

For your team's wellbeing.
For Living



Setting healthy workplace goals.

Here we'll look at how to set healthy workplace goals, including why it's important and how it might help to improve employee health and wellbeing.

Benefits of goal setting.

Protecting your employees' health and wellbeing while they're at work is important. And although you can encourage healthy behaviours, supporting your employees to set effective goals may be a key step in helping them to succeed.

Whether it's eating healthier, being more active or managing stress levels, try to prompt your employees to think about the aim or objective of their actions.

Without setting goals, your employees immediately limit their chances of success. By goal setting they are encouraged to try harder for longer and with less distraction. And that's not all; how they set and think about their goals is important too.

There's lots of theory around how to set effective goals. Depending on the type of goal, some elements may be more beneficial than others. But there are some key principles that you can share with your employees. If you can, disseminate these tips and encourage your employees to put them into practice. See what works best and tweak the 'recipe' accordingly.



6 steps to achieving goal success.

1 Set behaviourally optimised goals

When setting a goal, encourage employees to think about a specific behaviour rather than a desired outcome. Rather than aiming to lose five pounds, for example, suggest targeting a behaviour that will help your employee achieve their goal instead. It could be walking to the station in the morning instead of getting the bus.



You should also encourage employees to frame their goals as moving towards, rather than away from an outcome. For example, to improve stress levels at work, employees could allocate times throughout the day to take a mindful moment. This framing may be more effective than focusing on what should be avoided, for example working through lunch.

Finally, encourage your employees to set and focus on one goal at a time. By doing this they may be more likely to commit to, and achieve, their goal.

2 Create an action plan – and prepare for setbacks

Encourage employees to break down their goal and create an action plan, including what they're going to do, where, when, why and with whom. Employees should also think about how often and for how long they'll do something.



It's only natural that barriers to completing their goals will crop up. Encourage employees to think about these situations and plan for the 'what if'. This is known as 'if-then' planning. For example, if an employee's goal is to get outside during lunch time, then they might want to set an if-then plan for when barriers come up. For example, *if* it's raining *then* I'll take an umbrella so I can go out at lunch.

3 Have fun

If you want to help your employees achieve their health goals, encourage them to formulate their goals around things they enjoy or are interested in. For example, if an employee enjoys running and wants to up their physical activity, they may be more likely to succeed by going for a run then signing up to a fitness bootcamp. This type of motivation is known as intrinsic motivation.



However, 'a healthy lifestyle' might not be something that your employees find intrinsically motivating. If so, encourage them to think about their reasons for being healthier. The closer their reasons are to them – who they are and what they believe, the better.

4 Commit to achieve

Once your employees have set a goal, help them stick to it. There are lots of different commitment devices or tactics that can be employed to help your workforce achieve their goals. Suggest they commit to activities in a group, so they're less inclined to deviate from the plan.



Or perhaps suggest upping the stakes. One idea could be to encourage employees to deposit money, which will be donated to an anonymous cause should they fail to achieve their goal.

5 Keep motivation high

Over time, motivation towards achieving goals may wane. To help your employees boost their motivation and achieve their goals, suggest they set or tweak them to include a high-low range.



For example, if employees want to commit to doing some desk-based stretches twice a day, suggest that their goal is instead to do stretches between one and three times per day. The lower range is achievable, and the upper range is challenging – a great combination to keep motivation going.

6 Monitoring progress

Monitoring progress is crucial if your employees want to reach their goals. There are lots of ways they can do this. They can actively note down their progress toward a goal in a journal or app, or perhaps go one step further and publicly monitor their progress, for example on a leader board.



Another point to consider is whether employees track their progress in terms of how far they've come versus how far they must go towards achieving their goal. In the earlier stages, it may be more effective to focus on the progress made. As employees get closer to achieving their goal, switching to focus on what's left to achieve may be more effective.

Sources

- Epton T, Currie S, Armitage CJ. Unique effects of setting goals on behaviour change: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Consult Clin Psychol*.
- Stretcher VJ, Seijts GH, Hok GJ et al. Goal setting as a strategy for health behaviour change. *Health Educ Q*.
- McEwan D, Harden SM, Zumbo BD et al. The effectiveness of multi-component goal setting interventions for changing physical activity behaviour: a systematic review and metaanalysis. *Health Psychol Rev*.
- Bailey R. Goal setting and action planning for health behaviour change. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 2017.
- Janssen M, Heerkensens Y, Juijer W et al. Effects of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on employees' mental health: A systematic review.
- Dalton AN, Spiller SA. Too much of a good thing: the benefits of implementation intentions depend on the number of goals. *JCR* 2012.
- Goal setting in sport and exercise: Research and practical applications.
- Michie S, Richardson M, Johnston M et al. The behavior change technique taxonomy (v1) of 93 hierarchically clustered techniques: building an international consensus for the reporting of behavior change interventions. *Ann Behav Med* 2013.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 2000.
- Rogers T. Commitment devices: Using initiatives to change behaviour. *JAMA* 2014. doi:10.1001/jama.2014.3485.

This information was published by Bupa's Health Content Team and is based on reputable sources of medical evidence. It has been reviewed by appropriate medical or clinical professionals. The information is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice nor is it intended to be for medical diagnosis or treatment. Published December 2019.