

# How to make New Year's Resolutions that Work

By David Brewster

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The end of 2001 approaches and I want to set you a challenge. I want you to set yourself one major goal for next year - and I want you to do it now - not on New Year's Eve.

Too hard? Amazon.com lists 113 books on the subject of 'goal setting', so it must be complicated, mustn't it? The truth is, it's actually very simple.

We all know how to achieve goals. We have known since we were at secondary school and received our first assignment, sat our first exam or competed in our first sporting event. As we became adults and got our first job, we started achieving goals on a regular basis - writing reports, making patients well, designing or building things, completing projects. We achieved goals when we organised parties, weddings, Christmas dinners.

So why do we find ourselves setting the same 'big' goals - getting fit, losing weight, getting organised, finding a new job - year after year? Because when it comes to these goals we break all the rules that we intuitively apply to the smaller goals in our everyday lives. In particular, we tend to be far too 'fuzzy' when it comes to defining our goals in the first place.

A common framework for defining goals is the 'S.M.A.R.T.' approach. This approach has been widely used for some time, with variations. It is simple and easy to apply, which is why I like it.

'S' stands for SPECIFIC. This is the first hurdle at which we often fall. Day-to-day goals are usually implicitly specific: 'provide Christmas dinner for the family', 'provide report to client'. 'Big' goals are often non-specific: 'get fit', 'grow my business'. A personal goal of mine is to participate in the 7-day cross-country 'Great Victorian Bike Ride'. This is a more specific version of 'get fit', because I know that I have to be fit to achieve it.

MEASURABLE is a particularly important aspect of successful 'big' goals. Not only do we need to be able to measure the final result, we also need to be able to set intermediate goals and measure our progress. If a business goal is to 'double turnover to \$1 million in 12 months', monthly targets can be set over the 12-month period, which step up to that level. While riding in the Bike Ride can be measured simply on a scale of 'done or not done', actually achieving it will require the capability to ride about 100 km per day for a few days in a row. Now I have something to plot my progress against.

ACCEPTABLE brings your personal and/or business values into the equation. Your goal must be, first and foremost, YOUR goal - not something you are trying to achieve under duress or on

someone else's behalf. Further, your goal, and the resources (including time and money) required to achieve it, must fit within your overall life situation and values. For example, your commitment to family/work balance will often determine how many hours you can put into your business.

All goals need to be REALISTIC. This can be a hard aspect to pin down because it is easy to underestimate ourselves and therefore aim for less than our potential. I know that the Victorian Bike Ride is a realistic goal because thousands of people like me do it every year. On the other hand, if I were to set myself the goal of riding in the Tour de France, at the age of 37 and with no prior training, that would be unrealistic!

Having set a 'big' goal that meets the four criteria above, it is critical that we apply a TIME FRAME to our goal. Our day-to-day goals usually have pre-set time frames or deadlines. Ever known a family to eat Christmas dinner on Boxing Day because they missed the deadline? Business goals are often set by the boss or by clients. This is where 'big' goals often fall down. Because they are OUR goals, it is very easy to find reasons to put them off, or not to set time limits at all. A goal without a time frame is no goal at all because (a) we can't monitor progress and (b) something else will always be more important.

There is one more important aspect to setting 'big' goals: WRITE THEM DOWN.

Writing goals down has numerous benefits:

- Writing somehow makes the goal 'real'. It acquires a weight that cannot be achieved if the goal is kept in your head.
- Putting a goal into words on paper forces you to think it through. It gives you an opportunity to test the goal for 'SMARTness'.
- Writing facilitates 'going public' - telling business associates, friends or family what you are trying to achieve. This in itself increases the chances of achieving the goal.
- Importantly, writing gives you the starting point for planning the achievement of your goal. Having written down the 'big' goal, you can now write down the intermediate goals you will need to achieve to get there. If each of these intermediate goals is also SMART, you have a solid basis for monitoring your progress.

So there you have it. Sure, plenty more can be written - at least 113 books attest to that. But the biggest challenge is not HOW to set goals. It is actually DOING IT - without overlooking the basics.

And if you've had time to read this far, you have time to write down at least one 'big', SMART goal for 2002 right now. Get to it!

Have a great Christmas and you'll hear from me early in the new year.

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