

Setting goals that AREN'T smart

Rare is the person who hasn't heard about SMART goals – most of us have learnt the theory and many of us have probably experienced some success with them! To revise, the acronym stands for **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely**. The intent of using the acronym is to help you focus your efforts and increase your chance at success. For example, *"I will complete my weekly plan every Friday afternoon,"* is in the format of a SMART goal. It is intended to help us keep focused and to achieve.

However, at times (*probably more often than we care to admit*), **life doesn't go to plan** and your ability to commit, be persistent and achieve your goal is negatively impacted. Working in schools can be unpredictable. Our day can be full of interruptions and unplanned events that have an impact on us achieving the goals that we had intended to achieve. In the above example, you might have an extra meeting to attend ONE Friday or feel exhausted and running on reserves and so you might feel like you have failed that week.

A goal without a plan is only a dream.

Robert Herjavec

A SMART goal is quite black and white – either you achieve it, or you don't. This can be problematic, particularly for those with more perfectionist personalities and this can cause guilt, stress and disappointment. Fortunately, there is an alternative → an OPEN goal!

An example of an open goal is:

I will ensure my planning is complete so that I have it, when I need it, to organise my week and to feel prepared for what is coming.

Using open goals has many benefits, because they are:

- Exploratory
- Less specific
- "Looser" in respect to time target and requirements
- More flexible
- Work with YOUR energy and time rather than locking you into the (*sometimes arbitrary*) deadline specified in a SMART goal
- Supportive and remove the "*distress of failing*"
- Celebratory of ANY progress as achievement and success

As with just about any tool, there are some downsides to open goals:

- Progress is often slower
- It is easier to 'opt-out' – there's less built-in accountability
- The goals are harder to track and less precise to measure

One excellent way to combat this is to incorporate some SMART goal elements into your open goal. Adding the following detail to the above open goal is an example of how you can do this:

Usually this will mean spending an hour on it every Thursday afternoon so that Friday or over the weekend I can locate any resources I might need.

Combining both strategies will help you stay smart, sane and satisfied!

Key points

How to develop your own **OPEN** goals:

1. Think of what you want to achieve.
2. Phrase it in an **open-ended** way.
3. Include **flexibility** and ideas that help you reach your goal.
4. Consider adding elements of SMART goals that **support** you rather than restrict you in achieving your desired outcome.

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