

## Why Set Objectives?

If your previous objective setting efforts have fallen into the annual ritual category, you may be wondering: “Why bother setting objectives in the first place? “Why? Because when objective setting is done well it answers the age-old question asked by everyone from CEO to hourly employee: “What exactly is expected of me around here anyway?”” Good objectives give work a sense of purpose — a direction — a *raison d’être*. You’re not doing things just to do things.

Good objectives also keep you from falling into the trap of merely doing what you are most comfortable doing or what you’ve done in the past — neither of which may be right for the current situation. Also, numerous research studies on the relationship between objective setting and performance show that specific, challenging objectives produce better performance than medium, easy, do your best, or no objectives. Good objectives focus your efforts on things that are strategically important to achieve in your job. They enable you to invest your heart and soul in your job — not just go through the motions.

Good objectives also help ensure that you and your boss are on the same page as to what are the most important things to accomplish in your job. Without objectives there is no better than a 25% chance that you and your boss will agree on what’s most important.

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Here are some other benefits associated with developing good objectives:

- A greater awareness and understanding of your role in the organization.
- Increased consciousness of overall departmental and organizational strategic initiatives and goals.
- Clarification of your vertical and horizontal work relationships.
- A higher level of motivation and greater sense of accomplishment.

All in all, developing good objectives makes good sense from both a personal and organizational perspective.

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## Determine Key Result Areas – Overview

The first step in the objective setting process is to build a solid foundation on which objectives can be developed. Constructing a solid foundation brings focus to your objective setting efforts. It provides a framework around which to develop objectives. In addition, it keeps you from developing too many objectives, or falling into the “activity trap” and developing objectives without first determining what’s most important to accomplish. Lastly, it ensures that the objectives you develop are focused on what you do in your job — not something you do in addition to your job.

Objectives are built on a foundation of key result areas, which are unique for your job. To determine your key result areas, you need to do three things:

1. List all the duties, tasks and activities you perform in your job.
2. Cluster the items into three to five groups of items related to the same aspect of the job.
3. Assign each cluster group a name.

It’s important in #1 to make a complete list of ALL the duties, tasks and activities you perform in your job.

*Note:* Because your job is likely to consist of things you do more or less often, it is advisable to review and revise your initial list several times before going to #2.

There is no one “best way” to create the clusters in #2. Use common sense and good judgment in deciding which items relate to the same aspect of your job, and group

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these items together. In cases when an item could fit into more than one cluster, only one should be chosen. Also, if you end up with slightly more than five groups (say six or seven), that’s okay.

In #3, review and name each cluster group. The name chosen should be brief — preferably one- or two-word nouns like safety, budgets, labor relations, training, supervision, etc. These names — known as key result areas — represent the major areas that make up your job. They also represent areas where high performance must be achieved in order for you to successfully carry out your job.

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## Beliefs and Objectives

Whether you believe you can or can't accomplish an objective — you're right either way! Research indicates that beliefs are an important variable in determining individual motivation to accomplish an objective. So, it's important to develop objectives you consider worth working on — and that you view as challenging yet realistic. Objectives viewed as too easy or too hard are not likely to be motivating.

Three factors affect your beliefs about your ability to accomplish an objective:

1. Other people's perceptions of the objective
2. Your previous experience with a similar objective
3. Your self-image

In the case of other people's perceptions of whether an objective is doable, listen to what they have to say but don't be overly influenced by it. You are your own person. Consider what they have to say, but test it against your own instincts and beliefs.

If you previously had a bad experience with a similar objective, keep in mind that that was then and this is now. It's likely you've gained additional experience and knowledge so you're not tackling the objective from the same place you were before. While it's important to learn from history and not repeat the same mistakes again, don't automatically assume that because you weren't successful before, you won't be successful now.

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Everyone has self-image. The difference is some people have a positive self-image while others have a negative one. In each instance, regardless of the reasons why, the goal is to not let your self-image set you up to fail. When your self-image is positive, be careful to distinguish between objectives that are impossible and those that are challenging. Don't set yourself up to fail by taking on impossible objectives. If you have a poor self-image, beware! You can set yourself up to fail by avoiding objectives that are merely challenging but you regard as impossible — or by unconsciously taking on impossible objectives so that you'll be sure to fail.

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