Goal Setting for Your Practice
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PART 1: TIPS FOR WRITING GOALS

It’s time to write or review some goals for your practice – but how do you write goals that are useful, achievable & SMART? Follow the steps outlined below and you will soon have a list of goals that will make a difference to your practice. Don’t forget to involve your team every step of the way – after all why should you have all the fun!

1. Goal statement
Create a brief summary statement of the goal, and include details such as timing, cost, location etc. to make it real.

For example:
ABC Veterinary Practice will commence a ‘Puppy Pre-School Program’ beginning on the 1 August, 2009. The aim of the Pre-School is to:

- Introduce new pet owners to the services offered by our practice
- Commence the bonding relationship between our practice, the clients and their puppies
- Reinforce the importance of vaccinations, dietary requirements
- Introduce clients to our ‘wellness’ and ‘team consulting’ concepts

The Pre-School will:

- Run for four weeks and the programme will run consecutively with a one week break between programmes.
- Run within the practice and be facilitated by trained practice team members.
- Have a minimum of five and a maximum of eight puppies.
### 2. Measure of success and goal assessment

A measure of success is how you will know your goal has been achieved, and to what degree. You need to make some specific, measurable statements about what the possible outcomes will be, but how do you do that? You have two main choices; “discrete” or “continuous”.

#### Discrete

You can use a “discrete” measurement of goal achievement, that is, you either hit or miss a goal. This is a simple way of measuring success. Use with caution though, as missing a goal by a whisker and calling that ‘failure’ can be discouraging.

For example:

If the ABC Veterinary Surgery’s first Puppy Pre-School commenced on the 8 August (a week late) with four puppies (minimum was 5 puppies), it is certainly not a ‘failure’. There may have been very good reason why the Program could not start a week earlier and the practice may have decided to delay commencement until the programme was properly set up.

#### Continuous

You can also measure success using “continuous” results or a sliding scale. This method is common in most large organisations or companies. A rating system determines how effective an employee has been in meeting their goals, eg a range of 1-4 where 1 is unsatisfactory and 4 is distinguished performance.

The continuous measurement system takes more effort and subtlety of thought, however it encourages optimistic thinking. Perception of “shades of grey” encourages optimistic, non-depressive thinking and diffuses any emotional response to a goal outcome due to the multiple possibilities.

This is best explained by an example. Your goal is to have between five and eight puppies attending your ‘Puppy Pre-School’. What you would “measure” is your enrolment at the commencement of each Pre-School and your possible outcomes could be;

1. No puppies enrolled – Unsatisfactory
2. Three puppies enrolled – Could do better is some areas (eg marketing, awareness, etc.)
3. Five puppies enrolled – Expected outcome
4. Eight puppies enrolled – Excellent performance

You have articulated what would rank as unsatisfactory through to what is above expectations.

Giving your employees a range of results helps them to succeed by keeping them motivated. Also, the top rating may be an aggressive stretch target that will push them to achieve, and provide a challenge.
3. List Tasks

Now the major tasks needed to achieve the goal need to be listed. When developing your list try to avoid getting bogged down in detail at this stage.

**Top Tip** – If you are struggling with this, consider working backwards from goal achievement through to your first step. This exercise is sometimes called “chunking”, as you are breaking down a task into manageable sub-tasks.

The secret of working backwards is to keep it creative and fun; done well it really takes the stress out of goal setting. You start by ‘living in the future’ – describe to your employees what you expect the end result to look like, as well as describing the benefits the practice will experience from achieving the goal. This description will contain your tasks.

The other benefit of working on this step with your team is that they can help fill any gaps in the plan and they may spot flaws or major tasks you have forgotten.

For example:

**ABC Veterinary Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>ABC Veterinary Practice will commence a ‘Puppy Pre-School Programme’ beginning on the 1 August, 2009.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Objectives | • Introduce new pet owners to the services offered by our practice  
• Commence the bonding relationship between our practice, the clients and their puppies  
• Reinforce the importance of vaccinations, dietary requirements  
• Introduce clients to our ‘wellness’ and ‘team consulting’ concepts |
| **The Pre-School will:** | • Run for four weeks and the programme will run consecutively with a one week break between programmes.  
• Run within the practice and be facilitated by trained practice team members.  
• Have a minimum of five and a maximum of eight puppies. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determine team member who will be responsible for running the Pre-School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research learning content for Pre-School</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Pre-School running dates for the rest of the year</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set marketing guidelines – how to inform clients of new service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design course content &amp; handouts</td>
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<td>Set procedures for enrolling puppies into Pre-School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train rest of team on benefits, etc of Pre-School so they can market programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Timing and Allocating Tasks

Putting real dates as deadlines for completing activities increases your success rate. Get out your diary or calendar and have a look at your existing time commitments. Be realistic about what can be achieved by when.

**Top Tip** – If you have trouble getting organised have a look at the existing skills within your team. Some people are naturally organised – to spot them, check out their CD collection. If it’s neatly lined up in alphabetical order, then you may want to get some tips from them!

These lucky people will find “doing” their goals much easier as they are skilled in organising themselves. For the rest of your team, organising their time is a learnable skill so help them to work at it by developing action plans and having regular meetings to follow up on their progress.

Allocating someone to each of the tasks is equally important. Basically if no one is allocated to a task it won’t be done. Try not to overload the team members that are your most reliable, as unless you can take away some of their other tasks, you are effectively ‘punishing’ them for being effective workers. Instead allocate the tasks fairly and accept that some of your team members will require more support than others in achieving their tasks.
For example your task list should now look more like this:

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**Objectives**

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<td>30/04</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research learning content for Pre-School</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>30/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Pre-School running dates for the rest of the year</td>
<td>Bob &amp; Jane</td>
<td>30/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set marketing guidelines – how to inform clients of new service</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>16/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design course content &amp; handouts</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Set procedures for enrolling puppies into Pre-School</td>
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<td>Bob &amp; Jane</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Etc, etc</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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5. Self & Team Assessment

When considering a goal, it is a good idea to examine your own personal as well as your team’s ability and enthusiasm for it. You will have a much higher success rate if your team are as enthusiastic about achieving the goal as you are.

The key to bringing your whole team on board is to answer the following question for each team member: “What’s in it for me?” In other words, how will your individual employees benefit from achieving the goal: developing new skills; higher rate of pay; more opportunities for advancement; etc.

Tasks that require you or your team to learn a new skill require a different approach than a task you already know how to do. Go through each task in turn and ask yourself the following questions. If any of the elements is missing or low, then you can say you have low ‘skill’ or ‘will’ in that area. If this is the case, the consider how you can close that gap, and plan it in as a task.

**Ability (skill)**
- Have I/the team been taught to do this?
- Do I/the team see this as my/the role?
- Do I/they know how to do this?
- Have I/they successfully done this, or something similar, before?

**Enthusiasm (will)**
- Do I/they want to do this? Is it in line with my/their personal values?
- What’s in it for me/them?
- What is the risk of failure? Am I okay with taking that level of risk?
- Do I think /they can do it?

This is a practical, objective approach and an honest self-assessment will maximise the likelihood of success in achieving goal. A tradesperson has to purchase or hire special tools to do some jobs, so why shouldn’t you? Admitting you don’t know how to do something or that you are scared of doing it is not an admission of weakness. It just means you haven’t got the tools… yet.

6. Results

As you progress, note your key results and update your goal sheet on a regular basis. Meet regularly with those team members involved and discuss their progress. Congratulate them on their successes and discuss how you can help them achieve the areas they are having difficulty with. A quick review of the tasks, timing and self-assessment will enable you to make any necessary changes.

Allowing yourself and your team the flexibility to change, whilst keeping true to the main objective, will boost your success rate more than sticking doggedly to your original plan.
PART 2: ‘SMART’ GOAL SETTING FOR YOUR PRACTICE

Are the goals you are setting for your team and your practice **SMART** goals?

The acronym stands for goals that are **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant** (or realistic) and **Time-bound**.

**Specific goals:**
- Are concise.
- State a clearly observable result.
- Identify a specific reference point from which to track progress.

A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To set a specific goal you must answer the six "W" questions:

**Who:** Who is involved?

**What:** What do I want to accomplish?

**Where:** Identify a location.

**When:** Establish a time frame.

**Which:** Identify requirements and constraints.

**Why:** Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

For example:

A general goal would be, "Begin a Puppy Pre-School Programme". But a specific goal would say, "Begin a Puppy Pre-School Programme with 10 attendees by 1st August 2007"

**Measurable goals:**
- Quantify the expected result (includes number, percentage, frequency).
- Describe the criteria by which the result will be evaluated.

Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued effort required to reach your goal.

To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as... How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?

**Attainable goals are:**
- Challenging, but within reach of the person doing the work.
- Have a realistic time frame.
- Do not present unrealistic barriers to achievement.

When you identify goals that are most important to you and your practice team members, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. Your team can then work on developing the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. You & your team may even begin to see previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals.
Relevant goals are:

- Aligned across the company, from individual goals through higher goals and strategies.
- Integrate the company's values into the objectives.

Or... Realistic goals are:

To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. A goal can be both high and realistic; you and your practice team are the only ones who can decide just how high your goals should be. But be sure that every goal represents substantial progress. A high goal is frequently easier to reach than a low one because a low goal exerts low motivational force. Some of the hardest jobs you ever accomplished actually seem easy simply because they were a labour of love.

A goal is probably realistic if you truly believe that it can be accomplished. Additional ways to know if a goal is realistic is to determine if you have accomplished anything similar in the past or ask yourself what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this goal.

Time-bound goals:

- Identify the expected deadline for completion.
- Identify the frequency or duration of the project.

A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it there's no sense of urgency. If you would like to start a Puppy Pre-School Programme within your practice – when do you want it to start? “Soon” won't work. But if you anchor it within a timeframe, “by August 1st 2007”, then you've set your unconscious mind into motion to begin working on the goal.

T can also stand for Tangible – A goal is tangible when you can experience it with one of the senses, that is, taste, touch, smell, sight or hearing. When your goal is tangible you have a better chance of making it specific and measurable and thus attainable.

Source (adapted): Uncommon Knowledge, www.uncommon-knowledge.co.uk/goal_setting/writing.html, accessed 20/05/07
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To promote and improve management within the veterinary industry.

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- Interaction with stakeholders from the professional and affiliated associations
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- Regular newsletters
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- Access to the members only area of the AVAPM Website. www.avapm.com.au

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