

Setting individual objectives with your staff

Setting objectives is a very important step in managing staff performance. It is also a developmental tool and a great measure you can take to avoid frustrations from both sides in the supervisor - supervisee relationship. Here are a few questions to ask (yourself or others) to check the relevance and the feasibility of the objectives:

Questions to ask yourself or a supervisor when setting individual objectives¹

1. Do the objectives cover the main areas of accountability of the job?
2. What is the consistency between the objectives set for this member of staff and those of this department *and* the objectives in the logframe?
3. What are the assumptions underlying these objectives? - like availability of resources - human, time, materials, skills, willingness from other actors, etc
4. Are there too many objectives? If so, can some objectives be combined without losing clarity?
5. Are the objectives verifiable - how will both of you know at the end of the period whether or not the objectives have been achieved?
6. Do these objectives indicate
 - quantity?
 - quality?
 - time?
- ... If qualitative in nature, are objectives nonetheless verifiable?
7. Are priorities assigned to these objectives (ranking, weighting, etc.)?
8. Are short-term objectives consistent with long-term aims?
9. Will the supervisee have control over aspects of the work for which s/ he is being assigned responsibility?
10. Are the objectives challenging yet reasonable?

All the above questions can be framed in a well-known tool called **SMART**. It stands for: **S**pecific - **M**easurable - **A**chievable - **R**elevant - **T**ime-bound.

A **specific** objective has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general objective. To set a specific objective you must answer the six “W” questions:

Who - *who is involved?*

What - *what needs accomplishing?*

Where - *identify a location*

¹ Adapted from H. Koontz, C. O'Donnell, and H. Wehrich, *Management*, 7th edition. Copyright © 1980, McGraw Hill

When - *establish a time frame*

Which - *identify requirements and constraints*

Why - *specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal*

Measurable - establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you measure progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued effort required to reach your goal.

Achievable - when you identify goals that are most important to you and to the people you work with, together you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and ensure the capacity to reach them. You begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself or your staff closer to the achievement of your goals.

You can attain most of the objectives you set when you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps. Objectives that may have seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become attainable, not because you reduce your expectations of what you can reach, but because you grow and expand to match them. When someone lists their objectives, they build their self-image. They see themselves as worthy of these objectives, and they develop the traits and personality that allow them to possess them.

Realistic / Relevant - to be realistic, an objective must represent something toward which the person is both *willing* and *able* to work - in other words, the person must be able to appreciate its relevance. An objective can be both high and realistic; the person who will achieve it is the only one who can decide just how high the goal should be. A high goal is frequently easier to reach than a low one because a low goal exerts low motivational force. Some of the hardest jobs you ever accomplished actually seem easy simply because you enjoyed doing them.

Your objective is probably realistic if you truly *believe* that it can be accomplished. Additional ways to know if it is realistic is to determine if the person accomplished anything similar in the past or to ask what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this objective.

This is why it is very important that as a manager, you should discuss objectives together with the person responsible for achieving those and agree together that they are set at a level which is within the range of what they are capable of doing *with that little extra effort and support*.

Time-bound - An objective should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it, it loses any sense of urgency. "Someday" just won't work.

Owl sets a smart objective:

Getting supper



specific

measurable

achievable

relevant

timebound

Bridget Walker '95