

MINI CASE 03: THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING A SPECIFIC GOAL

Lera Zelenskaya

Overview: There are a total of five (3) Mini Case Assignments. They are numbered Mini Case Assignment 01, 02, and 03. While each case builds on the previous case assignment, each of the Mini Case Assignments will be completed and submitted separately as freestanding assignments.

Examples: You can refer to two Mini Case Assignment examples if you need some help in visualizing what a sample response might look like.

Read: Beginning below, you will read the short scenario that provides background, opinions from managers, survey information, and theory (from one of my business management books). It then proposes a Mini Case scenario made up of a hypothetical situation involving employees. Finally, based on the background and case scenario, it asks you to respond and answer a discussion question (an application of learn-by-doing).

My expectations: For each Mini Case Assignment, I am expecting a minimum, ½ page, individually written (on a new, blank document), and thoughtful response uploaded to the appropriate Mini Case Assignment location on Blackboard.

YOU WILL BEGIN READING THE SPECIFIC MINI CASE JUST BELOW THIS LINE BREAK

MINI CASE 03: THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING A SPECIFIC GOAL

A SMART goal is a goal that is: Specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, and timely. The following points discuss the importance of incorporating these five components into the goal-setting process.

SPECIFIC

Goals should be both explicit and unclouded—something to aim toward without misinterpretation. It is not enough simply to set positive-sounding goals ("*I want to become more fit*"). O’Hair found managers are more likely to succeed if their goals are specific and

clear.¹ Harry Waddington, GM of the Piedmont Driving Club in Atlanta believes, “*Focus is the key to my success. If I focus specifically on something long enough, I know that I probably can achieve it. If we properly plan a function and carefully focus on the details as it unfolds, we are likely to produce a huge success.*”

Goal-setting theory asserts that specific goals improve performance by producing higher levels of effort and planning than unclear or general goals. People strive for a higher standard of success by increasing effort.² When people pursue vague goals, they may obtain satisfaction from even low levels of performance.³

Club managers can channel some of this extra effort into the development of appropriate plans. Studies show that people with specific goals tend to plan and organize more than those with general goals which, in turn, creates a motivational effect to follow through with the plan.⁴ Using the example about hoping to become more physically fit begins to transform from a general wish to a distinct possibility by amending the statement to the more specific statement, “*I will become more physically fit by beginning a jogging program.*” This idea becomes more salient and develops into a goal as the process evolves.

MEASURABLE

¹ O’Hair 1992.

² Shalley, Christina E. "Effects of Productivity Goals, Creativity Goals, and Personal Discretion on Individual Creativity." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 76, No.2, (1991), pp. 179-185.

³ Latham, Gary P. and Edwin A. Locke. "Self-Regulation Through Goal Setting." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, (1991), pp. 212-247.

⁴ Earley, Christopher P, William Prest, and Pauline Wojnaroski. "Task Planning and Energy Expended: Exploration of How Goals Influence Performance." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol.72, No.1, (1987), pp. 107-114.

It is very important that goals are measurable because measurement permits objectivity which helps define goals in terms of actions that one can readily see. Measurement can be as simple as an informal check list, or it may be a complex and sophisticated evaluation form that measures performance in a variety of categories. For example, at the beginning of your jogging program, you could establish a baseline by timing yourself over a one-mile course. If your time is 14 minutes, you have established that as your baseline. It is reasonable to infer that with proper training, your time can improve—an indication of enhanced fitness condition. You may decide that you will jog 45 minutes, five days a week, for four weeks. And at the beginning of each week, you will time your first mile to see how you are progressing.

ACCEPTABLE / ATTAINABLE

Goals should not be imposed, but rather self-desired and thereby acceptable—whether assigned or self conceived. When club managers accept their goals and make a commitment to achieving them, goals have a much better chance of being realized. However, if the goal is more imposed than desired, the goal may be perceived as more difficult to attain, thereby resulting in frustration instead of accomplishment. Is achieving an improved fitness level an acceptable, self-desired goal to you—one that you are committed to achieving?

Acceptance and commitment create determination for reaching a goal—regardless of the goal's origin. Locke summarized the determinants of goal acceptance and commitment into three categories: external influences, interactive factors, and internal factors.⁵

External influences--legitimate authority. Managers have both personal and club related goals. Boards of governors have goals that are often times pushed down on managers. In order for

⁵ Locke, Edwin A. "The Determinants of Goal Commitment." *Academy of Management Review*, Vol.13, No.1, (1988), pp. 23-39.

managers to be as effective as possible in goal achievement, they must deal with this dilemma of sorting out which goals are most important. In effect, managers must try to reconcile conflicting goals and attempt to make them congruent for themselves as well as for the teams they supervise. This merging of individual and organizational needs is seen as the biggest challenge in goal attainment.⁶

REALISTIC + TIMELY

Managers should take responsibility for and assume ownership of their goals—all goals. Those that are sent down from the board should be carefully incorporated as guiding principles into operational goals where they become more salient. It may not be easy. The culture of the club will regulate the amount of influence club managers have on influencing top-down goals.

Michael Mooney, manager at the Annapolis Yacht Club in Maryland offered insight regarding his past experience in a restaurant company: *“The corporate office set the goals, the general managers were the enforcers. Department heads had very little say. Now that I am a club manager, I try to involve everyone in the process, so our goals become more meaningful.”*

Ideally, club managers should go about the process of developing and implementing work-related goals with the same structure and zeal they would utilize with their personal goals, instead of accepting them as habitual responses, respect for authority, or due to the power of the person assigning the goal.⁷ With long work weeks the norm for managers, the process of buying off on and personalizing club goals is a key issue with which to make peace.

Assigned goals do the following:⁸

⁶ Gatewood, R. D., Taylor, R. R., and Ferrell, O. C., *Management Comprehension, Analysis, and Application*. (Burr Ridge, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1995).

⁷ Earley, 1987.

⁸ Earley, 1987.

1. Provide a sense of purpose, direction, and clarity concerning expectations.
2. Stretch individuals' beliefs of what they think they can achieve.
3. Lead individuals toward developing high quality plans to achieve their goals.

Interactive factors—participation and competition. Although assigned goals increase commitment, studies suggest that participatory goal setting produces even greater commitment. Participation was a subject of primary concern to management during the 1960s.⁹ Maier's research asserts that employees tend to set higher goals for themselves in a participatory setting than supervisors alone would dare to impose, since employees seem to be more acutely aware of the factors within their control.¹⁰

Studies have not yet definitively proven how competition affects commitment. However, Locke found that individuals set significantly higher goals and performed significantly better in competitive situations than those who were not competing.¹¹

Internal factors: Personal goals, self efficacy and internal rewards. Personal goals and self efficacy judgments have direct effects on performance. Zander suggested that individuals are equally committed to self-set and participatively-set goals.¹²

Individuals will set more difficult personal goals for themselves than for others because they see themselves as more able to perform. In other words, individuals have lower expectations for others than for themselves.

⁹ Mathis, R. L. and Jackson, J. H. (1997). *Human Resource Management*. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1997).

¹⁰ Maier, Norman R. F. "Assets and Liabilities in Group Problem Solving: The Need for an Integrative Function." *Psychological Review*, Vol.74(4), (1967), pp.233-249.

¹¹ Locke, 1988.

¹² Zander, Alvin, *The Purposes of Groups and Organizations*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Publishers, 1985).

During the goal-setting process, individuals experience a normative shift that shapes their self efficacy—the belief in their capabilities.¹³ When an individual believes that they can accomplish a task, they will push themselves. By contrast, not even incentives will motivate an individual with low self-efficacy. In other words, self-efficacy is more a more fundamental internal value than reward. People will not strive for rewards they believe are unattainable, but they will commit to goals they believe they can reach.

MINI CASE: THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING A SPECIFIC GOAL

Sally Butterfield, dockmaster and manager at The Harborside Club, made an appointment to discuss budget problems with her boss, Paul Lewis, the general manager. Sally planned to ask Paul for an increase in operating funds because the yachting department was having a tough time making ends meet. Sally and Paul occasionally played tennis at the same park and their children attended the same school, so Sally felt comfortable about the meeting. She did not plan out what she was going to say because she felt sure that Paul would see the situation her way.

When Sally arrived at Paul's office, she was kept waiting for over 20 minutes. When Paul finally saw her, he told Sally that he had to leave for BMI V in 10 minutes. He looked at Sally and said, *"This is a tough year for budgets. All departments seem to need more money. I can help only those that can really demonstrate specific needs."*

Sally had come into the meeting unprepared—no data, hard facts, or specific goals. She did not even have a specific amount in mind. She had planned to use the meeting to get additional funding from Paul on the basis of their friendship. She left the meeting with Paul encouraging her to keep up the hard work, but no increase.

¹³ Gellatly, Ian R. and John P. Meyer. "The Effects of Goal Difficulty on Physiological Arousal, Cognition, and Task Performance." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol.77, No.5, (1992), pp. 694-704.

Sally's experience shows the importance of specific goals. They are valuable because they take set conditions into account and identify targets. Specific goals allow a person to plan her or his actions and behaviors. Sally should have set specific goals such as:

- *“I will present four points each with supporting material.”*
- *“I will prioritize my points so that if we run out of time, the most important ones will be covered.”*
- *“I will show how our department is in greatest need of extra funds.”*
- *“I will ask for a 20 percent budget increase, in hopes that Paul will actually give me 15 percent.”*

By setting specific and high goals, Sally would have been in a better position for handling such a difficult situation.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Have you faced a similar situation with your boss? Recall the specifics of that encounter. Using hindsight, what steps could you have taken to have made the session work to your advantage?