PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT · BEST PRACTICES

Setting and Aligning Goals

Why it matters

Clear, shared goals turn institutional strategy into daily behavior: they tell each person what to do more of, what to stop, and why it matters. Goal setting is the first step of performance management, which means helping employees define goals from organizational objectives, building commitment, guiding the work, evaluating progress and results, and redirecting as needed. Leaders anchor it in three questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to go? How will we get there?

LEADERS ARE CLEAR ABOUT

Where are we now?
Present situation

→

Where do we want to go?
Destination

→

How will we get there?
The plan

SHARED GOALS DRIVE BEHAVIOR

Shared goals and values → **Motivation** → **Engagement and commitment** → **Behavior**
Do more of it, or stop doing it

Write SMART goals

S	M	A	R	T
Specific	**Measurable**	**Attainable**	**Relevant**	**Time-bound**
Strategic; aligned with mission, vision and values	Motivational Manageable Meaningful	Actionable Appropriate Agreed upon	Relatable Results-based Realistic	Time-framed Trackable Traceable

Example: Increase the first-year, full-time retention rate by 2.5% over a one-year period.

Cascade goals down, roll objectives up

Goals flow from the institution to the division, college, department and individual. Your initiatives become the objectives of the next level down. In return, each level's supporting objectives roll up to the goals above it, so every individual objective traces back to the institution's strategy. At each level, discuss alignment, interdependencies, and priorities and gaps.

↔ **Peer departments**
Align horizontally and resolve shared dependencies.

↓ Goals cascade down ↑ Supporting objectives roll up

Institution — Strategic: why
Sets the strategic plan, priorities and KPIs

↓ ↑

Division — Strategic: why
Translates strategy into division objectives

↓ ↑

College — Operational: how
Turns division objectives into college initiatives

↓ ↑

Department — Operational: how
Sets team objectives, owners and KPIs

↓ ↑

Individual — Administrative: what
Writes SMART goals that deliver department objectives

Align horizontally

Share your objectives and discuss interdependencies with anyone who has a stake in them, across divisions, colleges or departments. Look for chances to:

- Use resources from other functions (for example, IT)
- Rely on others for critical activities or projects
- Join objectives that serve the same audience
- Connect projects that drive the same results
- Combine related or sequential processes

BEFORE FINALIZING, RESOLVE INTERDEPENDENCIES

1. **Share** the objective with interdependent groups
2. **Collaborate** on feasibility and ways to partner
3. **Resolve** competing objectives and resources
4. **Confirm** mutually agreed resolutions
5. **Communicate** action plans to your manager

Process overview

Plan

1. Senior leadership finalizes organizational objectives
2. Agree on specific objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs)
3. Write individual SMART objectives and KPIs

→

Align

4. Hold a team meeting to calibrate individual objectives with department objectives
5. Identify interdependencies with other departments and functions
6. Agree with your manager on final performance outcomes
7. Cascade to the next level down

→

Execute

8. Monitor and manage execution
9. Achieve and evaluate results

Assign clear accountability

Primary accountability belongs to the one person, or very small group, directly responsible for the objective. That owner:

- Treats it as a top priority
- Allocates resources within their authority
- Makes critical decisions
- Identifies outside resources needed
- Communicates progress to stakeholders
- Takes responsibility for the outcome

Keep in mind

Relevance: Does the objective support your department, college or division, or can it be parked for later?

Accountability: Are the right people, and the right number of people, accountable? Too many "primary" owners is a warning sign.

Watch-outs: What could make the objective succeed or fail? Address it up front.