

How to... set great objectives

Part of the DNA of business life, objectives provide a sense of direction, setting something to aim for and a means of managing and measuring performance and success. Objectives provide the link between overall business goals and those of individuals and teams.

Great objectives show the individual how they contribute to the bigger picture in the organisation. They can motivate, help extend capability, mark achievement and enhance morale.

■ So, what is an objective?

An objective is a (specific) statement of activity, which achieves a goal and clearly describes activities required for the outcome/success.

■ And how do we set great ones?

Objectives should...

Be forward looking (identifying where we want to be – an inspiring end point/destination)

- Take account of the past (learning from mistakes and good performance)
- Consider the present context (resources, situation)
- Either be set by the person delivering them, or be set in consultation/agreement with that person

A good starting point is to ensure that objectives have...

A verb – what must be done

A standard – to ensure quality

A date/deadline – to make it real

And measures – there are four principal forms of measurement: Cost; Time; Quantity and Quality

Generally, the most effective objectives will contain 2 measurements - for example: Do x by y date and...increase x activity by y% by z date.

- When writing objectives check that they meet the **SMART** criteria:

Specific - the objective is unambiguous and concrete

Measurable - the standards expected and how they will be measured are clear

Agreed/Achievable – the individual delivering the objective agrees with it and is capable of achieving it with some stretching of their capability

Realistic - it is not only achievable but can be done within their work context and is linked to team/department/wider business objectives

Timed – there is a specific deadline by when it must be achieved (with interim measures to keep on track)

■ Some tips...

Focus on what needs to be achieved/outcomes and avoid setting objectives which describe what someone is going to do.

Make the objective appropriate to the level, responsibilities and influence that an individual has.

Focus on challenge and achieving positive outcomes. Objectives that are either too difficult or too easy can be de-motivating.

Keep objectives under review throughout the year, allowing flexibility around role and responsibility changes and altered organisational priorities.

Mind your language! Precise words such as complete, increase, achieve, finish, deliver are effective. Avoid woolly phrases such as 'liaise with', 'contribute to'.

Make the objective exciting/motivating.