

Why Start SMART?

by
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Getting people to craft and use SMART goals is one of the most daunting tasks we have undertaken in over 20 years of conducting executive education and adult learning at OSA. Even for metric-based organizations raised under MBO and used to measuring everything in their operations, it is a formidable challenge. TDS Metrocom maintains it takes nine or more tries before you get good at it.

Some people become so frustrated with the process they question why do it all. They reject it as just more bureaucratic, unnecessary paperwork imposed by corporate. Or they argue that no metric is adequate or sophisticated enough to capture the complexity and intrinsic quality of what they do (e.g. designing buildings, trying cases, treating cancer patients). Or they have fears that such a process will be perceived by the troops as micromanaging, as setting up a grading system, and as intrusively monitoring the integrity of individuals' work. All of which will build resentment and erode trust.

Given such a picture, why even start SMART? There are two simple reasons. One is to get better. Put simply, if you don't know what good looks like, you can't improve. In order to know what good looks like you need some criteria, some form of measurement. *These* are the three factors that define design quality or effective cross-examination. *This* is a world-class seminar or course. *That* is exceeding member expectations. Without measurement, "these", "this", and "that" are meaningless. They all quickly reduce to what good looks like is what I say. Peter Drucker is one of the most respected management educators and theorists in history. One of his best business observations in his 60+ year career is, "Management is measurement. What is measured is what gets managed." It simply is not possible to build an enterprise of performance excellence on DUM(B): Don't Use Metrics (Bob).

The other reason to use SMART is because it's fair. We know from some excellent recent research that fairness is at the heart of building an organization of greatness (see *Harvard Business Review* study 2002). SMART is a tool that levels the playing field when deployed properly. It says we are going to play fairly, objectively, and professionally with one another. Politics, power, and position aren't done away with, of course, but their importance in the performance management equation is greatly attenuated. In fact, if people are being accountable for mutually agreed upon, reasonably objective targets, then subjectivity, personality biases, and playing favorites become less of a factor in assessing individual as well as committee or program performance.

One may wonder why all the concern about getting better and being fair. The answer is that these are the critical underpinnings for building an enterprise worth having. Whether that enterprise constructs state of the art healthcare facilities, provides top-notch legal representation, or delivers high quality/cost effective learning, there isn't a substitute for starting and staying SMART.