

Setting S.M.A.R.T. Goals

By Dr. Tanja Haley

I cannot stress the importance of setting goals enough. Goals give us something to work toward, and help us feel like we are moving along a specific path. Establishing goals invites us to look at the big picture, break it down into smaller pieces, and get started toward accomplishing our important hopes and dreams.

It seems though, that many people aren't quite sure how to set goals. One of the most common problems is that their goals tend to be too big. It is much easier to achieve smaller goals that fit with a larger objective, than to try and accomplish everything all at once. Here are some simple tips that you might find helpful:

Formulate two to three goals that you want to work toward in the next six months. Use the S.M.A.R.T. technique to help you define these goals:

- 1) Specific - set clear, concrete goals. Some examples might be implementing an exercise plan, working toward a certification, or improving your relationship with your spouse.
- 2) Measurable - identify markers that will indicate when you have reached your goals. If your goal is implementing an exercise plan, a marker is going to the gym three times per week. Or, if you want to have a better relationship with your spouse a marker might be checking in with him/her for at least 10 minutes per day.
- 3) Achievable - ensure that your goals are realistic. Ask yourself the question of whether your goal is actually achievable or not, and be honest! For example, setting the goal of losing 10 pounds in two weeks is not realistic (and definitely not healthy!).
- 4) Relevant - choose goals that are applicable to your personal or professional development. Make sure that these goals are something you are truly invested in, because you will be focusing a great deal of time and energy on them.
- 5) Time-Related - set a timeline that will guide your progress. Specifying a goal for two years down the road is not as powerful a motivator as one that you set for the next six months.

Once you have set a couple of goals for yourself that you feel comfortable with, share those goals with a close family member or friend. Often voicing them out loud makes them much more tangible, and may increase your motivation for reaching them. Also, the person you entrust with these goals could become a cheerleader, and someone to celebrate your successes with.

Rick Hansen sums up the importance of setting S.M.A.R.T. goals very well:

"The goal you set must be challenging. At the same time, it should be realistic and attainable, not impossible to reach. It should be challenging enough to make you stretch, but not so far that you break."