



# The Simplest Method for Setting Powerful Goals

How to Maximize Your Chances for Strategic Success  
with **3D Goal Setting**

# 92%

That's the percentage of people who never meet their goals according to Forbes. By anyone's standard, this is an unacceptable failure rate. Why is it so hard to achieve a goal once it has been set? What makes it so difficult to manage ourselves to meet daily demands and take small steps toward our goals? A goal requires a degree of commitment to ourselves first and foremost, which translates into credibility as perceived by those around us.

Many factors help increase the chances of achieving a goal such as employing a professional coach, setting one goal at a time, and routine iteration, by 800%, 243%, and 76%, respectively. However, a goal poorly set is already doomed to failure. This whitepaper will present some of the common challenges of setting goals and propose an approach called 3D Goalsetting that simplifies the process to its essentials.

# 80%

That's the percentage of people who do not set goals for themselves according to Entrepreneur magazine. There are many reasons people decline to set goals. Some of them include avoidance of accountability, uncertainty about the right direction for their work, and an acknowledgment of an unwillingness/inability to execute. Either way, this lack of will or ability to set goals ends up undermining an organization's ability to achieve strategic goals.

Strategy can be translated into a hierarchy of goals throughout the organization. When you combine the two statistics above: 92% of goals are never achieved and 80% of people never set goals, it becomes crystal clear why companies struggle to execute their strategies. Another way to state this is to say that only 20% of people set goals and of that subset, only 8% are actually achieved. When you look at the problem of business achievement through this lens, the only course of action is to focus on improving people's ability to set and achieve goals. **This critical capability is the key that unlocks every other door.** Successful companies are made up of successful people. Success, in this sense, is defined by the ability to set and achieve goals. Individuals achieving their goals, when effectively aligned, add up to companies executing their strategies. As you can see, there is enormous room for improvement in this vital area.

## The Problem with Traditional Approaches to Goal Setting

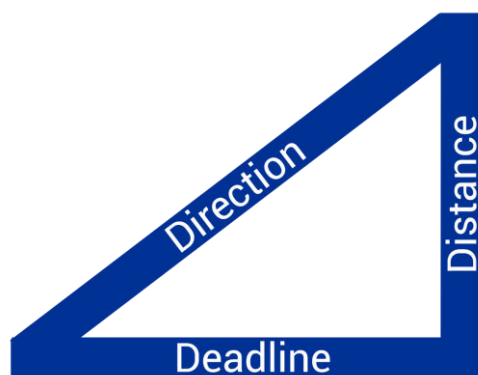
In the simplest terms, people set goals to give themselves speed and direction for improvement. As Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up someplace else." Furthermore, without goals, there can be no alignment or coordination of strategic efforts. There can also be no improvement.

The first major challenge for a leader is to ensure everyone has a goal. This means closing the 80% of non-goal-setting gap to 0% or as close to it as possible. You must ensure that everyone in your organization is pulling the rope and in the right direction. The next challenge is to get everyone to achieve with sufficient speed.

You may have heard of SMART goal setting. For many years, I have used this approach to a degree of success. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. While going from no goal setting to the SMART model is a huge step in the right direction, there are still some flaws with the model. For example, specific for one person may seem vague to another. People may also disagree on what is achievable or relevant. The elephant in the room of any goal setting activity is accountability. These weaknesses in the SMART model are often exploited and accountability evaded when it's time to review performance at the end of the goal cycle.

### What is 3D Goal Setting?

3D Goal Setting is a methodology that simplifies the process down to checking three boxes. A goal should have a clearly defined Direction, Distance, and Deadline. When shooting a basketball, the shooter only has two primary factors to control: speed and direction (minus a few other shooting mechanics, but let's keep it simple). In the 3D Goal Setting format, Distance and Deadline set the speed, and Direction sets the direction. The best shooters can accurately judge and execute these factors to hit the target most reliably, which builds trust.



Let's break each component down further.

**Direction** – This sets the achiever on a path of improvement. Some examples of Direction might include: *increase quality*, *decrease cost*, or *decrease turnover*. Notice the increase or decrease qualifier coupled with a measurable outcome are present to minimize ambiguity.

**Distance** – This gives the achiever a sense of how far they need to go in the given direction to arrive at the destination. Some examples of Distance might include: *to 100%*, *to \$150 per unit*, or *to 3%*. Notice two things about setting the Distance: 1) the term “by X%” does not qualify. This term creates a condition for improvement relative to an unstated starting point. It allows the achiever to claim success in any case as long as no one knows what the starting point was. 2) The Distance is defined as a rate. It should be framed as “X per Y”, or “\$150 per unit”, for example. Even a percentage is effectively a rate since it expresses ‘X’ per 100 outcomes. This is to ensure that a new state of operations has been established.

**Deadline** – This gives the achiever a sense of how soon they need to arrive at the destination. It requires the achiever to prioritize how time and other resources should be spent. A Deadline can be simply stated as “*by August 15<sup>th</sup> of 2023*”, for example. No Deadline practically ensures inaction. Long Deadlines enable procrastination. Shorter Deadlines tend to encourage immediate action. As our attention spans get shorter, so should our Deadlines. The Deadline, combined with Direction and Distance, are all a person needs to focus and improve.

Let's look at a few random examples of poorly written goals to dissect where they often fall short of meeting the need.

**Example Goal A: *To become world-class in manufacturing.***

**The Problem:** While this sounds good on paper, it has several flaws. It lacks both Distance and Deadline and can thus never objectively be achieved. First, there is no widely accepted measurement for “world-class manufacturing”. How do you know when you have achieved the goal? How will you evaluate the effectiveness of each decision if there is no way to measure if you are getting closer or further from the goal? Further, there is no deadline for achievement that provides any sense of urgency for progress. It would be better written as *Decrease unplanned downtime to 5% by February 20<sup>th</sup>*.

Bad Goal	Good Goal
To become world-class in manufacturing	Decrease unplanned downtime to 5% by February 20th

**Example Goal B: *Reduce operating cost by 25% by June 1st.***

**The Problem:** This is slightly better than the first example in that it provides Direction (Reduce Cost) and a Deadline (by June 1<sup>st</sup>). However, the target of “by 25%” is a bit ambiguous. Unless you knew exactly what the operating costs were when the goal was set, you could never be sure if you had achieved a 25% reduction or even moved in that direction. Better to state this one as *“Reduce operating cost to \$35k per month by June 1<sup>st</sup>”*. At any point along the way, it's possible to check where you are relative to the \$35k per month goal and course correct if needed.

Bad Goal	Good Goal
Reduce operating cost by 25% by June 1 <sup>st</sup>	Decrease operating cost to \$35k per month by June 1 <sup>st</sup>

**Example Goal C: *Implement the new ERP by November 15th.***

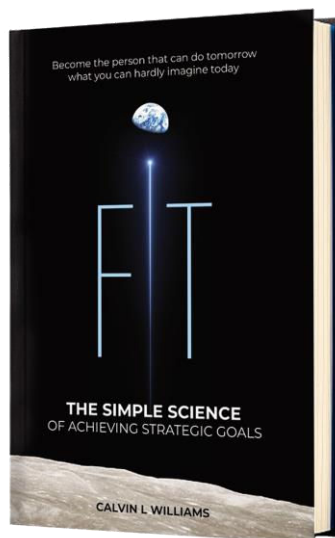
**The Problem:** This statement is more of a task or project than a goal. By this goal, as stated, you can never truly verify that the ERP is implemented as opinions about the finish line can vary. It would be better to state the goal as: *Increase transaction capture rate in the new ERP to 95% by November 15<sup>th</sup>*.

Bad Goal	Good Goal
Implement the new ERP by November 15th	Increase transaction capture rate in the new ERP to 95% by November 15 <sup>th</sup>

We've seen many companies deliver outstanding results while advancing a culture of Continuous Improvement with 3D Goal Setting. For example, Gentek Building Materials delivered over \$1.2M in cost savings in as few as 3 months using 3DGS in combination with the Impruver Strategy Execution software solution. By establishing a common framework to set and align goals, the company was able to help each team member understand their unique role in helping the company succeed.

### Conclusion

If your organization finds goal setting, alignment, and achievement to be challenging, don't fret. You're not alone. This capability is one that sets the exceptional few companies apart from the many in the middle. The challenge for a leader is not just to set and achieve their own goals but help an entire organization of people achieve theirs as well. The 3D Goal Setting method is the simplest approach to creating a common framework and language around how to set better goals. Simplicity scales better than complex because it is far easier to teach, learn, and apply. A well-set goal will have a Direction, Distance, and Deadline that creates the focus and sense of urgency needed for Continuous Improvement. The next challenge in creating a high-performance organization is to develop conditions that maximize the likelihood of achievement. Many of these conditions are discussed thoroughly in our Amazon Bestselling leadership book: [FIT – The Simple Science of Achieving Strategic Goals](#).



Many leaders are compelled to load up a few high achievers with many goals and everyone else with none. This means that perhaps 10% of people end up with too many goals while the remaining 90% of the company's talent pool is placed in neutral. Why not activate 100% of the brain trust within your company and become unstoppable, engaging everyone in improving something important every day? World-leading companies can tap into and leverage far more of their organization's creative horsepower to get results that the rest can only dream of.

It's important to establish a common framework for how goals should be set and communicated throughout an organization. This enables better alignment of effort, focus, and progress toward what's most important to improve. If you'd like to learn a systematic way to do this, I'd be happy to share more about the work my team at Impruver is doing to help people like you. Check us out at <https://impruver.com> for more details.

In the meantime, here's the link to a free e-Learning module on [Agile Strategy Execution](#).