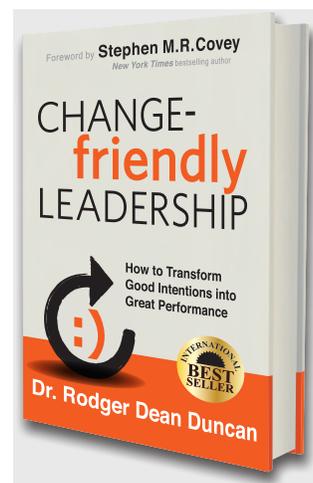


Section



## BONUS•POINTS

# TWO



## The Wisdom (and Utility) of SMART Goals

By Dr. Rodger Dean Duncan

How do you know what kind of goals to set? The whole point of setting goals, of course, is to *achieve* them. The best goals are *smart* goals. Actually, SMART goals is more like it. SMART stands for the five characteristics of well-designed goals.

**Specific:** Goals must be clear and unambiguous. Vague ambitions and platitudes have no place in goal setting. When goals are specific, they tell people precisely *what* is expected, *when*, and *how much*. Only with specific goals are you able to assess progress.

**Measurable:** What good is a goal if you can't measure progress? When goals are not measurable, you never know if or when or even how you're making progress toward their completion. Not only that, but it's very difficult for people to stay motivated to complete goals in the absence of milestones to indicate progress.

**Attainable:** Goals must be realistic and attainable. Goals should give people something to stretch for, but they should not be out of reach. Neither, of

course, should goals be too easy. Goals that are set too high or too low become meaningless, and people tend to ignore them.

**Relevant:** Goals must be an important element of the

overall plan of achieving your mission and reaching your vision. It's estimated that 80 percent of people's productivity often comes from 20 percent of their activities. You can guess where the remaining 80 percent of effort ends up. Relevant goals address the 20 percent of the effort that has the greatest impact on performance.

**Time-Bound:** Effective goals have starting point, ending points, and fixed durations. People are better able to focus their efforts on goal attainment when they are committed to deadlines. Goals without schedules or deadlines tend to get lost in the rush of day-to-day life.

To illustrate how this approach adds value and power to goal-setting, let's compare a SMART goal with a not-so-smart goal. (This is vital in individual efforts as well as team initiatives.)

Let's say the managers at a nuclear power plant want to improve safety consciousness at the station. A not-so-smart goal might be something like "Get all employees on board with safety principles so they appreciate the need for improvement." On the surface, this certainly seems like a worthy aspiration. But what does it really mean? Does "on board" mean cheering louder at safety meetings? Does it mean memorizing and reciting safety rules? Does it mean clicking their heels and saluting when a government inspector walks by? And what exactly are "safety principles"? Are these some of the buzz words in the corporate values statement? Are they the slogans from wall posters? You'll notice that this not-so-smart goal is not specific. It is not measurable because we don't know specifically what to measure. It is really not attainable



because, lacking specificity and measurability, there's no way to know if and when the goal is reached. The goal is only marginally relevant because, although it alludes to the need for improvement, the lack of specifics dilutes it to "platitude" status. And the goal is not time-bound because it has no starting point, no ending point, and no fixed duration.

For the sake of illustration, let's say that what the managers really mean is:

- We want our people to be absolutely vigilant in dealing with safety issues so we can honor our stewardship in running a safe nuclear operation.
- We want our people to obey all safety regulations with exactness—not out of grudging compliance, but out of personal commitment.
- We want our people to know with certainty that raising concerns about possible safety issues will always be met with appreciation and prompt action, never with retaliation.

While these are laudable aspirations, they are not at all implied in the goal "Get all employees on board with safety principles so they appreciate the need for improvement."

**Getting Started.** If this goal is the starting point of discussion, good questions to ask would include:

"Exactly which 'employees' are we talking about? Does this include only people who are at greatest risk of radiation exposure, or does it also include the accounting department and the cafeteria workers?"

"Do we mean only full-time employees, or should we include the supplemental workers who help with special projects like outages?"

"Exactly where are the perceived safety problems?"

"What are the relevant metrics?"



“*The landscape of leadership consists of countless smaller pieces that add up to a large mosaic.*”

“What does ‘on board’ really look like? How can the improved behaviors and performance be measured?”

“When will all this happen? Are we talking about accomplishing this goal next week? Next quarter? Next year?”

Do you get the message? SMART goals—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound—have punch and power. A broad-brush not-so-smart goal like “Get all employees on board with safety principles . . .” can be transformed into a series of SMART goals that actually get reached.

**Steps Along the Way.** For example: “Our goal is that every person in the organization will participate in our two-day workshop in dialogue skills by the end of this calendar year.” Notice that this goal is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

It also implies a number of intermediate goals. For instance, a complete and accurate list of all employees, along with the training they've received so far, must be compiled. Work and project schedules must be cleared. Training schedules must be arranged. Every intermediate goal must be a SMART goal so it

won't float out into never-never land. Getting all employees to complete a two-day workshop is of course not the absolute end of the work in strengthening safety consciousness among the workers. Lots of other work must be done to correct errors, reinforce desired behaviors, hold people accountable, and create a culture of genuine, conscious commitment to safety.

The landscape of leadership consists of countless smaller pieces that add up to a large mosaic. It is focusing on the smaller pieces—while keeping an eye on the larger vision—that enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Effective leaders use SMART goals because they leave nothing to chance. They want their people to invest their energy and ingenuity in real work that makes a real difference.

And when that real work is done right, you can add an S to the end of SMART. The final S can stand for Sustainable. A hallmark of true success is the ability to sustain the good that's accomplished.