

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

SETTING BETTER GOALS: THE KEY TO TRUE ACHIEVEMENT

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributors: Caroline Adams Miller, author of *Getting Grit: The Evidence-based Approach to Cultivating Passion, Perseverance, and Purpose*.

THE GOAL:

Set better goals and pursue them more effectively.

NANO TOOL:

Are the goals you've set for yourself or your team letting you down? Research shows that we need goals to direct our attention, both cognitively and behaviorally, toward what matters. Without them, we can easily get distracted and expend energy on many tasks without an organizing purpose.

But many people who feel “stuck” in their careers and/or their lives aren't moving forward because the goals they set for themselves (if they set any) are either too low or unrealistic. And because we value things we work for, not what comes easily, the quality of the goal matters — harder is better. Harder goals not only give us a greater sense of accomplishment, but they also influence persistence, meaning we are more likely to achieve hard goals than easy ones. In addition, they remind us of past mastery efforts and enhance our belief that we can do even more difficult things.

With these powerful benefits in mind, consider the five action steps below to help you set and achieve better goals.

ACTION STEPS:

Goals need to be dosed and prescribed carefully to avoid common pitfalls, such as demotivating employees who don't have the resources to achieve their goals, creating competition between groups whose goals conflict, suppressing creativity and extra learning because of a too-narrow focus, and focusing too much on profit at the expense of culture.

- 1. Don't confuse “learning goals” with “performance goals.”** While both should be challenging and specific, learning goals are set when the objective is something new to you. It's fine to have a learning goal of “do your best,” since there is no track record to show how long it will take or even what strategies you might use. Performance goals, in contrast, need distinct metrics and a clear finish line. They should stretch your team to higher levels of performance. Confusing the two can lead to frustration and feelings of failure when performance goals are set in a learning goal situation.
- 2. Gamify learning goals.** Brainstorming new ways to accomplish goals, or finding new ways to access the requisite knowledge, can be gamified by challenging a person or team to come up with a number of different approaches. When a cross-functional team works on gamification, the ideas generated can lead to innovation and new relationships can be fostered.



3. **Establish short-term and long-term goals.** When you only have long-term goals, the delayed gratification can be demotivating, especially if it is hard to see progress. People respond well to leveraged goals that build upon each other. The completion of a shorter-term goal can improve chances of accomplishing the longer-term goal, and can also serve as an evaluation of whether your methods for measuring progress are as effective as they could be.
4. **Be accountable.** Write down your goals, and share them with trusted individuals or groups. Schedule emails that will be delivered to you at set intervals, reminding you of steps you need to take, emphasizing why your goal is so important, and challenging you to remain committed. For example, at the website www.futureme.org, you can create free emails that will be sent to you in the future.
5. **Think about your goals.** New research finds that people who consciously think about the goals they need to accomplish during the day and how they fit into longer-term goals and plans are less emotionally exhausted, more satisfied at work, and even have a happier commute! So in the morning, as you think through your day's activities and how and when you will accomplish them, also ask yourself where they fit into your longer-term plans. This type of future-oriented thinking is known as "goal-directed prospection," and it can put you in a better mood, increase your willpower, and give you a leg up when you get into action in a goal-directed state of mind.

HOW LEADERS USE IT:

- Belcorp, one of the largest direct-sales companies in the world, decided to change its goal-setting process after learning about goal setting theory. Instead of simply emphasizing product sales for new consultants, they encouraged managers to help their teams break their goals into learning and performance goals, matching more seasoned consultants with new consultants to help flatten the learning curve around cultivating clients and using their new digital platform. They also began to share more videotaped stories of overcoming obstacles so that consultants in different countries could have hope that short-term obstacles didn't spell long-term failure.
- Chili's restaurants recognized that employees usually have a blend of performance and learning goals, so they established different metrics to gauge performance goals (meals served, sales) and learning goals (dealing diplomatically with unhappy customers, menu rotations).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Getting Grit: The Evidence-based Approach to Cultivating Passion, Perseverance, and Purpose*, Caroline Adams Miller (Sounds True, 2017). Offers practical guidance for developing the qualities needed to persevere over obstacles — not just toughness and passion, but also humility, patience, and kindness.
- *Creating Your Best Life: The Ultimate Life List Guide*, Caroline Adams Miller and Michael J. Frisch, (Sterling, 2009). Provides actionable steps, worksheets, and suggested readings to gain broader knowledge about goal setting theory, motivation, Positive Psychology, and how the environment impacts success.
- *Succeed: How We Can Reach Our Goals*, Heidi Grant Halvorson, (Hudson Street Press, 2010). Provides insights and science-based information to help set goals, build willpower, and avoid the kind of positive thinking that makes people fail.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.