior reflects these facts ... we ALL need to. We ALL need to periodically take stock of ourselves.

Self-knowledge grows as you subject your actions and behaviors to examination and self-reflection. The How am I doing? question can never be asked too often. Listening to your own speech, reflecting on your own thoughts, looking at your own actions, examining your own personal and professional habits – these are the activities by which you manage yourself (and others) and add value to your organization.
9. Practice Spontaneity

Part of achieving a goal is being sensitive and receptive to what fortune and circumstances have to offer – and seizing those opportunities when they present themselves. You can’t rely on luck and serendipity, but you can keep your eyes open for them ... and take full advantage of them.

Value spontaneity. Goal setting involves establishing a delicate balance between planning and improvisation. What should never be left to chance, however, is the ability to execute any plan. Required logistics, support, and training must be identified, acquired, and followed.

10. Respect Your Rights and Responsibilities

You have...

- The right, privilege, and responsibility to set and achieve goals.
- The right to be successful and happy.
- The right to expect positive consequences for making positive contributions.
- The responsibility to produce positive, ethical results for your organization.
- The responsibility to teach and share what you have learned.
- The responsibility to become all that you are capable of becoming.

If you’re serious about achieving your personal and professional goals, you must respect your rights and responsibilities.
The 6 P’s of Business Goals

When viewed in a business context, goals typically involve changing, improving, fixing, increasing, or enhancing one or more of the following:

Products
- The goods and services your organization provides.

Processes
- The policies, procedures, methodologies, and equipment used to produce your products and administer your organization.

Patronage
- The number and type of customers you serve.

People
- The employees – at all levels – who comprise your organization (including YOU).

Performance
- The quality and quantity of individual and organizational output.

Profits
- The revenue and financial condition of your organization.
Exercise: Identify the Goals

Look over the following list and indicate whether or not each item has the characteristics of a valid and complete goal – as identified on page 8.

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Flip for answers:

Only numbers 2, 4, and 9 can truly be considered goals. They are the only ones that meet the specific, measurable, and time-bound criteria of a goal.