



## Self-Motivation: Setting Goals

By Ivonne Chirino-Klevans, Ph.D. Program Director – International Programs Walden University

**As a former elite gymnast, watching athletes perform at the Olympic Games has always been a unique experience for me. These performances are the result of hard workouts and mental toughness. As an organizational psychologist I have asked myself if there is anything in common between these athletes and top performers in the business world.**

Why are elite athletes willing to subject themselves to hard and straining workouts? What drives them to enjoy the suffering of taking oneself to the extreme, and then take pride in doing so? Also, what can we learn from these athletes that can be applied to the workplace?

All of these questions relate to understanding motivation. Every organization seeks to increase productivity and quality while reducing costs. Motivation is involved in all of these organizational goals. Motivated individuals are more likely to achieve organizational goals and to report increased job satisfaction.

It is crucial to understand motivation on a personal level—self-motivation, particularly when it is applied to your career. Self-motivation is the drive to shape one's behavior to satisfy a need. In order to do this, individuals must identify gaps between where they are, how they are perceived and where they want to be.

One way of doing this is by using 360-degree feedback instruments to help individuals identify how they are perceived by others. This type of feedback involves the individual inquiring about how their supervisors, peers, and direct reports perceive his or her performance.

This awareness helps the individual monitor his or her emotions and behaviors, as well as identify the reaction these behaviors cause in others. Second, acknowledging and identifying our own optimal stress level, along with acquiring a strong sense of self-awareness, can contribute to improvement in job performance. Finally, identifying ways to motivate ourselves, instead of expecting the environment to provide favorable conditions that motivate us, brings a stronger sense of control over our own performance.

**Here are some steps to follow for self-motivating:**

### **1. Develop self-awareness.**

The first time I saw myself performing on the uneven bars on a video, I was shocked. Until that day, I had not realized that I was using the wrong technique. The same situation can occur on the job. Someone may describe himself or herself as simply being very assertive, only to find out that others describe him or her as aggressive and unapproachable. The use of feedback instruments provides an effective tool to identify how we are perceived by others and to develop self-awareness. Only when we are aware that there is a gap between where we are and where we want to be will we be motivated to close that gap.

### **2. Set the right goals.**

The next step is to identify a goal. When setting goals, we must remember that they have to be within our reach (e.g., developing leadership competencies versus making everyone like me), objective and measurable (develop a new software application in one week), and stated in a positive way (know my customers so that I can satisfy their needs versus stop customer complaints).

### **3. Identify what resources you need to achieve your goal.**

I can still hear my coach saying, "You need to 'stick' your double tuck;" however, the truth is that I did not know how. You will realize that there are many ways to achieve a goal, and the resources to attain it are varied as well: Money, training, mentoring, time, moral support, and coaching are just a few.

### **4. Specify an objective plan and a deadline.**

If you have ever tried to lose weight, you may agree that it is easier to reach the following goal: "Today I will not eat anything between meals," rather than "My goal is to lose 30 pounds." That is why it is important that we identify short-term sub-goals that are objective and that seem reachable. Self-efficacy refers to the need for an individual to believe that he or she can perform a task, which is imperative to goal setting.

### **5. Recruit supporters.**

I have personally found that executive coaching is a very good resource to help individuals create self-awareness. But anyone



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who has tried to change a behavior may agree that while you are rehearsing those new behaviors, others may think that the change is not permanent. We want to make sure that we can perform those new behaviors that are actually helping us reach our goals. Some individuals may benefit from recruiting supporters while setting goals; it could be a co-worker, a mentor, a boss, or a significant other.

### **6. Identify contingencies and how you will deal with them.**

Anyone who has adolescent children may be very familiar with the concept of “magical thinking,” the notion that bad things happen to others and not to us. The truth is that we are going to face many obstacles and drawbacks in the quest for our goal. Let’s think of a merger, a sudden fall in stock prices, fluctuations in the market, organizational changes, etc. It is important to keep in mind that we will face several contingencies while we are trying to reach our goal. But those contingencies can be used to make us more skilled and creative leaders as we find ways to get back to our original goal.

### **7. Celebrate, get feedback, and start again.**

Having a feeling of accomplishment or self-efficacy is important in keeping individuals motivated. But we also need to identify what made us successful (so that we can utilize those skills in the future). Perhaps it was the opportunity you gave yourself to rehearse a new behavior—such as negotiating skills—which helped you accomplish your goal, or maybe it was gathering

some business intelligence before you talked to a client. Just as importantly, we also want to identify what we would do differently next time.

There is more than one way to be successful, but make sure to get feedback so that your job-related goals are in line with the organizational strategy. Then, start again with the next-highest mountain.

### **About Ivonne Chirino-Klevans, Ph.D.:**

*Dr. Ivonne Chirino-Klevans joined Walden University in 2005 as an organizational psychology faculty member. In 2007, she was tapped to serve as program director for International Programs at the university, where she is the lead faculty member responsible for the new International Management Certificate, a post-baccalaureate business certificate designed to give business professionals in Latin America international business acumen and English language skills. Chirino-Klevans has expertise in global executive education program design and has spent years working with Fortune 500 companies. Her background includes international client management, cross-cultural organizational environment assessments, international talent attraction and retention, compensation program development, training needs assessment, training management and results impact assessment. She was also a Pan American medalist in gymnastics.*

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