Section A, Part 2: Goal Setting

One of the most important aspects of success is the ability to define and achieve goals. Goals are specific, realistic reminders of the accomplishments you visualize. You can set long-range goals (college, career, lifetime), intermediate goals (this semester), or short-range goals (this week, today).

Planning backward in time helps your immediate activities focus on your overall goals. For example, your overall goal might be to be accepted at a certain college; your sub-goals might be to get all As this semester, get involved, win a scholarship, and so on.

Goals are important in academics, student leadership, and personal affairs. Apply goal setting to all areas of your life and your group activities.

WHY IS GOAL SETTING IMPORTANT?
The benefits of goal setting are real and significant and apply both to you as an individual and also to the group that sets goals.
> They provide a sense of direction.
> They motivate us.
> They make us feel good about ourselves and what we do.
> They point out strengths, which can be used to overcome obstacles, and make us aware of weaknesses so we can begin to improve them.
> They help us visualize what is important, plan actions to achieve the goals, and then carry them out.
> They help us make decisions.
> They make us responsible for our own lives and make our group responsible for its own success or failure.
> They force us to set priorities.
> They make us feel committed.
> They develop better group morale by giving a sense of past victories and providing a stimulus for present success.
> They measure both individual and group progress.
> They sharpen our leadership skills.

REASONS PEOPLE GIVE FOR NOT SETTING GOALS
Clearly defined goals are the keys to fulfillment and achievement. They are essential for success. But if there are so many good reasons to set goals, why don't more people do it? Indeed, many people—perhaps even most—do not set goals. Perhaps some of their reasons are familiar to you.
> Predictability - Many people feel threatened by change and resist goal setting because it may be uncomfortable while moving out of the "rut."
> Conditioning - Most of us are conditioned so that after we have done something a certain way, it becomes habit, automatic and reflexive.
> Belief in Miracles - Many people sit back and wait for miracles instead of setting goals and taking action to accomplish them.
> Fear of Losing - Many people do not set goals because they are afraid they will be criticized for not reaching them.
> Fear of Winning - Odd as it may seem, some people do not set goals because they cannot imagine themselves being capable of handling the new behavior of success.
> Over Expectations - Setting your goals too high enables you to say, "I know I can't reach that goal, so I won't even try"
DEFINING GOALS
Goal setting can be a very gratifying, positive feedback system for you and for your group. You select a goal you wish to reach, carry out a plan of action to achieve it, experience the satisfaction of accomplishment, and are encouraged to set another goal.

To begin, you need to be able to define your goal in a clear, precise statement that includes the following components:
> It is realistic, attainable, and feasible but challenging
> It has a target for completion
> It has measurable results
> It is clear, specific, and understandable
> It is meaningful and desirable
> It is beneficial
> It is flexible and has more than one method of attainment
> It is something that you are responsible for making happen; it doesn't depend on someone else.

A group goal is identical to an individual goal, except that it has these additional components:
> It should be created by all the members
> It should be understandable and acceptable to all the members
> It should be beneficial to all the members

HOW TO SET GOALS
To simplify matters but ensure a goal that includes all the necessary components, you can follow the goal setting process FRAME.'

Fantasy: Dream your wildest dreams. Fantasy is the desire for any improvements to the status quo. Ask yourself: What do I most want to accomplish? What do I want to be doing 1 year, 5 years, and 10 years from now?

Reality: This means a return to reality, in the form of a careful look at the factors pro and con. Realize that you possess the power to make your fantasies real, but a realistic self-assessment is vital. Ask yourself: How badly do I want my dream? How hard am I willing to work, and what am I willing to sacrifice? What risks will I accept? If this dream conflicts with another, can they co-exist, compromise, or must one go? Above all: Be honest and complete in considering all pertinent facts.

Aim: Clarify the needs and purposes that are the basis of your goals. Define your goal by striking a balance between "F" and "R" factors. Be specific. Ask yourself: Is it specific? Is it attainable? Am I responsible for whether it happens or do I, depend on someone else in order to achieve it? How will I know when it is accomplished? Above all, set the goal high but realistic, because it must be believed.

Method: Plan your attack by generating the possibilities and narrowing the alternatives to the ones you really intend to pursue. Break down the larger goals into smaller steps that will help lead to the desired result. Play on your strengths, de-emphasize your weaknesses, and use your resources to overcome anticipated obstacles. Carry out the plan you have devised. Ask yourself: What steps do I need to take to accomplish my goal? How can I utilize resources around me? What do I need to do or learn to get where I want to be? Above all, don't let the means become more than the end. Remember the goal.
Evaluation: Process the results. Evaluation is not necessarily the last step, it should be continuous. Ask yourself: What got me where I am? If I succeeded, what helped me? If I fell short, what stopped me? What progress did I make? How can I apply what I've learned to future endeavors? Above all, emphasize the positive! You've only failed if you've failed to learn. Your biggest obstacle and your greatest strength is yourself!

SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL GOAL SETTING
> Decide what you want to do, possess, share, and become.
> Set both short-term (this week, today, this minute) and long-term (this month, quarter, semester, year, decade) goals.
> Realize that some of your short-term goals will probably be aimed at directly increasing your ability to achieve your long-term goals.
> List goals in each area of your life: social, financial, cultural, educational, professional, physical, spiritual, intellectual, family, hobby.
> Write your goals down!
> Set priorities among your goals. Decide which ones are more important than others.
> Focus on one goal and one activity at a time.
> Use your goals to guide decisions about what you will do with your time and energy. Choose activities that achieve your objectives.

SETTING S.M.A.R.T. GOALS
SMART goals are those that are:
> Specific – What you want to achieve and the standard you will use to measure your success is clearly stated.
> Measurable – The goal includes specific points of achievement or benchmarks that identifies the progress of the goal and when it is completed.
> Attainable – The goal is challenging, but is realistic and within your reach
> Rewarding – Reaching the goal will make you feel good. You should recognize that you have accomplished something by raising your level of skills or knowledge and applying them successfully.
> Timely – The goal should have a time limit that is reasonable. You may want to include deadlines within the goal to help you manage and plan the work necessary to reach the goal.

SETTING GOALS IN GROUPS
For a group to be truly effective, members must have a common focus or reason for belonging. Setting goals as a group helps everyone understand what the group is all about and helps develop a team spirit. The following four-step plan may be helpful in determining goals for your group.

1. Brainstorm for possible goals.
   > Keep in mind the purpose of the group.
   > Discuss what the group should accomplish.
   > Everyone should participate.
   > All ideas should be recorded, no matter how unrealistic.
2. Set priorities among the goals.
   > Discuss the goals in relation to the group's needs—consider your strengths and weaknesses.
   > Rank the goals in order of importance.
   > Achieve consensus on a few important and specific goals that the group can commit to, rather than a "laundry list" of goals that may or may not get done.
3. Select activities/projects to help you achieve your goals.
   > Some goals may be accomplished in one project, while others require ongoing efforts.
   > Determine when activities should happen, and plan your year-long calendar.

4. Develop Action Plans
   > Identify specific steps to achieving the goals, projects, or activities.
   > Place the steps in chronological order.
   > Delegate responsibilities.
   > Set timelines.

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN
(Source: Nebraska Association of Student Councils)

An action plan is a guide for your group to follow in achieving its goals. Each step of the plan is a specific task that must be completed to reach the larger objective. Action plans are written by looking at what information your group needs and what actions will be taken to progress toward a goal. Action plans should spell out specific tasks, assign responsibility, and set deadlines.

Imagine that your group wants to start an aluminum recycling program at your school. You would need to ask yourselves:
   - What things do we need to know that we don't already know?
   - Is there a local company that recycles aluminum?
   - Will they pick up the cans at the school?
   - Where is the cheapest place to buy plastic bins to hold the cans?

Turn those questions into statements of things to do. Then brainstorm all the actions that must occur in order to progress toward the goal. Combine all these tasks in one list, delegate them to specific people, and set deadlines for their completion.

For example:
My Action Plan
   > Locate recycling company, plan pick-up system Research prices on plastic bins
   > Write proposal, present to Exec. Committee for review Present proposal to the Administration
   > Create schedule of people to empty bins
   > Design publicity campaign
   > Person Responsible Deadline
   > Once you have prepared your action plan, post it in a conspicuous place, so that everyone in your group is constantly reminded of their commitments.

Setting goals is essential, but if you don't give yourself a plan to achieve them, they are all but worthless. Of course, your action plans will never be complete or perfect, but they are a starting place from which to build. In order to be effective, these plans should be as thorough and specific as possible. As the project progresses and more questions come up, more steps will be added to the list. Writing action steps is a good way to break the big picture of a goal down into the steps necessary to get there. And by setting deadlines and delegating tasks to specific people, you increase the likelihood of things getting done.