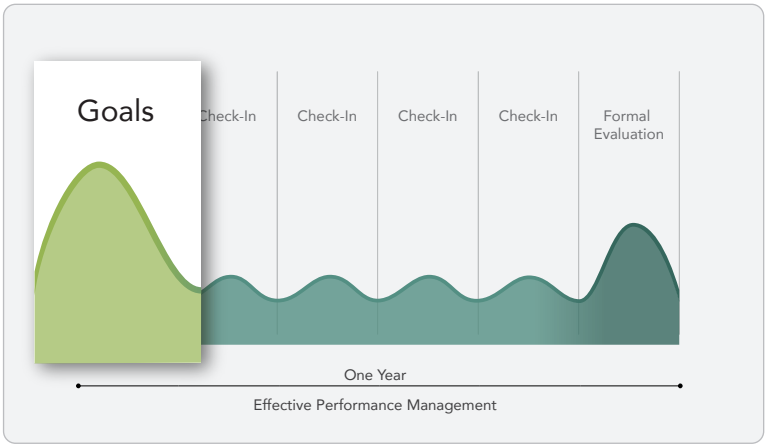
A Quick Guide to

Goal Setting

What are goals?

Goals are the most important way to set expectations for an employee that include both *key* RESULTS of what needs to be accomplished and BEHAVIORS, or how the results are accomplished over the next year.

Note: depending on the work, some goals can span several years or have a shorter time-span. Goals do not need fit an annual time frame - they may get done before the end of the year or carry over to the next cycle.



Setting annual goals is the first step in effective performance management.

Why should I set goals?

- Well-designed goals guide an employee's priorities and efforts and set the agenda for the year.
- Setting meaningful goals is one of the most powerful ways that you can motivate employees, focus their contributions, and help them improve their performance.
- Clear and relevant goals are the foundation for effective coaching and feedback as well as for performance evaluations.

How do I set goals?

Simply follow the steps which outline the best practices below.

01

CLARIFY BROADER PRIORITIES

What are the broader priorities of your unit or college? Depending on your process, these might be more formal/specific that cascade down or link up, or less formal and generally describe your purpose*/how your team's or department's work contributes to the University's mission. Identifying and describing the broader priorities will allow you to:

- Focus on the most important work
- Communicate the IMPACT of work
- Describe how individual goals contribute to the broader priorities and goals.

Example of connecting impact to broader priorities:

Impact: *If successful, the student services process improvement project will not only save the college money, but it will also remove a big source of frustration for students.*

Impact: *Finding a good replacement for our data analysis tool will allow us to analyze data much faster, so our lab will be more productive and better able to take on larger projects.*

*See the **Quick Guide to Orienting to Results** for more information on translating your team's purpose into goals.

Goal Setting (Cont.)

02

CONSIDER EMPLOYEE ROLE AND SKILLS

With broad priorities in mind, consider the employee's:

- **Current skills and development needs**: Do they have the knowledge and skills needed to advance the priorities of the role? What skills are needed for the role in the future? What is the challenging part of their job right now? How can they develop stronger skills in that area?
- **Interest/motivation:** What are their career aspirations? What is motivating for them in their current role? What would be a meaningful project for them to focus on next?
- **Experience and mastery**: Has the employee been a part of your team/department for a while? How well do they know their role? What is their current performance?

03

IDENTIFY UP TO THREE MOST IMPORTANT EXPECTATIONS

Identify *up to three* expectations that are most important for the employee over the next year to support the unit or college strategic priorities. Include expectations for BOTH results and behaviors (the "what" and the "how").

- Describe the most important results this person needs to achieve. Example:

  Result: *Complete the student services process improvement project by the end of October.*
  Result: *Determine two viable options for replacing the current data analysis tool and evaluate the pros and cons of each by the end of February.*

- Describe *how* this person needs to achieve these results. In other words, identify and describe the behavioral competencies* (i.e., skills, knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics) that will be most important. Example:

  Behavior: *Effectively looks beyond the surface to identify underlying issues and root-causes of problems.*
  Behavior: *Is able to proactively keep others informed of important updates, information, and issues.*

Goals vs Tasks

All work encompasses the big projects that need to get done to meaningfully move the unit/college forward (goals) AND the day-to-day routine duties to keep the team operating (daily tasks). Often individuals' goals resemble the task list or job description, and not the few large contributions they can make to the unit/college. In order to ensure goals are goals and not a task list, it is helpful to distinguish the these types of work:

Goals describe a few larger contributions that push you outside of your comfort zone and take time to accomplish. Effective goals are not something that can be done in a day and they commonly are a set of multiple smaller tasks that need to be done.

Tasks/Activities are the smaller, simpler daily routine tasks that *keep the team operational*. Because they are smaller and less complex, they can usually be checked off the list by the end of the day/week. Accomplishing daily tasks is important, but typically results in less impact to the overall team's priorities.

*Do not have a behavioral competency model? Go to **z.umn.edu/competencies** to learn more about the competency model developed at the University of Minnesota to support talent development discussions.

Goal Setting (Cont.)

04 DISCUSS AND INVITE INPUT TO FINALIZE GOALS

Ask the employee for their thoughts and suggestions on their goals. Goal-setting is a two-way street and employees will be more likely to find the goals meaningful and motivating if this is a *collaborative* exercise. Finalize goals:

- ❑ **Are they limited in number?** Effective goals identify the few important things an employee needs to get done during the year. Limit to no more than three.
- ❑ **Are they specific, important and measurable?** Would achieving these goals be a meaningful and significant accomplishment? What success looks like for each goal? Goals should be challenging enough that they push employees outside of their comfort zones, but are achievable with significant effort.
- ❑ **Do they show impact on broader priorities?** Effective goals are aligned with unit/college strategies and should contribute to the broader priorities.
- ❑ **Do they include BOTH results and behaviors?** Effective goals should describe the most important results this employee needs to achieve and how the employees need to achieve these results.

Example goals:

Goal 1. Student mentoring to enhance student experience

Increase the leadership skills and interests of students ***Impact*** *through actively and effectively mentoring college students* ***Results - the "What"*** *during the Fall 2020 semester. Move FROM waiting for students to come to you to ask for mentoring and guidance TO proactively identifying opportunities to offer mentoring and guidance to students and then acting on those opportunities.* ***Behavior - the "How"***

Goal 2. Improve process to reduce waste

Implement a new process to reduce inventory/waste by 10% ***Results - the "What"*** *to improve operational efficiencies.* ***Impact*** *Move FROM accommodating multiple requests on an "ad-hoc" basis TO designing and implementing a workflow that would help meet most of the requests in a consistent manner.* ***Behavior - the "How"***

05 CHECK-IN TO REVIEW PROGRESS AND UPDATE GOALS

Goals need to be flexible and reflect the dynamic nature of the work. Priorities can shift dramatically during the course of the year, so it's important not to fall into the "set-and-forget" trap of writing goals and not looking at them again until review time. It is most effective when goals are set at the beginning of the performance cycle, but it's never too late to set goals at other times during the year. Goals should be updated, added or marked off as they are completed.

Have ongoing check-ins* on a regular basis to **discuss progress** toward the broad annual goals, to **update** and revise them.



* See the *Quick Guide to Ongoing Check-Ins* for structure and best practices on conducting ongoing check-in discussions.