



[Return To Previous Page](#)

# Set SMART Goals to Better Manage Time

By [Julie A. English](#) and [E. Lynn Lanoue](#)

Time management is a common sore spot among many Six Sigma practitioners. The typical complaint: "I spend most of my time on my day-to-day responsibilities – my Six Sigma projects – and then my personal life suffers." The question is: How can practitioners best manage all of their tasks and priorities?

While time cannot be managed, people can be. As Six Sigma practitioner, you are a [change agent](#); what would it be like if you used the principles of Six Sigma for time management?

To create a goal around time management, start by breaking down a version of the DMAIC model into three main categories:

1. Define
2. Measure
3. Achieve

## Define a SMART Goal

A SMART (specific, measurable, action oriented, reasonable, timely) goal is a written statement that describes what needs to be done to work toward a specific change, ultimately creating success and improvement.

For example, my goal is to create a framework for each day that incorporates time for [mentoring](#), project work and personal learning, and also allows me to have a healthy work-life balance. I want to accomplish this within the next 90 days. Sounds like a lofty goal, so it may help to break it down into the SMART components.

**Specific** – Specific goals are more likely to be achieved than nonspecific goals. Some questions to consider:

- Who is involved?
- What do you want to accomplish?
- When? Establish a time frame.
- Why? Determine the specific reason, purpose or benefits of achieving a goal.

**Measurable** – Measuring progress toward a goal helps people stay on track, reach target dates and experience achievement. Staying on track will result in a continuous improvement cycle that leads to [motivation](#) and goal attainment.

**Action Oriented** – To keep from becoming overwhelming, goals should be broken down into action steps. Each step moves a person closer to successful goal achievement.

**Reasonable** – Avoid setting unreasonable expectations. Personal and situational factors may influence the ability to reach a goal. Some personal factors to consider are tiredness, physical well-being and other commitments.

**Timely** – Define start and end points to the goal. Maintain commitment to these deadlines. Goals without deadlines or schedules for completion tend to be put aside for the day-to-day crises that invariably arise.

SMART goals can be divided into three categories:

1. Learning - What do you need to know or learn:

- From others or through training?
- Professionally?
- Personally?

2. Performance - What do you need to do:

- To meet performance goals?
- To move to the next level in the organization?
- Professionally?

3. Fulfillment - What do you want:

- To be fulfilled?
- To balance work and life?
- Personally?

## Measure the Data

After creating a SMART goal, keep in mind that there are 24 hours in a day; no amount of “managing” is going to change that fact. Ask how much of your time is being spent on:

- Worrying and complaining about time (to coworkers, friends, family and self).
- In crisis mode (waiting and focusing on crises).
- On distractions (emails, phone calls and web surfing).
- On perfection (answering emails or constructing reports to “perfection”).

Be honest with yourself. Input that time into each of the three goal categories. Here is an example surrounding the common issue of responding to interruptions:

### Learning

- How often do I stop what I’m doing to address interruptions (coworkers, emails and phone calls)?
- How many interruptions really require immediate attention?
- What time of the day am I at my best?

### Performance

- How many times am I answering one-line emails with a tome?
- How much time do I spend researching and creating perfection?
- How are my practices impacting my professional goals?

### Fulfillment

- How are my practices impacting my personal life and goals?
- How often am I stealing time from what I love to do and giving that time to what I should do?
- How much fun am I having?

Figure 1 shows a goal setting form with examples of goals and their measurements for each of the categories.

Figure 1: Goal Setting Form		
Name: A. Chieve		Date: 3/16/09
Learning		
Goal: Learn new computer program within 30 days	Measurement: Able to use program successfully in current project	Is your goal SMART? _Specific _Measurable _Action-oriented

		_Reasonable _Timely
<b>Performing</b>		
Goals: 1. Create a daily framework to incorporate time for mentoring, project work and personal learning, allowing me to have healthy work-life balance. I will accomplish this in the next 90 days. 2. Create a process to reduce time spent handling interruptions, such as emails and questions from staff. Accomplish in next 10 days.	Measurement: Framework developed and in operation – mentoring, project work and personal learning goals fulfilled. Will no longer stay late or handle emails on weekends or vacation. Take a 10-day vacation	Is your goal SMART? _Specific _Measurable _Action-oriented _Reasonable _Timely
<b>Fulfillment</b>		
Goal: Spend one hour every evening playing with my daughter before dinner. Starting immediately.	Measurement: Successful one-on-one time with my daughter.	Is your goal SMART? _Specific _Measurable _Action-oriented _Reasonable _Timely

### Achieve a Plan of Action

Based on the data collected, create a plan of action. This should consist of:

- Action steps.
- A time frame (start date and end date).
- Help needed and the resources that can provide it.
- Follow-up.

The form in Figure 2 will assist in creating a plan of action.

Figure 2: Plan of Action Form							
Plan of Action	Time Frame		Help	Follow-up	Follow-up		
	Begin date	End date			How do you know when step is complete?	Actual end date	Progress – results
1. Learning							
2. Learning							
1. Performance							
2. Performance							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize emails</li> <li>• Respond in a concise manner or delegate to staff</li> <li>• Schedule time for</li> </ul>	3/16	3/26	Direct reports, supervisor,	I will spend less time working late and on weekends. My stress levels will	3/19	Working great – no longer respond to email after hours, staff is making own	Taking a 10-day vacation

direct report questions • Meet with peer on how they handle emails successfully			peer	decrease and I will have time for personal fulfillment goal.		decisions. Spending time with my daughter every day.	April 1.
1. Fulfillment							
2. Fulfillment							

## Putting Goals to Work

The story of a Master Black Belt helps to illustrate the use of this time management process. One of her time management action steps involved emails. First, she met with a peer who is very successful at handling emails and learned what he did. After the meeting, she incorporated a plan by notifying her boss and direct reports that she had set a goal and would only check her emails during specific times of the day.

During these periods, she would review quickly emails for importance. She would either triage them to someone else, or respond in a concise manner. She also would not check emails on vacation, weekends or during personal time. How did she know it was a success? Her direct reports began solving their own issues (empowerment), felt valued (delegation) and developed a greater respect for her time, along with their own. Additionally, she completed her Master Black Belt charter ahead of time, eliciting commendations from her boss on how focused she had become.

This plan took only a few days to implement. She rewarded herself by planning and taking a 10-day vacation for the first time in two years, and for the first time in five years she actually used all of her paid time off. One goal's action plan created success both personally and professionally.

**About the Author:** ***Julie A. English** is the CEO of Within Reach Consulting LLC and a founding member of The Leadership Collaborative, a coaching, consulting and training organization. A Master Black Belt, her 14 years of experience include working with companies such as AlliedSignal, Honeywell International, Raytheon and Accenture. She can be reached at [julie@withinreachconsulting.com](mailto:julie@withinreachconsulting.com). **E. Lynn Lanoue** is a founding member of The Leadership Collaborative and is CEO of BWI Coaching & Consulting LLC. She has spent more than 25 years in the medical and healthcare business working for Baxter Healthcare Corp. and Nestlé Clinical Nutrition, including management and training in sales, marketing and strategic business development. Lanoue is a Green Belt. She can be reached at [lynn@bwicoaching.com](mailto:lynn@bwicoaching.com).*

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[Return To Previous Page](#)