



Employee Goal Setting Template

Set goals that drive high performance
and help you live up to your full potential.

How To Use This Template

Goals can be powerful tools for helping us live up to our highest potential or helping our teams perform their best.

But too often, goals at work feel like irrelevant administrative tasks forced on us by others.

Have you ever had to set a goal for the sake of having a goal?

The best way to fix any goal-setting processes is to set really effective goals. The power of goals starts with what you choose and how you word them. Getting that step right is necessary to see any value from your goal-setting process.

This template is a framework for setting effective goals based on the research of Dr. Edwin Locke and Dr. Gary Latham (the pioneers of modern goal setting).

Locke and Latham spent many years researching what types of goals drive high performance. This template takes their findings to help you set the most effective goals for yourself or your team.

After working through this template, you'll have several clear, effective, and inspiring goals to pursue, along with a wealth of goal-setting knowledge.

In each section you'll write out your goals, updating them as you go until they're perfect.

Ready to dive in? Let's get started!

1. Start With Goals You're Committed To

For your goals to be effective, they need to inspire commitment and determination.

This is especially important when goals are difficult. You're more likely to follow through when things get tough if you're trying to accomplish a goal that you're committed to.

So how can you ensure you're committed to your goals? Locke and Latham believe the two key factors of commitment are:

1. The results of completing your goal are meaningful to you or to your organization
2. You believe you can achieve your goal (i.e., self-doubt won't hinder your commitment)

Try asking yourself these questions as you think about your commitment to your goals:

- What is the most important thing you can be working on?
- What vision of the future excites and inspires you?
- What is worth working really hard for?
- What do you believe the best version of you can achieve?

Remember that your answers to these questions don't need to be static. Finding motivation for yourself and leading others is often about inspiring commitment to goals and developing the confidence to strive for them.

Write down up to three goals that inspire a sense of commitment and determination in the boxes below. Don't worry too much about the format—you'll revise them as you continue through the template.

Goal 1:

Goal 2:

Goal 3:

2. See a Path to Completing Your Goals

Now that you've set a few goals that you're committed to and excited about, it's time to break down how you're going to reach them.

The most effective goals are for tasks or projects that have a somewhat clear path to success. Have you ever set a goal that just sits on your to-do list forever because you had no idea how to get started? The motivating impact of goals works best when you know how to approach the goal.

As you move further from your expertise, you need to engage in more problem solving to complete your goal. Problem solving isn't linear—it involves a lot of stops, starts, and dead ends. It's hard to create a well structured goal for such an uncertain activity.

You can still have big uncertain goals, but it's best to break them down into smaller goals that you have more clarity on how to complete.

As you look at the goals you just set, ask yourself: Is it pretty clear what I need to do to achieve this goal?

If not, start by thinking what sub-goals could you set to start moving in the right direction, or help you get more clarity on how to achieve your bigger goals. For example, if you're not already an expert on health and fitness and you have a goal to lose five pounds, you could start by trying to lose one pound. Then find a fitness plan you're excited about and try to lose two more pounds. Stick with your fitness plan for the next six weeks and lose three more pounds.

Use the boxes below to revise your goals until you have a clear understanding of how you'll achieve each of them.

Goal 1:

Original

Updated

Goal 2:

Original

Updated

Goal 3:

Original

Updated

3. Decide What Done Looks Like

Great goals don't leave any room for interpretation—they are crystal clear.

In order to have clarity, your goals need to have a deadline. An easy goal can be made difficult with a tight deadline and therefore drive high performance.

Additionally, you should define what reaching the goal looks like. "What done looks like" is a popular term in product management, as product managers define the outcomes of each project before starting. This is an important aspect of goal setting and helps everybody understand what goal completion looks like.

This can include using metrics so your goals are measurable, but it could also mean giving a lot of elaboration or clarity for more hard to measure goals.

The purpose of having crystal-clear goals is to set a standard from the beginning that can't be moved. Rationalizing a version of your goal that's easier to achieve halfway through a project can leave you feeling unmotivated.

Be sure your goals avoid any vague generalities. As you work to add clarity to your goals, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the goal have a deadline?
- Is there only one definition of what done looks like?
- How do you know you're making progress towards being done?
- Is there any way for this goal to be misinterpreted or watered-down later?

Use the boxes below to rewrite your goals so that each one has is crystal clear and doesn't leave any room for reinterpretation later.

Goal 1:

Original

Updated

Goal 2:

Original

Updated

Goal 3:

Original

Updated

4. Challenge Yourself

At this point, your goals should require commitment, have a clear path forward, and be crystal clear. But one of the most important characteristics still remains—do your goals challenge you?

Goals should push you slightly beyond your current skill set. When you believe you can achieve a goal but know it will be tough, you'll feel energized and excited about the prospect of succeeding at something meaningful.

On the other hand, if you don't think the goal will challenge you, you won't be inspired by it. And if you think the goal will be too difficult to accomplish, you can become overwhelmed and give up on it.

As you can see, it's tough to strike the right balance between challenging and attainable. Consider these questions when working to find your balance:

- Have you done something like this before?
- Will it require you to learn a new skill?
- Will you be able to use some of the skills you already have?
- Does it put you outside of your comfort zone?

Now let's take another look at your goals. Do they challenge you just beyond your current skill set? If not, what can you do to make them challenging but within reach?

Use the boxes below to rewrite your goals so that each one feels just a bit beyond you're currently capable of. Great goals push us.

Goal 1:

Original

Updated

Goal 2:

Original

Updated

Goal 3:

Original

Updated

Congratulations! By completing this template, you should have a greater understanding of how to set effective goals that will help you live up to your fullest potential and will help your teams perform at the highest level.

Remember that goal-setting is a living, breathing process. The setting and pursuit of goals is the most important process. So don't be afraid to review and reset goals frequently. Stale and irrelevant goals don't have any power. It's important to meet with your manager often to discuss your goals, evaluate progress, and make adjustments as needed.

If you're ready to take the next step and see how goals work together with continuous feedback and structured reviews, check out our article: [3 Elements of Performance Management \(And Why You Should Focus On Them\)](#).