

## leadership instalments

### The Power of a Goal

By Dan Gaynor

**JUST A FEW DAYS AGO, IN A NATIONALLY TELEVISED** speech from Georgetown University, in Washington DC, President Barak Obama reminded us of the essential role leaders play in setting corporate goals. Why do the best leaders set corporate goals? What role do good goals play, and what makes for a good goal? These are the questions we'll consider in this month's Talking Leadership.

Goal setting is one of every leader's most essential roles. Good leaders know that the right goals have the power to inspire and focus a team. Without clear goals, the organization can drift, not knowing what is important. Good goals establish clear priorities, and they provide a framework for decision making and resource allocation. Good goals tell people where to direct their efforts. They provide a measuring stick to evaluate success and failure, and to learn through the process, about what works and what doesn't.

Yet in so many organizations, corporate goals are unclear or non-existent. People have no alternative but to just keep things running another day. There can be little purposeful change or growth.

So what do good goals look like? I believe they meet four standards: they are challenging, doable, worthwhile, and measurable. Let's look at each of these in turn:

Facing and meeting a challenge, gives people a sense of achievement, and achievement is a strong motivator. Give an individual or a group of people a taste of genuine achievement and they will come back for more. They stand a little taller. Challenge and achievement are inseparable, one a prerequisite for the other.



Achievement builds confidence and it feels good, so good goals should prepare the way for an experience with achievement.

While good goals provide challenge, they must also be doable. The old adage, "shoot for the stars, get the moon" is nonsense. Goals that are unreachable only teach people to fail. Good leaders teach people to succeed. The skill in setting good goals is in knowing where the balance between challenging and doable is.

Good goals are also worthwhile. People can be working hard and yet working on the wrong things. Creating focus around the right work is one of the reasons good leaders set goals. President Obama believes achieving energy independence to be a worthwhile goal, and for one of the world's largest economies and populations, it is hard to argue that he is wrong. He chose students at Georgetown U as his primary audience to focus Americans on the value this goal holds not only for the current generation but also for a generation of sons and daughters. When the goal is worthwhile, it inspires others to work hard at achieving it. Good goals are always unselfish, they always serve the interests of the larger corporate body and its members.

Finally, good goals are measurable. They have clear timelines, accountabilities and targets that enable everyone to evaluate the success or failure of the effort, not as an exercise in reward or punishment, but as an opportunity to learn. Good leaders set good goals, prepare their teams and provide the resources, then evaluate the results, all in an effort to improve the organization and its fortunes. Set the right goals, communicate them clearly and frequently, and then measure performance against them, and you take another powerful step toward transformational leadership - the only kind that's worth doing.

#### Discussion Questions:

- What are the two or three most important goals you have set for the evolution or transformation of the team you lead?
- Do your goals meet the test of challenge, doable, worthwhile and measurable?
- How and how often are you communicating goals and assessing performance against them?

*To go deeper into the powerful practices of effective leaders contact us for a half day workshop.*

For other Leadership Instalments articles go to:  
[www.gaynorconsulting.com](http://www.gaynorconsulting.com)

Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:  
403.880.1780