

4 reasons to rethink goal-setting



It's simply a given that leaders carefully set and monitor lofty goals, and it's an accepted trope of managerial culture that we encourage others to do the same—by the month, by the quarter, by the year.

But it's important to examine the possible downsides of relentless goal-setting. Consider these:

- 1. You're entering a never-ending quest for catch-up.** By composing hard and fast goals, you give up living for the now and are always seeking an imagined future where everything's better than it is today. You're making the choice to live perpetually on the clock in a mindset where you can't ever quite be good enough. After all, when one goal is reached, we're encouraged to immediately set another. Can you handle the stress of going to sleep each night with work undone?
- 2. You may misdefine success.** If your goal is to personally save \$25,000 or overhaul the company's brand, and you reach about 80% success, you'll likely call your efforts a noble failure, better luck next time—never mind that what you've accomplished is admirable. This fallacy is seen in companies quite often; because its 4th quarter financial goal was X and it fell just short, there are no bonuses for anyone despite the fact that the profits were even higher than last year. When real results are relentlessly compared against a foggy ideal of what might have been, egos can get bruised and workplace cultures can be resigned to frustration.
- 3. You might be punished for sharing.** We all like to speak of our ambitions to the people we're close to, but it can have the effect of cranking the pressure up to deliver. We then feel a little ashamed when we fail, just like the moment when we tell everyone that our New Year's resolution to lose 20 pounds has gone by the wayside.
- 4. You're putting on blinders.** The goal you set today is very much a product of its date and place. The person you are changes constantly, as do your circumstances. Writing down a goal and treating it as sacrosanct can blind us to the fact that its value may be decreasing every day, and we sometimes become unwilling to recognize that the journey is providing diminishing returns.

3 hard questions to ask about your goals

1. *What pain am I willing to endure to achieve this?*

2. *Exactly who am I trying to please?*

3. *How will I really feel if I reach this goal, and how will I really feel if I fail ... not just in the moment, but years later?*

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