

S.M.A.R.T. OBJECTIVES

Performance objectives for organizations, departments, teams or individuals are much more effective if they are written as specific, measurable, achievable, results that are time bounded.

Specific

Specific: clearly stated and unambiguous conditions that will exist as a result of the activities and efforts put forth by the organization, department, team or individual. Not "improved response time" but "delivery anywhere in the U.S. within 48 hours after receiving the order."

Measurable: end-state conditions that achieve or meet pre-determined success standards.

Such measurements are most effective when they are objective and quantifiable (e.g., percentage increase or decrease from known baseline data; profit as a percentage of sales; number of units produced per hour or day; order process time in hours or days; program or system implementation where there was none before; etc.). In rare instances the measurements may have to be subjective and difficult to quantify (e.g., significantly improved morale of the department; increased ability to effectively handle rapid changes; a more favorable response from the City Zoning Board, etc.).

However they are measured, objectives must be measurable to be effective. If, they can't be measured, they can't be managed.

Achievable: end-state conditions that require significant or special effort to attain but that are attainable. If performance objectives are easy to achieve they are viewed as "routine"; they are not particularly motivating and usually don't produce significant positive change.

If objectives are so challenging that they cannot be achieved, most people involved will soon realize that this is the case and will refuse to participate in earnest. The notion that objectives set "out of reach" are desirable because efforts falling short will yield significant gains anyway is based on fallacious thinking. People will not continue to strive to achieve such objectives. They will "cover their asses" and become cynical. Management will lose credibility and many other initiatives will become suspect in the eyes of affected subordinates.

One of the best ways to insure that objectives are challenging but achievable is to involve those who must attain the desired results in establishing the goals.

Relevant

Results: desired end-state conditions... not activities. Not "train all of our people in TQM" but "50% reduction in process time and 30% reduction in unit material costs using TQM processes that will become part of the way we do business and will regularly yield desired levels of quality and operating effectiveness."

When setting objectives, ask "Why do we want this?" If the answer is "That is what we want!" then you probably have a good objective. If the answer is another "result" then the first (or second or third) "result" was probably an activity or a subordinate objective ... one of several that will have to be achieved in order to achieve the end-state condition that is actually desired.

Focus on the results desired and let the people accountable decide how best to achieve them.

Time bounded: the specific date by which the desired results will be produced or achieved.
"Goals are dreams...with deadlines!"

There are other elements of effective objectives such as relevancy (people need to understand the importance of objectives ... their place in the "big picture") and resource constraints (which, along with any other conditions affecting the objective should be written as part of the objective) ... but the key elements are all addressed in **SMART** objectives.

Remember that customers, whether internal or external, have specific things that they want ... they have a report card of measurements in mind ... they may be demanding but they will negotiate since they want you to achieve and deliver ... they don't care at all about activities—only the end result ... and they want what was promised on time.