

Section 5



TEAM GOALS AND TIME MANAGEMENT

Key Points

- 1 Goals and the Small-Unit Mission
- 2 Developing Goals in the Army
- 3 SMART Goals
- 4 Tools for Group Time Management

An Army leader is anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals. Army leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking, and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization.

From Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership: Competent, Confident, and Agile

Introduction

Time may be your most precious asset as an Army leader. How you manage time—yours and others’—will be an essential yardstick of your effectiveness and success in leading small units. Your Soldiers will assess your ability based on this key leadership yardstick. Make the best use of their time in completing Army tasks and accomplishing missions, and they will give you their best effort.

You may have already studied personal goal setting and individual time management. This lesson further explores how to lead a group in developing team goals and managing time. While some of these concepts touch on topics similar to individual goal setting and time management, managing a *group’s* goals and time is more complicated. You must analyze and plan within complex situations, know your team’s skills and abilities so you can delegate responsibilities appropriately, and then make intentional decisions toward the team and organizational mission.

You will be able to apply the ideas you learn here to group projects in your ROTC training and your broader college education. They also will increase your effectiveness as a leader in any organization you may serve in the future.

For a concrete example of these skills in action, take a look at how one executive officer determined the importance of administrative procedures and their contribution to the team’s values, mission, and goals.

The “Paperwork Purge”

The division’s new chief of staff was surprised at how much time subordinates spent at meetings; it seemed they had time for little else. After observing the way things worked for two weeks, the chief did away with most of the scheduled meetings, telling the staff, “We’ll meet when we need to meet, and not just because it’s Friday morning.” What’s more, the chief required an agenda for each meeting ahead of time: “That way, people can do their homework and see who needs to be there and who doesn’t.” The chief was always on time for meetings and started at the time specified on the agenda. There were no interruptions of [whoever] had the floor, and the long, meandering speeches that had marked previous meetings were cut short.

The chief put a one-page limit on briefing papers for the boss. This meant subordinates learned to write concisely. Each staff section did a top-to-bottom review of procedures that had been in place as long as anyone could remember. Anything that couldn’t be justified was thrown out. The chief handled most of the correspondence that came across his desk with a quick note written on the original and told the staff to do the same.

The chief made the staff justify the requirements they sent to subordinate organizations, with the comment, “If you can’t tell them why it’s important, then maybe it’s not important.” The explanation also helped subordinate elements determine their own priorities: “You can’t keep sending stuff down saying, ‘This is critical!’ It gets to be like the boy who cried wolf.”

Of course, the staff didn't take the new chief quite seriously at first, and after a week of reviewing old policy letters, some staff sections let the requirement slide. Then the chief showed up one day and had them give him a rundown on all the policies left after what everyone was calling "the big paperwork purge." A few more outdated requirements fell by the wayside that afternoon. More important, the staff got the message that the chief followed through on decisions.

Finally, and most startling, the chief told staff members that now and then they should sit quietly and stare into space: "You're getting paid to think, and every once in a while you've got to stop moving to do that well."

Goals and the Small-Unit Mission

Goals are intentional destinations. To arrive at an intended destination, you need a map and a plan for getting there. For groups, the map takes the form of a clear organizational vision (where you want to go) and mission (how you plan to get there) that both you and everyone in your unit understand. The next step is to establish destination points along the way to meeting your mission and vision. Whenever possible, you should involve your entire team in creating the vision and mission and then setting the goals to achieve it. This inclusive approach builds team morale, trust, and commitment to the mission.

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, leadership writer Stephen R. Covey states that "without involvement, there is no commitment." As a small-unit leader, you will be extremely busy and have a limited amount of time. But you should never be in too much of a hurry to involve your platoon members in your decision making. Otherwise, you risk losing their willingness to participate in the unit's success. People need to feel ownership of their work and their time; they need to feel that their work has significance and contributes to the organization's direction.

There will be times, however, when an organizational vision and supporting goals have already been established. If so, review them and create subgoals and tasks as they apply to you—then do the same thing for the unit. In the interests of cohesion, whatever the situation, you must get your unit working toward the same end. Your Soldiers must own the mission. That is your leadership challenge.

How Goals Help Accomplish the Mission

Author Covey says that effective goals provide the team meaning and purpose—they show the team where it is, where it is going, and when it has arrived.

Poorly or hastily set goals waste time, money, and effort. Not only that, poorly designed goals can damage morale. If you continually set unrealistic goals for your team, eventually their motivation to overcome obstacles and remain focused on the goal will diminish—why bother if it's not even possible, right? Covey also notes, "An effective goal focuses primarily on results rather than activity." In other words, it's up to you to ensure that each activity takes the team one step further toward one of its goals or end states, and does not simply subtract from the limited time available.



Developing Goals in the Army

When developing goals for your unit, consider these points:

- Subordinates should be involved in the goal setting
- Goals must be realistic, challenging, and attainable
- Leaders must develop a plan of action to achieve each goal
- Goals should ultimately lead to improved combat readiness.

Whether you are involved in Army activities or another organization's work, these considerations will assist you in setting organizational goals. Of course, while a business or corporation's work does not require improved combat readiness, its management will certainly want to ensure that goals lead to improved day-to-day operations. So, in military or in professional life, goal setting principles are the same.

Within the Army, every goal you set should—at least in principle—point toward the ultimate end of providing the most efficient, effective use possible of your unit's time, talents, and effort in pursuit of your unit's mission and of the Army's broader strategic objectives.

Critical Thinking

How would you define “combat readiness” in an organization outside the Army?

SMART Goals

SMART goals

goals that are
Specific,
Measurable,
Achievable,
Realistic, and
Time-bound

How do you guide your subordinates so that your unit creates effective goals?

Last year you may have learned about **SMART goals**. Recall that SMART goals are:

- specific—they use concrete language and distinct tasks
- measurable—they employ benchmarks and yardsticks, and call for measurable results
- achievable—they are realistic and have attainable milestones
- realistic—they take real situations and circumstances into consideration
- time-bound—they adhere to a schedule or deadline for completion.

Using this format when setting goals allows the team members to see where they are going, measure where they are, and see a clear end point. Goals lacking these characteristics are often too vague to get everyone pulling together. For example, say the goal is *The platoon will do better in inspections*. Well, everyone wants to do better. But how will you measure “better”? How will the platoon know when it has reached “better”? And “better” by what date? And in which inspections?

An example of a SMART goal might be: *Ninety-five percent of platoon members will score “good” or “excellent” on weekly barracks inspections conducted by unit NCOs by the end of _____ (month)*. Or perhaps: *Eighty percent of platoon members will qualify on the sidearms range within two months of beginning training*. Notice that these goals have reasonable—and mutually agreed upon—measures, end dates, and specifics for unit success.

Tools for Group Time Management

Tools for Group Time Management

- Prioritizing
- Meeting
- Delegating
- Planning
- Eliminating distracters
- Divesting non-congruent tasks.

Accomplishing anything of significance to your unit requires your careful management of tasks and time. Successful time management implies many things, such as:

- What amount of time should the team spend on each task or goal?
- Which goal is the most important?
- Which tasks should the team disregard altogether?
- How much effort should the team put into each task?
- Who is best qualified to perform the task?

As you lead your unit, consider how the principles of effective time management come into play. If your team is to accomplish its goals, your Soldiers must agree that they will participate in managing their time individually and collectively.

Some of the strategies or tools you can use to make the most of your unit’s time are *prioritizing, meeting, delegating, planning, eliminating distracters, and divesting non-congruent tasks*.

Critical Thinking

Explain why meeting agendas are crucial to completing tasks as a group. How is a good agenda like a good road map?

Prioritizing

Prioritizing means identifying what you believe to be the most important tasks to perform first. You have many ways to prioritize. Sometimes you will do it based on what you need to do right away. Sometimes it's what you need to do today or this week. A number of limitations affect how we prioritize, including available time, money, personnel, and pre-existing orders.

prioritizing

ranking tasks for completion in order of importance

Meeting

While meetings are not always the answer to time management (some business experts claim they are the enemy of time management!), Milo Frank, author of *How to Run a Successful Meeting in Half the Time*, points out that meetings can be very productive when you run them properly. Effective managers make meetings count. Good meetings require clear communication and coordination beforehand. To get to the issue and avoid wasted effort, good meetings always have an agenda that you strictly follow, and an assigned recorder to keep a record of reports, issues, decisions, action points, and accountability. Good meetings always begin and end on time.

One successful airline executive held meetings at which no one was allowed to sit down. A publishing manager always limited meetings to 15-minute “roundup sessions” that ran like clockwork. Whatever your strategy—and you should be creative in how you run meetings—you should set a format and stick with it so your Soldiers get used to efficiently using the time allotted to the meeting. They should think of meetings not as “bull sessions” or social occasions, but as important tools to complete their jobs. They will respect you for respecting their time.

Delegating

The old saying holds that the best managers are adept at **delegating** authority. Most groups naturally have a diverse makeup—members vary in knowledge, background, talents, and experience. Delegating is the management act of giving authority to the appropriate subordinate to complete part of the mission or task. Sometimes you will delegate based on a subordinate's job description. But as a leader, you must become skilled at relating the task or goal to the right person or team to ensure that the job is accomplished. That's why it's crucial to know your people, their skills, and their interests. Delegating is important because it frees your time for other activities, develops your followers, and strengthens your organization.

delegating

assigning tasks and mission parts to the team members most qualified to carry them out

Planning

In the text *Becoming a Master Student*, author Dave Ellis describes how “planning can set you free.” Using a calendar, checklists, milestones, and a written plan, you can help your team keep abreast of details, direction, and progress. Your challenge comes in planning each activity with the vision, mission, or goals in mind. Good planning requires coordination, communication, and critical thinking. Strong planning will help you avoid becoming stuck in “crisis mode” as a matter of routine. Planning requires time, of course, so you should schedule time to plan—and for the related writing and scheduling that planning requires.

distracters

factors that pull individuals' and the team's attention away from the task at hand to the detriment of the overall mission and team goals

Eliminating Distracters

Not only do you and your Soldiers have **distracters** in your day-to-day lives, but sometimes huge distracters confront your entire unit. Little distracters, such as nonproductive activities or people interrupting meetings, can consume team members' time. Sometimes administrative requirements or waiting for appointments, critical information, and coordination can stymie your team's best efforts at staying on task. Big distracters can include setting and working toward goals that do not contribute directly toward the organization's mission or vision.

Some distracters are under your control as the leader (“No cell phones at meetings”). At other times, your team might need to create a list of its own rules to prevent distractions, such as “No socializing once a meeting begins”; “No answering the phone during a discussion”; or “No projects or goals that do not contribute to the mission.” Remember: It's critical that team members buy in to the decision making process if you want them to accept and follow the rules.

It may be impossible to eliminate distracters—and perhaps that's one of those unrealistic goals. But if you set the appropriate management tone and example, your subordinates will trust you, follow your model, and make the best use of their time—which includes limiting distracters.

Divest Noncongruent Tasks

Dave Ellis states that “Managing time is as much about dropping worthless activities as about adding new and useful ones.” Most organizations engage in **noncongruent tasks**, or tasks that do not contribute directly to the goal or mission. The trick is to identify them and to divest—or free—the organization of them. One way to do this is to have the team members analyze all the projects or tasks on which they spend their time. List each task, then ask: “Does this job contribute to the vision or goal?” Unfortunately, this weeding-out process might require ridding the team of an enjoyable or fun task or two. (An example might be your platoon supporting the annual fair). Talk with your team about ridding the organization of these more pleasant tasks or activities. The discipline required may help strengthen group determination and commitment.

You'll learn more about many of these tools in the next section of this book.

noncongruent tasks

tasks that do not contribute directly to an organization's goals



Critical Thinking

How do you strike a balance between creating a productive, enjoyable working environment and allowing distracters and noncongruent tasks to sap the team's time available for the mission?





CONCLUSION

While similar to personal goal setting and time management, goal setting and time management for groups differs in important respects. You must analyze and plan within complex situations, know your team's skills and abilities so you can delegate responsibilities, and then make intentional decisions toward the team and organizational mission. The dynamics of managing team goals and the dynamics of leadership are similar—they are not an exact science. As a leader-in-training, you will continue to perfect the art of working with groups, developing team goals, and ensuring the team manages time well so that it can accomplish its mission.

As you study and perfect your team goal setting and time-management techniques, you will be well equipped to apply these essential skills to running organizations as an Army leader, in group projects for ROTC or other classes, or in leadership roles for other groups.

Teams rise or fall on the quality of their leadership. Nothing marks a competent leader more clearly than how he or she leads the team in setting its goals and managing its time.

Key Words

SMART goals
prioritizing
delegating
distracters
noncongruent tasks

Learning Assessment

1. What are four considerations in setting goals?
2. Name the five characteristics of SMART goals.
3. What are the six tools for effective group time management?

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