

GOAL SETTING:

A Fresh Perspective



Taleo 

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Using This Guide

“The world makes way for the man who knows where he is going.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Replace “man” with “organization” in this quote from Emerson, and you have the rationale for why an organizational focus on goal setting is so critical. An organization in which every employee understands and acts upon his or her part in achieving the business strategy, in which everyone is traveling in the same direction, is unstoppable.

This new guide from Taleo provides an overview and refresher about setting great goals. Here, you’ll find background and ideas on how to establish a goal-setting approach in your organization designed to guide all employees toward delivering your company’s strategies.

This guide is appropriate for use by HR to support performance management policymaking and design, by line managers to understand and execute their role in the guiding their team members as they set their goals, and by individual employees as they write strong, stretch goals that will help move the business forward.

All of the content in this guide is free for you to use as you see fit, with appropriate credits cited. Think about customizing the language to your organization’s culture. Localize the exercises and examples to your business. Make the content work for you in executing a consistent and effective goal-setting approach across your organization.

Where goals fit into the performance management process

Goals launch the annual performance journey; if you step off in the wrong direction, you'll never reach the destination you're targeting.



"If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else."

Yogi Berra

Why are great goals more important than ever to business?

Goal setting, given high priority and approached consistently throughout the organization, is the mechanism by which the business delivers results against its strategy. Improved shareholder value, greater profitability, increased revenue, inspired innovation—none of these can be realized without an organized process that deconstructs strategies and cascades relevant and measurable elements of those strategies appropriately through the workforce.

Great goals offer significant benefits to the organization. They:

- Add a needed measure of organizational discipline that keeps everyone at every level focused on the same destination.
- Keep employees engaged, because employees know what is expected of them at work. Through rigorous analysis of research conducted over 30 years with 17 million employees, the Gallup Organization identified 12 core elements that best predict employee and workgroup engagement and performance. Of those Q12® statements, Gallup found that “I know what is expected of me at work” is fundamental.¹
- Allow accurate forecasting of resource needs, foster the efficient use of those resources, and avoid costly stops and starts and changes in direction.
- Keep the organization competitive in both the business marketplace and the employee marketplace.

These benefits are as critical to the success of small businesses as they are to large enterprises.

The Gallup Q12®

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.



¹Harter JK, Schmidt FL, Killham EA, Agrawal S, Q12® Meta-Analysis, *The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes*, www.gallup.com, August 2009.

Why are great goals important to employees?

Goal setting is critically important to individuals and their managers. Gallup found that knowing what is expected of them at work was critical to employees remaining engaged in their work. Other researchers point out additional benefits of setting great goals.

In *A Theory of Goal Setting & Task Performance*,² Locke and Latham cited Locke's research showing that specific and challenging goals led to better task performance than vague or easy goals. They not only confirmed the link between goals and performance at work, they went on to outline five characteristics of an effective approach to goal setting: clarity, challenge, commitment, feedback, and task complexity. Ultimately, these principles evolved into the SMART approach that companies are still refining today.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi reaffirmed the value of challenging activity to people in all aspects of their lives, including work. He demonstrated that people are happiest when they are in a “flow state,” and that happens when they are so absorbed in an activity that nothing else seems to matter—strong support for specific, challenging goals.³

How else do goals benefit employees? Making progress toward goals and achieving them foster both satisfaction and self-confidence. Goals also promote planning, and along with plans, interaction between managers and direct reports and among teams to align plans, monitor milestones, and make course corrections when needed.

What do great goals look like?

An effective and consistent approach to goal setting includes three facets:

1. Goals should be, at a minimum, SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. We'll look later at ways to enrich SMART goals and customize this approach to the organizational culture.
2. Goals should be manageable in number. Five or six meaningful, stretch goals are sufficient to challenge employees and keep them engaged in their contribution to the business. Adding more goals is likely to have a negative impact on productivity and derail progress toward achieving any of them.
3. Goals should address both business results and personal development.

Each year, the goal-setting process establishes a new “contract” between employee and manager; both should be equally invested in achieving the desired results. Well-written, regularly-monitored goals provide the framework for accountability and the basis for productive performance conversations between managers and employees.



²*A Theory of Goal Setting & Task Performance*. Locke, Edwin A.; Latham, Gary P. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, US: Prentice-Hall, Inc. (1990).

³*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. New York, NY, US: HarperCollins Publishers (1990).

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”

Andrew Carnegie

The best way to make sure you're traveling in the right direction is to have a map. Your company's business strategy and the goals of your business unit, division, department, and/or team provide guidance about where your goals should be heading.

Cascading goals

The goals cascade is really a process of deconstructing and translating goals from one level of the organization to the next. It is the manager's role to describe the contributions that members of his or her team can make to delivering results to the next level up. Managers should take care that employees are able to achieve their goals:

- The employee needs to be able to do the work; people can't achieve a goal that is not within their scope of influence or current capability.
- The employee must have the tools, resources, and access required to get the work done.
- Expectations must be well defined, and the employee must have sufficient time and bandwidth to meet milestones.
- Goals must be reasonable. The challenge of a stretch goal can be invigorating; an impossible target will certainly be frustrating and can be demoralizing.
- Managers must be prepared to offer guidance and coaching.



Taleo Perform™, part of **Taleo Business Edition**, helps managers and employees establish quantitative and qualitative employee goals, define expectations, and align employee goals to broader company objectives, leading to improved productivity and a more engaged workforce. Its broad-scope interface provides an overview of each individual's goals and the business goal or strategy from which it cascades, along with an easy-to-scan graphic display of progress against goals.

The screenshot displays the Taleo Perform web interface for a user named Elizabeth Thain (Administrator at TaleoLearn). The interface includes a navigation bar with tabs for My View, Employees, Candidates, Learning, Reviews, Compensation, and Reports. Below the navigation bar, the user's name and role are displayed. The main content area is divided into three sections: My Active Employees, Employee Goals, and Performance Reviews.

My Active Employees

Name	Job Title	Location	Email
Walden, Patrick	Customer Service	Headquarters	pwalden@mvademail.com
Topper, Jim	Customer Services Manager	Headquarters	jtopper@mvademail.com
Hiner, Brandi	Front Desk Agent	Los Angeles	bhiner@mvademail.com
Carmine, Lara	Regional Sales Representative	Sacramento	lcarmine@mvademail.com

Employee Goals (Overdue + Next 7 Days)

Employee Name	Title	Aligned To	Due date	Percent complete	Action
Walden, Patrick	Achieve Budget Flow for 2011	Growing Profitability	12/30/10	15%	View
Carmine, Lara	Continue implementation of purchasing strategies	Growing Profitability	12/31/10	100%	View
Carmine, Lara	Improve Overall Customer Satisfaction	Generating Customer Loyalty	3/31/11	75%	View
Carmine, Lara	Improve Recognition and Retention	Improving Employee Satisfaction	11/31/10	35%	View
Carmine, Lara	Increase Brand Awareness scores	Promoting Our Brand	12/31/10	45%	View
Carmine, Lara	New Employee Orientation		12/31/10	100%	View
Carmine, Lara	Service Training		6/30/11	25%	View

Performance Reviews (Overdue + Next 7 Days)

Employee Self-Assessment	Employee Name	Title	Status	Due Date	Action
	Walden, Patrick	Development Plan	New	1/31/11	View
	Hiner, Brandi	Service Annual 2010	In Progress	12/31/10	View
	Carmine, Lara	Service Annual 2010	New	12/31/10	View
	Carmine, Lara	Annual Review Template	New	12/30/10	View

My Plans

How does this work: Cascading Goals Example

Goals address every aspect of organizational endeavor. Business units set goals related to increasing impact on the marketplace and becoming better at what they do, whether that be through sales, impressions, clicks, cost control, productivity, or other measures. Functions also seek improvement through goals that may address efficiency, expanding capability, higher service scores, and more. Team goals carve out each team's expected contributions to the larger business unit and functional goals, and individual goals further refine the work and make the all-important connection between the individual and the organization.

The goal cascade demonstrates to each individual employee what role he or she plays in achieving the company's business goals. Study the example below.

Business level	Cascaded goals	How the cascade works
Business goal:	Double revenues from \$100M to \$200M in the next five years.	Senior executives are unsatisfied with the company's slowing growth in recent years. They want to make the company an attractive candidate for acquisition or an IPO.
Division goal:	Increase U.S. sales of HotProduct 1 by 20% in 2012.	The HotProduct 1 U.S. division's goal is to grow its business in line with the company's growth goal.
Department goal:	Recommend three new U.S. markets for HotProduct 1 with \$5M in potential by the end of Q1.	The market for HotProduct 1 sales in traditional markets has matured. The best potential for growth lies in identifying new markets. It's marketing's job to find them and determine how to appeal to them.
Team goal:	Conduct comprehensive market research into potential new markets for HotProduct 1 in the U.S. by March 1.	The research team launches into high gear to develop the market data the marketing department needs to recommend new markets.
Individual goal:	Complete thorough competitive intelligence studies of suggested new HotProduct 1 markets in the U.S. by February 1.	Competitive intelligence specialists must report on the competitive landscape in possible new markets by February 1.

P1

Practice: Cascading Goals

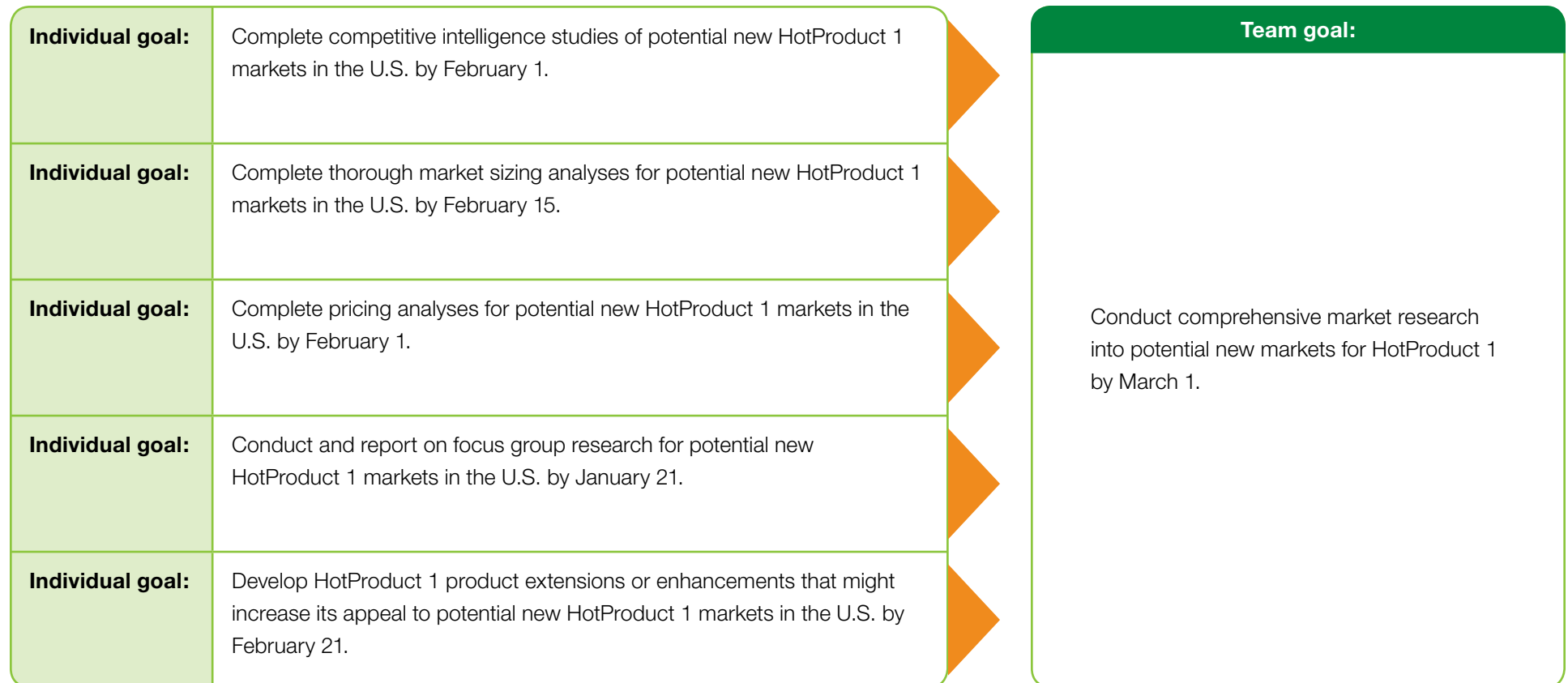
Now create a goal cascade that culminates in your contribution as an individual. Think about the goals of the team members around you and those to whom you report. How does your work support that of others in the company? What information do you need to be effective in assuring your goals fit in to the company cascade? How can you obtain that information most efficiently?

Business level	Cascaded goals	How the cascade works
Business goal:		
Division goal:		
Department goal:		
Team goal:		
Individual goal:		

Aligning goals

The process of goal alignment provides a checkpoint to assure that all members of a team—at any level—are working in parallel toward the achievement of a goal. Goal alignment guides goal setting in the same direction, so that every individual and team are working purposefully toward meaningful contribution as opposed to just working. Alignment keeps everyone on the same road and discourages the divergence and distraction that can help derail progress toward planned business results.

Example of aligned goals




P2

Practice: Aligning Goals

Practice aligning goals

Develop a set of aligned goals for another marketing department team in which your contribution parallels the work of other team members. Think about the goals of the team members around you. Think about the goals of other marketing teams and how they might align with your team's goal to contribute to achieving the goal of identifying new HotProduct 1 markets with \$5M potential. How does your work support that of others on your team? What information do you need to be effective in assuring your goals align well with others'? How can you obtain that information most efficiently?

Individual goal:			Team goal:
Individual goal:			
Individual goal:			
Individual goal:			
Individual goal:			

On the journey toward achieving great business results, well-written goals are the fuel that drives performance. It's quite likely that you have heard of SMART goals and that you've traveled this way before. You may even be thinking, "Oh no! Not SMART goals again!" What else is there to know?

What are SMART goals?

Most reviews of SMART goals explain the acronym this way: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely.

S	Specific	The goal clearly defines the outcomes to be delivered, with any necessary interpretation agreed upon by the employee and manager in advance.
M	Measurable	The achievement of the goal can be objectively assessed according to a pre-determined and applicable measurement.
A	Attainable	The employee has the resources, time, and access to people, data, etc., to allow him or her to achieve the goal.
R	Relevant	The goal addresses work and results that clearly align with the goals of the team, the department or division, and the organization as a whole.
T	Timely	The goal clearly specifies a delivery date or schedule.

"It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"

Andrew Carnegie



But while there is generally conceptual agreement about what SMART stands for, there is room to make this model one that reflects the practice, personality, and culture of your organization.

Think about the original acronym. Are there words that are more appropriate for your workforce?

- **S** can also refer to Stretch, Significant, or Synergistic.
- **M** also might mean Meaningful or Motivating.
- **A** can also represent Action-oriented, Agreed-upon, or Accountable.
- **R** might mean Relevant, Rewarding, or Results-oriented.
- **T** can mean Tangible or Thoughtful.

Some organizations expand the acronym to include additional concepts:

- **SMARTER**, where the E means Engaging and the second R means Rewarding.
- **SMART-C**, where C means Challenging or Collaborative.
- **SMART-S**, where S means Stretch, Sustainable, or Significant.
- **SMAART**, where the second A stands for Actionable.

Glenn Hughes, Director of Global Learning for KLA-Tencor Corporation, introduced a SET SMART methodology to broaden the scope of goal-setting to include the external as well as the internal. The added acronym represents the following:

- **S**: Does it Scare the competition?
- **E**: Does it Engage the employee?
- **T**: Does it Thrill customers?

Is it time for your business to take a look at recasting SMART goals to be more compatible with your culture? Wherever your company settles in this debate, make sure that you communicate throughout the organization not only the what of your corporate SMART goal approach, but also the why.

SMART

SMAART

SMART-C

SMARTER

SET SMART SMART-S



Taleo Perform, part of [Taleo Business Edition](#), allows for full customization in defining and/or expanding the SMART goal model to reflect the organization's culture and ensure consistent messaging across businesses/departments/teams.

The screenshot shows the 'Employee Goal Details' form in Taleo Perform for Employee: Lara Carmine. The interface includes a 'SMART Methodology' diagram, a 'SMART' section with definitions, and a 'Goal Alignment' section.

SMART Methodology

- S** - Specific, Significant, Stretching
- M** - Measurable, Meaningful, Motivational
- A** - Attainable, Agreed upon, Achievable, Acceptable, Action oriented
- R** - Relevant, Realistic, Reasonable, Rewarding, Results oriented
- T** - Time based, Timely, Tangible, Trackable

Employee Goal Details

Title: Percent complete:
Type: Status: Red = Required Information

SMART

Specific - A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal.
Measurable - Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set.
Attainable - When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true.
Relevant - To be relevant, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. A goal can be both high and relevant.
Timely - A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it there's no sense of urgency.

Measurement:
[Check Spelling](#)

Description:
[Check Spelling](#)

Due date:

Goal Alignment

You can align an employee goal to a company goal or a manager goal.

☒ Company Goal [\[Select\]](#)
☐ Manager Goal

Title: Generating Customer Loyalty [\[remove\]](#)

A word about metrics

Make sure the measurement you apply to your goal is an appropriate one. There are two primary types of metrics: variables and attributes. Use variable measures when your goal progress can be measured in numbers or percentages. Use attributes when your outcome will be a qualitative or toggled result, such as yes or no.

Variables	Attributes
Number	Yes/no
Percentage	Complete/incomplete
Time	Proceed/abort
Cost	
Speed	

Other elements of a good metric include:

Easily understood	The measurement data are easy to understand and compare with other data.
Controllable	The individual must be able to influence the variable or attribute being measured.
Complete	The measurement addresses all elements of the goal; it represents the numerical or qualitative portion of the successful outcome.
Cost manageable	The method of collecting measurement data should be affordable in terms of both time and financial resources.
Responsive	Measurement data should be available within a time frame that allows for adjustment in the work plan if necessary.



Writing SMART goals

Let's take a look at the individual goals of the market research team, analyzing the first pass at each goal and how the individual improved the goal to a final version.

First pass goal	What's missing?	Final version
Find out about possible competitors in new markets for HotProduct 1.	<p>Specific? No. What form will your output take? When is your deliverable due? What geography will you cover?</p> <p>Measurable? No. Without specificity, it's difficult to apply a metric to this goal.</p> <p>Attainable? Yes</p> <p>Relevant? Yes</p> <p>Timely? No. When is your deliverable due?</p>	Complete competitive intelligence studies of potential new HotProduct 1 markets in the U.S. by February 1.
Identify which potential new HotProduct markets might have potential for \$5M in revenue.	<p>Specific? No. What form will your output take? What geography will you cover?</p> <p>Measurable? Yes</p> <p>Attainable? Yes</p> <p>Relevant? Yes</p> <p>Timely? No. When is your deliverable due?</p>	Complete thorough market sizing analyses for new HotProduct 1 markets in the U.S. with potential for \$5M in revenue by February 15.

Notes:

P3

Practice: SMART Goals

Now you review the goals of the remaining members of the market research team. How would you rewrite them into SMART goals?

First pass goal	What's missing?	Final version
Estimate the revenue that potential new HotProduct 1 markets would generate.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Specific?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Measurable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attainable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Relevant?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Timely?</i>	
Collect data on what prospective buyers might like in a HotProduct 1.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Specific?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Measurable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attainable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Relevant?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Timely?</i>	
Develop HotProduct 1 product extensions or enhancements by February 21.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Specific?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Measurable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attainable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Relevant?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Timely?</i>	

S3

Solutions: SMART Goals

Below you'll find one answer to the practice exercise. How do these final goals compare to the ones you have developed?

First pass goal	What's missing?	Final version
Estimate the revenue that potential new HotProduct 1 markets would generate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Specific?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Measurable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attainable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Relevant?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Timely?</i>	Complete pricing analyses for potential new HotProduct 1 markets in the U.S. by February 1.
Collect data on what prospective buyers might like in a HotProduct 1.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Specific?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Measurable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attainable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Relevant?</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Timely?</i>	Conduct and report on focus group research for potential new HotProduct 1 markets in the U.S. by January 21.
Develop HotProduct 1 product extensions or enhancements by February 21.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Specific?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Measurable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Attainable?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Relevant?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Timely?</i>	Develop HotProduct 1 product extensions or enhancements that might increase its appeal to potential new HotProduct 1 markets in the U.S. by February 21.

When an individual—or for that matter, an organization—sets too many goals, the prospect of addressing them all can become overwhelming. The employee may dip into and out of the work required for each goal, making little progress toward any of them. Everything is a priority, so consequently, nothing is a priority.

Also, do not confuse job responsibilities with goals. Employees' job responsibilities are laid out in job descriptions; goals describe outcomes needed to move the business strategy forward.

Try to limit the number of goals toward which each employee is working to five or six, with one of those being a development goal.

Working together on development goals

The development goal should address competencies and skills the employee needs to grow in his/her current role. At the same time, consider the individual's career aspirations and the organization's future needs. Is there a development goal that will enhance the employee's role today and prepare him/her to move ahead?

The manager and the employee should each answer the focusing questions below, then discuss their results and agree upon the competencies and skills the employee should be working to develop, along with some preliminary ideas about how he/she will develop them.



The What:

What competencies or skills do I need to master to:

- Improve my contribution or expand my scope in my current role?
- Progress toward my career aspirations?

The Why for today:

How will I use these competencies or skills in my current role? How will my growth contribute to better results for my team?



The Why for tomorrow:

How will mastering these competencies or skills prepare me for expanded responsibilities or a broader understanding and impact on the organization?

The How:

What steps will I take to get there? What is my preliminary action plan?



Goals are a “contract” between employee and manager. They provide the framework for accountability and promote conversations between the manager and employee to monitor progress throughout the year.

Goals are also a contract between the individual and the organization. They should be viewed as a route toward a destination. Should the destination change with a change in business direction or requirements, consider revising goals. However, set an organizational policy for a cutoff for goal revisions that falls no more than midway through the year. Any revisions after that are, in reality, simply a recasting of goals to align with what happened during the year.

The goal framework is the basis for these performance management conversations:

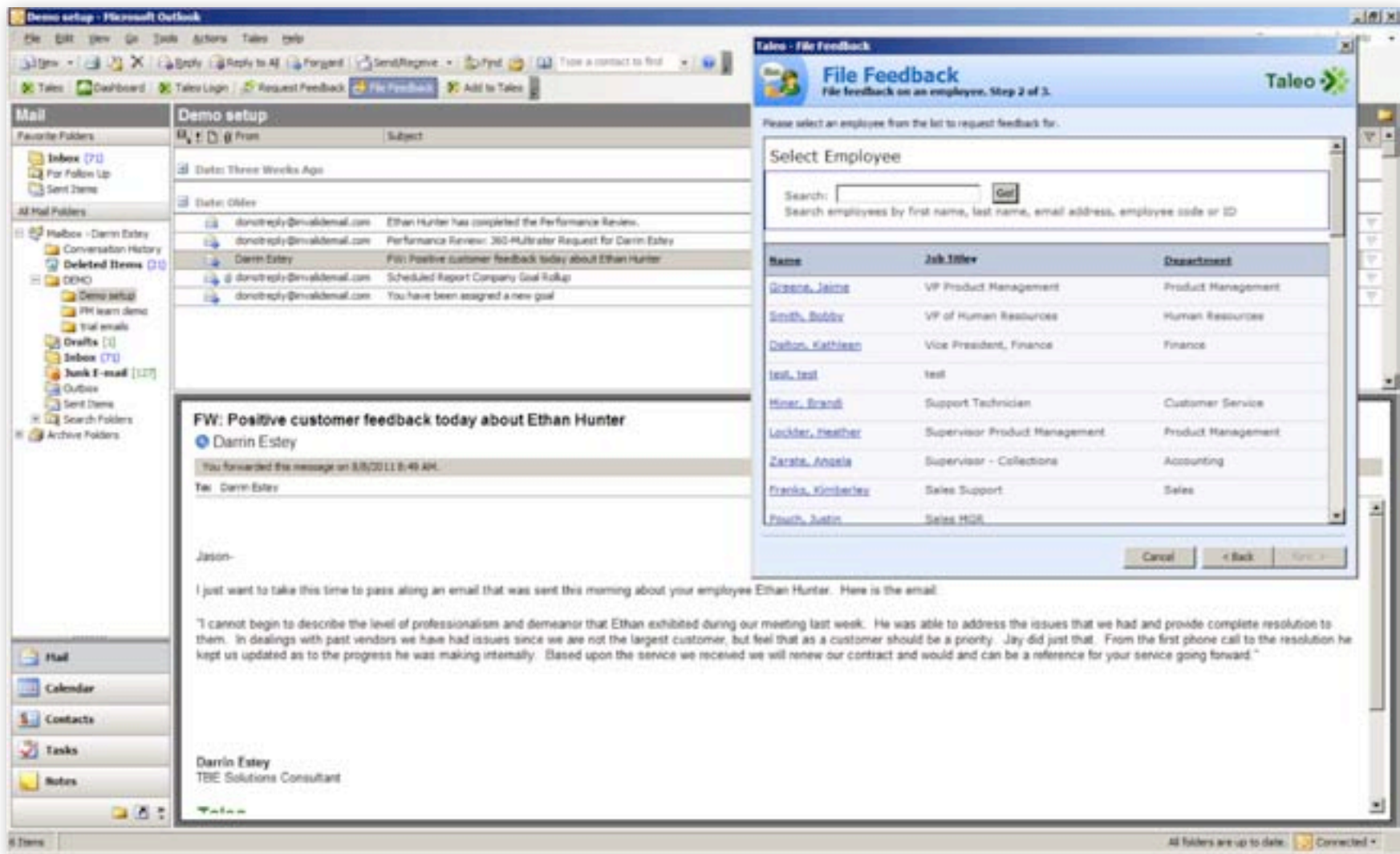
What	Why
Goal setting	Cascading organizational goals, aligning team member goals, managing priorities, addressing development needs, keeping employees engaged
Quarterly check-ins	Monitoring progress against plan, identifying challenges and derailers early, addressing changes, avoiding year-end surprises, keeping employees engaged
Informal touch-bases and in-the-moment coaching	Encouraging interaction between managers and employees, recognizing positive performance and addressing negative performance issues when they happen, keeping employees engaged
Annual performance review	Assessing and rewarding performance, discussing readiness for coming year, keeping employees engaged
Development planning	Building skill and capability in current role, preparing for career aspiration, keeping employees engaged

“Don’t say you don’t have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein.”

Life’s Little Instruction Book, compiled by H. Jackson Brown, Jr.



Taleo Business Edition features a Microsoft Outlook plug-in that streamlines managers' abilities to document performance conversations, both formal and in-the-moment. This useful, practical tool supports proactivity, helping managers avoid the “uh-oh” of approaching the year end with little documented feedback for the employee. The Outlook plug-in allows managers to build complete documentation over the course of the year, making the year-end performance appraisal easier to prepare and more robust.



Coaching for great goals and execution

The GROW model was developed and used extensively in the United Kingdom as well as in the United States over the past 20 years. It has been promoted by such noted coaching practitioners as Graham Alexander, Alex Fine, and Sir John Whitmore⁴, and offers a time-tested and effective model for coaching employees about goal setting and performance. The model offers a highly useful set of probes that can help lead employees to the answers they need to write and execute great goals.

G

Goals

- What is it you would like to focus on?
- What would you like to achieve?
- What would you like to happen that is not happening now?
- How would you know you were being successful if you achieved your goal?
- How could you break this goal down into manageable chunks?
- What are all the things that would need to be done to achieve the goal?

R

Realities

- What is happening at the moment to derail your progress toward the goal?
- When and how often does this happen? Be precise if possible.
- What effect does this have?
- What other factors are relevant?
- Who else is relevant?
- What is that person's perception of the situation?
- What have you tried so far?
- What else is conflicting with achieving the goal?

O

Options

- What possibilities for action do you see? Don't worry about how realistic they are at this stage.
- Who might be able to help?
- Which options do you like the most?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of these options?
- Which options are of interest to you?
- Rate from 1 to 10 your assessment of the practicality of each of these options.
- Would you like to choose an option to act on?

W

Will

- What are your next steps?
- Precisely when will you take them?
- What might get in the way?
- What support do you need?
- Can you see some real benefit coming from this for yourself and others?
- Are you excited by the prospect?



⁴Coaching for Performance: GROWing Human Potential and Purpose: The Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership (Third Edition). Whitmore, John, London, England, U.K.: Nicholas Brealey Publishing (2002).

Delivering performance feedback

Organizations use a variety of methods designed to collect data about employee performance and to deliver that feedback to the individual: manager assessment of performance, 360-degree feedback, coaching, development conversations, and more. In almost all organizations, these methods focus on feedback, on a review of past events and “constructive criticism” on how the employee might have done things better.

Feedback is important and works well in many of these contexts, but another method may be more effective in day-to-day interactions and in-the-moment coaching. In these situations, Marshall Goldsmith (www.marshallgoldsmithfeedforward.com) promotes, instead of feedback, the use of *feedforward*.⁵ Feedforward focuses not on what went wrong in the past, but on what can go right in the future. It emphasizes solutions rather than problems. And because it focuses on future solutions, the person delivering the feedforward need not have any experience with the individual—just good ideas for completing the task, making the change, delivering the result, etc.

Feedback, despite managers’ best intentions, often feels like judgment and criticism. Feedforward, on the other hand, is typically interpreted as encouragement and a boost forward. Try feedforward. When an employee encounters a challenge, suggest ideas that might work in the future. This method not only focuses on the solution, rather than the problem, but also urges employees to think creatively and build on the ideas of others.

Why try feedforward? Here are 11 reasons:

- 1. We can change the future.** We can’t change the past. Feedforward helps people envision and focus on a positive future, not a failed past. Athletes are often trained using feedforward. Racecar drivers are taught to, “Look at the road ahead, not at the wall.” Basketball players are taught to envision the ball going in the hoop and to imagine the perfect shot. By giving people ideas on how they can be even more successful, we can increase their chances of achieving this success in the future.
- 2. It can be more productive to help people be “right,” than prove they were “wrong.”** Negative feedback often becomes an exercise in “let me prove you were wrong.” This tends to produce defensiveness on the part of the receiver and discomfort on the part of the sender. Even constructively delivered feedback is often seen as negative as it necessarily involves a discussion of mistakes, shortfalls, and problems. Feedforward, on the other hand, is almost always seen as positive because it focuses on



⁵Feedforward is a tool offered by Marshall Goldsmith and is used with permission.

solutions—not problems.

3. **Feedforward is especially suited to successful people.** Successful people like getting ideas that are aimed at helping them achieve their goals. They tend to resist negative judgment. We all tend to accept feedback that is consistent with the way we see ourselves. We also tend to reject or deny feedback that is inconsistent with the way we see ourselves. Successful people tend to have a very positive self-image.
4. **Feedforward can come from anyone who knows about the task.** It does not require personal experience with the individual. Feedback requires knowing about the person. Feedforward just requires having good ideas for achieving the task.
5. **People do not take feedforward as personally as feedback.** In theory, constructive feedback is supposed to “focus on the performance, not the person.” In practice, almost all feedback is taken personally, no matter how it is delivered. Feedforward cannot involve a personal critique, since it is discussing something that has not yet happened. Positive suggestions tend to be seen as objective advice; critiques are often viewed as personal attacks.
6. **Feedback can reinforce personal stereotyping and negative self-fulfilling prophecies.** Feedforward can reinforce the possibility of change. Feedback can reinforce the feeling of failure and can be perceived to reinforce the message, “This is just the way you are.” Feedforward is based on the assumption that the receiver of suggestions can make positive changes in the future.
7. **Most of us hate getting negative feedback, and we don’t like to give it.** In a review of summaries of 360 degree feedback reports for more 50 companies, the items, “provides developmental feedback in a timely manner” and “encourages and accepts constructive criticism” almost always scored near the bottom on co-worker satisfaction with leaders. Traditional training does not seem to make a great deal of difference. Leaders are not very good at giving or receiving negative feedback, and it is unlikely that this will change in the near future.
8. **Feedforward can cover almost all of the same “material” as feedback.** Imagine that you have just made a terrible presentation in front of the executive committee. Your manager is in the room. Rather than make you relive this humiliating experience, your manager might help you prepare for future presentations by giving you suggestions for the future. These suggestions can be very specific and still delivered in a



positive way. In this way your manager can “cover the same points” without feeling embarrassed and without making you feel even more humiliated.

9. **Feedforward tends to be much faster and more efficient than feedback.** An excellent technique for giving ideas to successful people is to say, “Here are four ideas for the future. Please accept these in the positive spirit that they are given. If you can only use two of the ideas, you are still two ahead. Just ignore what doesn’t make sense for you.” With this approach almost no time gets wasted on judging the quality of the ideas or proving that the ideas are “wrong.” By eliminating judgment of the ideas, the process becomes much more positive for the sender, as well as the receiver. Successful people tend to have a high need for self-determination and will tend to accept ideas that they “buy” while rejecting ideas that feel “forced” upon them.
10. **Feedforward can be a useful tool to apply with managers, peers, and team members.** Rightly or wrongly, feedback is associated with judgment. This can lead to very negative—even career-limiting—unintended consequences when applied to managers or peers. Feedforward does not imply superiority of judgment. It is more focused on being a helpful “fellow traveler”. As such it can be easier to hear from a person who is not in a position of power or authority.
11. **People tend to listen more attentively to feedforward than feedback.** Normally, when others are speaking, we are busy composing a reply. This is particularly true when receiving negative feedback. In feedforward, people are free to listen to what is being suggested because they feel less defensive. Most often when using feedforward, the response is “thank you.”



Use this worksheet as a guide to make sure your goals are properly aligned and that they follow your organization's SMART goal model. Review the following examples before you start.

Example: Roger Malek, human resources administrator

Goal 1	
Aligning with business goal:	Maintain our position as the employer of choice in our industry by retaining status as a Fortune top 100 employer in our size and industry category in 2012.
Aligning with HR division goal:	Review and improve as necessary our talent management policy and process to improve retention by 2%, achieve top employee ratings for on-boarding for 98% of new hires, improve employee engagement scores by 3%, and exceed competing employers' benefits packages.
Aligning with department/team goal:	Research, develop, recommend, refine, and prepare for implementation of a new 2012 performance assessment approach by 4Q11.
Individual goal:	SMART check
Roger will participate as a member of the team evaluating and recommending a new performance assessment approach for 2012. He will have direct responsibility for researching successful approaches and reporting on them to the team by 1Q11. He will adapt the selected approach to our culture, writing the framework and obtaining team feedback by 2Q11. He will obtain legal sign-off and present the final team recommendation to senior HR leadership by July 2011. He will develop and obtain team approval of an implementation plan by 3Q11.	<input type="checkbox"/> Specific? <input type="checkbox"/> Measurable? <input type="checkbox"/> Attainable? <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant? <input type="checkbox"/> Timely?

Example: Lisa Count, plant A manager

Goal 1

Aligning with business goal:	Increase U.S. market share for intermediate product line by 8% with neutral profitability impact by 4Q12.
Aligning with manufacturing division goal:	Re-examine manufacturing elements to drive 6% of cost out and prepare for 8% production increase by 4Q11.
Aligning with department/team goal:	Analyze all processes from LEAN perspective to drive out at least 6% of cost and assess needs for 8% production increase by 3Q11.

Individual goal:

Lisa will lead the LEAN reassessment team for Plant A. She will chart the reassessment process by February 15, 2011, and assemble and assign project teams by March 1, 2011. She will monitor process activity and sign off on milestone achievements. She will prepare and deliver a report of findings and an execution plan for achieving the team outcomes by July 15, 2011.

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

P4

Practice: Goal Setting

Goal 1

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

Goal 2

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

P4

Practice: Goal Setting

Goal 3

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

Goal 4

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

P4

Practice: Goal Setting

Goal 5

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

Goal 6

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:

SMART check

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

Developmental Goal

Aligning with business goal:

Aligning with division goal:

Aligning with department/team goal:

Individual goal:**SMART check**

- ☐ Specific?
- ☐ Measurable?
- ☐ Attainable?
- ☐ Relevant?
- ☐ Timely?

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Source: Aberdeen

Author: Jayson Saba

Author: Justin Bourke

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According to a 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers survey, many CEOs were quoted as being concerned with how their respective companies engage, retain, and manage talent. As the economy begins to expand, our concern in this arena deepens.

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