



**C.A.R.E.**  
Career and Resilience Education Program

## CAREER GOAL SETTING

The importance of career goal setting can never be underestimated. It can shape what you do for the rest of your life. A career as a police officer can be a very rewarding one. It is an incredibly varied profession and can present many different opportunities. It can be a lifelong career. If you discover what your goals are in your police career then you will go a long way to achieving them.

This article is designed to:

- provide basic tips on how to set effective personal and career goals;
- how to prioritise your workload so that you can achieve these goals; and
- the importance of having effective time management skills.

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## S.M.A.R.T. CAREER GOAL SETTING

Whether you realise it or not, every time you achieve something, whether it be big or small, at work or in your personal life, you have achieved a goal. Having goals is what makes our lives fulfilling. It gives us something to work towards – whether it is gaining a promotion, working in a new career, buying a house, or even getting that hot body you've been after.

Goals should be set for the short, medium and long term. It is important to 'think big' at the start and then work from there. Think about what you want to do in the long term, for example, in the next 10 years. Then break down the big goal into smaller goals that you can achieve in say, five years, one year, six months, one month, one week, today! All of these smaller goals must be achieved in order to meet your long term goal but breaking them down means you have lots of little 'wins' along the way.

For example, if your long term goal is to become a senior officer then you need to break down that goal into smaller goals of how you are going to achieve this. Perhaps in the next three years you want to make Sergeant? In six years Inspector? Break it down to what you need to do to achieve this, starting now. Perhaps your one week goal is to research what is required to become a Sergeant? **(Tip: Why not visit the NSWPF intranet for further information on the police promotions system).**

It is important to ensure you review and evaluate your goals. Things change in life and, as they do, so may your goals. Priorities change, we gain new experiences and we develop different interests. If you choose a career path and you feel it is no longer what you want – modify your goals. Be flexible to your changing priorities.

Another helpful tip is to put your goals in writing. You will more likely stick to them if you keep a log of them and can tick them off once they are achieved.

Whatever your goal is, it is important to understand some basic rules about goal setting before you start. These same principles can be used no matter what goals you are setting.

Setting S.M.A.R.T. goals will help you set powerful goals.

S.M.A.R.T. stands for goals that are:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**chievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime bound

## **Specific**

Specific goals are ones that are clear.

Avoid generalised goals that provide no direction. Be specific in your goal. A specific goal shows you where you're going. For example: "To get promoted" is too general, try and be more specific. Where are you getting promoted to? What position? For example, do you want to become a specialist police officer or a detective (In a LAC or State Crime Command)?

"To get promoted to Sergeant" or "To become a detective",

are specific goals that you can set for yourself.

When thinking about setting your goals, be as precise as possible. Break your goals down into 'bite sized goals'. Aiming for one big goal that won't likely happen for a number of years is not going to sustain motivation – keep lots of little goals to help you achieve the big goal.

Another example of a vague goal is "to participate in a marathon". A specific goal is "to participate in the 2015 Sydney Marathon".

## **Measurable**

Measurable goals should be set so that you can measure your success.

Include precise information such as dates, times, and amounts. If your goal is "reduce the amount of ongoing cases" or "reduce the amount of outstanding victim follow up" then by how much are you aiming for? A more measurable and specific goal would be to "decrease your ongoing cases by 15%", or "reduce the amount of outstanding victim follow up by 10%", for example. That way you can review your figures and see if your goal has been achieved.

If your goal is to become part of the State Protection Support Unit (SPSU) then to do so you will need to undergo medical and psychological testing prior to undergoing training. A measurable goal here could be to increase your level of fitness in the next three months, for example.

A good way to know if your goal is measurable is to ask yourself, "How will I know I have accomplished my goal?"

## **Achievable**

Make sure you set goals that you have a chance of achieving.

Setting unrealistic goals that are impossible to achieve will damage your confidence and make you reluctant to set goals in the future. To use our Sydney Marathon example, if you have never been a runner, it may not be wise to make it your goal to run a marathon in two months.

An effective way to make goals achievable is to break down your 'end goal' – or large, long-term goals – into small, 'bite sized' goals that are more easily achieved in a shorter period of time. In other words, what do you need to do first in order to reach your end goal?

## **Relevant**

Set goals that are relevant to what you want to achieve.

Think about your end goal and then what you need to do to achieve that. Avoid wasting time on things that won't help you achieve your goal. Sticking with our previous example, if your long-term goal is to run a marathon, a relevant short term goal is to join a running club – there's no point joining a gourmet dining club or a wine club – it isn't relevant to your long-term goal.

Another example is a Senior Constable working in general duties who wants to get into Traffic and Highway Command and become part of the Motor Cycle Response Team. Instead of doing a secondment to a Detective's office or doing an Intel course, the Officer could instead look at doing a Solo Cycle Course or obtaining Gold Certification (driving) or completing Infra Red BAS Operators Course, or even doing a rotation to a local Highway Patrol Office with a view to obtaining a permanent position.

## **Time-Bound**

Ensure all goals you set have timeframes in which you want to achieve them by.

Being vague with time – or putting no time limit at all – allows for procrastination or excuses. If you want to be promoted by December 2015 – and if this is a realistic timeframe in which you could become promoted – then you will work hard to achieve this. Whereas if you say "I want to be promoted" then there is no sense of urgency as to when you need to put in the work by. Does that mean you want to be promoted in the next year, two years, 10 years or in your entire working life?

## **PRIORITISING**

Prioritising your goals is essential to ensure they are achieved.

The first step in prioritising your work is to make a 'to do list'. Don't keep it on post-it notes or in your head — at the beginning of each day or week, write down what you want to get done and by when. This can be on a sheet of paper, your computer, mobile phone or iPad, etc., whatever will work best for you.

People who tend to accomplish the most in a day are those who know exactly what they want to accomplish.

Once your to do list is completed, rank your tasks according to importance or urgency to plan your day/week and focus your mind. Try to focus on what is important for you to achieve your goals or what will ease the pressure of your working week. Tick things off as you achieve them.

Make sure you set realistic deadlines for your tasks. Estimate the time each task needs to be completed and be honest with what you can achieve in a working day or week. It will avoid you feeling overwhelmed from the start.

Make sure you review your workload regularly. If there is one job that is always left at the bottom of the list, is there a reason why? It is important to recognise that you can't do everything and perhaps this task can be delegated to someone more suitable, or changed. Don't be afraid to say no to someone if you simply do not have the time.

There will always be times when an urgent job will come in or a pressing issue will arise, which must be dealt with before anything else. This can wreak havoc with your to do list. However, once this has been resolved, set aside time to re-write your list and start again.

## **TIME MANAGEMENT**

Time management is an essential skill to help you keep your work under control and your stress levels to a minimum. As workloads increase and deadlines tighten, it is important to be able to manage your time.

The following time management strategies may be useful to you, if your job permits. However, we recognise that many aspects of police work are urgent and out of your hands and therefore some of these strategies may not be relevant to you in your particular working circumstances. Hopefully you can use this information as an example and adapt this to apply to your particular position or working circumstances.

To plan your day, you need to make a to do list and prioritise it. Make sure you look at what must be done that day first.

Allow yourself time for inevitable interruptions or urgent issues that arise during your day.

Where possible (and appropriate), stop doing a job once the time you have allocated is up. What about time wasters? The things that get in the way of your good time management. There are many different things which can be considered time wasters:

- The telephone
- Internet
- Emails
- Colleagues
- Procrastination
- Cluttered desk
- Inability to say no

Time wasters are an inevitable part of work. Those are the people who pop their heads in for "just a quick question" or who want your opinion on something. A way to deal with this might be to close your door if you have one and, if not, perhaps tell your colleagues around you that you have a lot to get done today so you may be a little quiet. Hopefully most will take the hint! If not, you may need to politely tell them in a firmer way.

If you are a manager or team leader you obviously have to carefully manage interruptions so that people are not afraid to approach you. A good idea might be to schedule regular meetings. That way staff can bring their issues, questions, comments, etc., to the meeting to discuss and you can get an update on

current workload in a streamlined way. Having staff ask questions every five minutes is an enormous time waster. Even if their question is “just a quick question” it throws off your train of thought and can end up wasting a huge amount of time. Obviously there will be times when interruptions are inevitable but you should try to manage the non-urgent ones, where possible.

Another good way to manage this could be to suggest a more suitable time that day for them to come back. Be approachable and polite – but also remember your objectives.

What about general time wasters? The phone, emails or the internet? No matter what your job is, we can all waste significant amounts of time on the phone or reading emails. Obviously due to the reactionary nature of policing there are some roles where this will not be possible but try to look at strategies to deal with these interruptions. :

- Is it appropriate in your particular job to put your phone on voicemail and pick up your messages later?
- Is it appropriate in your particular job to leave your inbox closed and just check emails at the start, middle and end of the day?
- Setting aside specific time to make phone calls or read and respond to emails – if appropriate in your position – is an effective strategy in time management.

Another big time waster is procrastination. Have you ever said to yourself “I’ll do that later”? Or you’ve been given a long deadline so it gets “put on the backburner”. Procrastination will only make it worse as these jobs will pile up and you will be left with an even bigger workload and much less time to do it. Procrastinating will not make things go away.

If you have a good to do list, which has been prioritised – and you stick to it – you will avoid procrastination, which will give you a much greater sense of achievement.

Sometimes our time management fails because we don’t know how to say no. However, taking on more and more and never saying no will end up wasting more time and could damage your career. If you don’t speak up and say “I’m sorry, I won’t be able to do that right now” then your boss will think you can handle it and the problem will only get bigger the longer you leave it. Obviously this will not always be possible when urgent matters arise but it is also important to be able to have an open and honest conversation with your boss when non-urgent matters become too much. It is far better than having a performance issue arise later.

There are some other basic time management strategies:

- Clear the clutter from your desk.
- Use an in-tray. Having paperwork sitting over your desk is a big time waster – how much time must you spend looking for that one document among all the paperwork?
- Take a short break. If you find it hard to stop working, set a reminder for yourself to take a break or schedule a break into your to do list, even for five minutes. Taking a break allows you to recharge the batteries and you will find you get much more done afterwards.
- Know when you are at your best. Do you work best early in your shift? Or are you better later in the day? Only you know when you are at your peak so try to schedule your day around this so that your most important tasks are done at this time. Perhaps phone calls and emails can be responded to when you aren’t feeling at your peak and save the ‘gritty’ work for when you can give your best. Obviously this will depend on the type of work you are doing and you may need to adjust to suit your circumstances.

Another good time management strategy is to review what you have been doing to ensure you are being effective with your prioritising and time management. One great way of doing this is to keep an activity log.

An activity log is a record of how you spend your time. Not to be confused with a timesheet, it is a log of what you have done during the day to work out where your time is going and eliminate time wasters.

You might see a pattern that you are doing time-wasting activities at a certain time each day. This might then help you to schedule your time more effectively because you are clearly not at your best during this time.

Keeping an activity log is easy. All you need is the Date/Time, what you are doing, how long it took you to do it and how important the task was. For example:

- 1 Jan 2013, 10am – made coffee and chatted to colleague – 15 mins – low importance.

After a few days you can review the activity log and see where you are wasting most of your time. Are you procrastinating? Are you ineffectively managing interruptions or are you the interrupter?

Summing up time management:

- Set goals and write to do list.
- Prioritise your workload.
- Set timeframes and stick to them, where possible.
- Be sensible about when you schedule activities – when do you work best?
- Try to manage interruptions.
- Review your time management plan if you are not getting through everything.