

How to Set Achievable Goals for Your Job Search

Recorded by Jessica Jonikas

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Hello. My name is Jessica Jonikas. I am the Associate Director of the UIC Center on Mental Health Services Research and Policy. Today I'll be talking about how to set an achievable goal for your job search.

Whether you've been out of the workforce for a while, or you want to try something new, or get a promotion, setting achievable goals is critical to your success. The first step is figuring out what you want. Many people want a better paying job. Others want a more satisfying job. As you think about what kind of job you'd like, consider what type of business or industry interests you. You also should consider how long of a commute you're willing to make, or whether you're willing to relocate for a new job. It's also important to know your skills, and what type of job you're qualified for. Finally, as you consider your work goal, it's important to identify the type of work setting you prefer and why.

Once you know what you want, you need a specific plan for getting there. To do this, career coaches often recommend setting what's called a SMART goal. This type of goal planning is popular across many life areas because it works well for many people. Let's see how SMART goal planning can help you set a manageable work goal.

Let's say your goal is to get a new job that also allows you to keep some of your disability benefits such as SSI or DI. That's great! You know what you're working towards. Next, you need to plan action steps that help you to land that job. Enter SMART goal planning. The S in SMART stands for Specific. This means that your planned actions are detailed and focus on what you can achieve in a set amount of time. Rather than stating, "I'll start looking for a job," which isn't very specific, you might say instead, "I'll update my resume by the end of this week." As another example, instead of saying, "I'll decide what kind of job I want," you might say, "During the next 2 weeks, I'll work with someone to figure out two types of jobs that would best suit me." The more specific you are about what you're going to do, the more likely you are to start moving towards your larger goal.

The M in SMART stands for measurable. You want to include amounts and dates in your action statements, so it's very clear when you've done them. Let's consider an example. You've probably heard people say that getting a good job depends on who you know. It's true that it can be easier to find work if you expand your contacts to people who might have available jobs. But, stating that you'll expand your contacts isn't measurable. It's better to say, "By the end of next week, I'll contact my college's alumni association to get names of people who run small businesses and might be hiring. Or, "Next Monday, I'll ask my Employment Specialist to help me join the web site LinkedIn or Jobster to build my employment contacts." Both of these actions are measurable because it's clear exactly what you will do and by when.

The A in SMART stands for achievable. This means planning actions you know you'll be able to take. Saying that you'll brush up your resume, expand your contacts, research local businesses, and send out 5 resumes by the end of a month is usually too ambitious. Using SMART goal planning, you would instead choose 1, or maybe 2, of those things to do in a month. This strategy also can build your confidence and improve your mood, because you'll be giving yourself things to do that can actually get done.

Related to this, the R in SMART stands for realistic. This boils down to being honest with yourself about what you can manage to do. For example, if one of your contacts knows of a job that involves a two-hour commute, this might not be manageable if you're caring for kids or an elderly parent. You want to be realistic about what you can juggle, and how best to maintain your wellness while working.

Finally, the T stands for time-framed. Attaching times to when you'll complete your actions creates accountability and a sense of urgency. It will help move you from doing things someday to right now. And, if you've made achievable and realistic plans, then saying you'll do something within a week or a month is less overwhelming. In fact, if it seems overwhelming to do something you've planned, consider doing less of it or give yourself more time to get it done.

Thinking about a new job can be daunting. But, when we break that larger goal into smaller action steps, we can start to feel in charge of the process. SMART goal planning is a good way to make a big task more manageable.

Thanks for tuning in today. Some of the information found in this podcast was adapted from the web sites, career-intelligence.com and walrathrecruiting.com. I wish you all the best in your job search.

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