

Five Steps to Reaching Your Goals

by Margie Johnson, Shop Talk

I am often asked, “What one strategy do you consistently recommend when consulting with a new specialty retailer?” The answer is simple: Set goals for your business, yourself and your staff.

Too often I see a very lackadaisical attitude about this topic. Clearly one of the fastest ways to energize your business is to establish some goals and rewards.

Goals can impact a business in many ways, from creating direction to improving teamwork, to increasing sales to problem solving. Why not set short- and long-term goals, not just for sales, but for training, innovation, efficiency and opportunity?

Volumes have been written about goal setting — about the strategy, tactics, etc., that should be considered in this process. We’ve tried to make it as simple as possible in this five-step approach. Simplicity is important to consider if this process is new to your business.

Five Easy Steps

Gather the troops/team. Have an innovation session about the future direction of your business. Solicit your staff’s input about the goals you are considering. Their “buy- in” at this level is an essential success strategy. Urge them to think about the implementation of both short-term and long-term goals.

Examples of short-term goals could include increasing the average ticket per sales person per month, or perhaps reducing inventory levels in a specific category such as sports coats. Examples of long-term goals might be to increase the total sales percentage over a three-to-six month period, or have a long-term expense reduction goal in a specific category.

At this innovation session, ask for commitment to this process. (Creating a poster that they all sign can be a “fun” way to boast the commitment. Post it in a highly visible employee area.)

Outline your priorities. Identify the specific timeline, the cost constraints, and the rewards involved with each goal. Please keep the goals simple and reasonably attainable in the early process.

Stay focused by limiting the number of goals. Don’t overwhelm your staff with too much too soon. Less is more. You should initially start with one (no more than two) of each long-term and short-term goal to focus upon. Write the goals down. State them in easy-to-understand language. Clearly spell out the specifics of each goal and post them.

Analyze your progress. Then communicate it to your team. On short-term goals, try to supply feedback at frequent intervals. Restate the goals in memos, check vouchers, at staff meetings, and in informal conversations. Keep them alive!

Sometimes it is necessary to revisit or restate our goals. Consider goal setting as a “work in progress.” Good communication is a key motivator in this process. People are competitive; they like to win. Approach this as a win-win situation for everyone.

Lead your team. As you evaluate their progress, use the facts to lead, inspire, and motivate them. Along the way, consider some “quick carrots” — rewards pertaining to long-term goals. These can be simple perks, rewards, or recognition that reinforce the process and generate excitement

For example, every three weeks you could offer incentives such as movie tickets or gift certificates, bring in lunch and have a staff pizza party, or a coffee and Danish gathering where you rally the troops and praise and update them. These simple “boosters” work very well in inspiring the staff to achieve both short and long-term goals.

Praise and recognition play a tremendous role in effective goal-setting programs. Don’t be stingy with the praise. Nothing will propel your team quicker than timely and sincere praise and recognition along the way.

Stretch. Yes, set goals that are tied to timeline specifics, etc., but always give your team the opportunity to not just meet the specific goal, but to exceed it. Offer a s-t-r-e-t-c-h goal as a part of a sales goal. Make it a two-tier goal and reward.

It is great to see the excitement that happens when “teams” realize that meeting a tier one goal is clearly possible and they forge on to the second tier. Make your goals challenging, but realistic. This will certainly encourage higher levels of performance.

Join the High Performers

If your business is goal-oriented, keep revisiting your objectives. If your business is not goal-oriented, I urge you to “get on board” and join the high performing retailers who have found this strategy to be extremely effective – great for both sales and morale!

Remember, the old Chinese proverb, “The journey of 1,000 miles begins with the first step.” Make this a banner year. Celebrate your success. I wish you a fabulous retailing year!

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