

How To Set and Reach Professional Goals

When Chris Johnson and Tim Keck were just juniors in college they put their passion for humor and writing to work for them by creating a small satire magazine to distribute for free around their campus. What began in a dorm room became what we now know as The Onion—a wildly successful spoof news source.

What Johnson and Keck realized is that reaching professional goals is about harnessing existing passion, then letting it move you forward in reasonable increments at the right pace. If you've got an itch to professionalize or an idea for a start-up, you can begin setting those goals today. "SMART" goals, or goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, are one straightforward strategy you can implement to move toward passionate success at any stage of your career.

Set Specific Goals

The more specific your goal, the easier it will be to execute. It's helpful to start by answering the simple questions, or "The 5 W's."

1. What do I want to accomplish?
2. Why is this goal important?
3. Who is involved?
4. Where is it located?
5. Which resources and/or limits are involved?

Asking and answering these questions of yourself gives you the opportunity to organize, plan, and prepare. But more than that, they help you flesh out your ideas. When you come to the drawing board with a fuller picture in mind, you'll have better ability to think of the many ways to reach that goal.

Set Measurable Goals

When you're parsing through the 5 W's you'll likely be thinking of the many smaller goals that you'll need to achieve on your path to your greater vision. As you consider these, give yourself concrete factors by which to measure whether these micro-goals have truly been completed.

For example, if you need to build an audience for a product as part of your plan, give yourself solid data to reach and later interpret, like that you want to reach 100 followers in one month. Then set your sights on actionable ways you can do that, and make sure you understand how it will help you along the greater road to success.

Set Achievable Goals

Achievability is something that must be considered alongside your measures of success. If you want to reach that audience of 100 in one month but you're also busy securing investors and writing your business plan, your marketing might fall by the wayside. Be reasonable with yourself and don't set goals that you can't reach in a timely manner or even at all. Trying otherwise sets you up for disappointment, and can stall or even collapse your project. Plus, that's a drain on your passion.

Set Relevant Goals

Relevance is crucial. This should play a role in all your decisions but especially when initially developing a concept. Ask yourself if your idea is worthwhile and occurring at the right time. Have others already implemented your goal? Are you the best person for this job?

Relevance also means considering the current socio-economic climate. If your goal does not align with the political temperatures of the people you're trying to reach, it won't be successful. For example, millennials are well known for their high standard of ethics. So if you're opening a business that has unethical elements, like how Uber tracked users long after their rides ended by using their cellphone data, it's unlikely to be successful. After taking a sharp dip in sales, Uber had to revise its strategies and has now agreed to no longer track riders. While Uber may have recovered its sales from the #deleteUber campaign, it's now growing much more slowly than its rival Lyft in the wake of this scandal.

Set Time Bound Goals

Lastly, ensure that each of your goals has a time limit to it. Setting dates for the execution of your goals keeps you accountable. It's also a great way to ensure your goals and micro goals are measurable. If something can't be completed in a timely manner, maybe it needs to be reevaluated.

While not everyone is going to be the next founder of The Onion or Facebook, it's still important to be setting and reaching professional goals. Whether you're studying business or art, there are always ways you can grow your professionalism. Maybe it's hosting a fundraiser or organizing your first art show. Whatever you choose to do, ensure that you're working to map steps that are possible and relevant, then get to work.

Skills Employers Want In 2018

In the current school year, universities are expected to award over two million Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees. With spring graduation approaching, these final winter months are when most students begin their job search. Because of the high competition employers want more than a degree to fill their positions. One way to stand out is to not only explain your related skills, but to share the specifics behind them. For all those soon-to-be grads, here's a short list of skills employers look for, and how you can tailor it to your future career.

Continuing Education for New Grads

Degrees give you tools to get you started, and knowledge of the subject, but it's nearly impossible your education has prepared you for everything you'll experience on the job. For example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the most anticipated additions to the workplace soon for almost every industry. So, there will be a learning curve for most in this area. There are plenty of online resources to assist in this process. UDACITY offers AI courses at introduction and in-depth skill levels.

Technology is, of course, not the only area where more education may be needed or desired by students making their way into the job market. Certifications and licenses can be valuable additions to your resume. Sites like Continuing Education provide online courses

for fields like health care, financial services, and real estate. Expressing a willingness to learn, and learning quickly, will certainly give you an edge.

Efficiency at a New Job

Efficiency is a product of habit, so if you haven't been the most effective during your scholarly years, it's time to start growing. Meeting deadlines is a crucial aspect of almost any job. Efficiency is all about producing work quickly while ensuring quality. Think about your field, the daily work required of your dream position, and how you think you'd balance. Then, strategize ways to demonstrate this to your potential employer, like in a cover letter or during the interview process. (Remember, don't brag!)

Stand Out As A Team Player

It's important to stand out as a great individual, too, but don't overlook the power of working with a team. Almost no task can be completed alone. It's all about working together. Expressing this skill is important, so be sure to talk about the skills that make up being a team-player. It requires compromise, navigating conflict, communicating, and commitment, all of which are valuable traits.

Communication: Writing and Speaking

According to a PayScale survey 46% of employers want young workers to practice their communication skills. This goes beyond verbal communication between co-workers, though that is important. Employers want to see a breadth of understanding in written communication. Sharing your work or taking a writing course could go a long way in any field. Also, don't underestimate public speaking skills. Any position you've had that required a form of public speaking should be highlighted to the employer.

Early Career Leadership

According to a National Association of Colleges and Employers' survey more than 80% of employers look for leadership skills on a potential employee's resume. This evidence could be anything from leadership positions or jobs with influence on campus. Not only should you share positions you've held that demonstrate leadership, but give examples of your leadership in those positions. Tough decisions, strategic thinking, and building relationships are all key aspects to leadership. There are many different philosophies and models to approaching leadership. Take the time to reflect on your style and how you act as a leader.

Getting specific about your skill set is a great way to stand out from other candidates. But don't forget about other important aspects of landing a job like self-promotion and maximizing your time with recruiters. Whether it's leadership, communication, or efficiency, there is always a way to specify your talent to future employers. What's a skill that sets you apart from others?

5 Keys to Self Promotion

Promoting yourself is important the moment your name is mentioned. You can stand out from the crowd by highlighting your unique qualities and connecting them to what the employer is looking for. But there is always more to be done. Self-promotion happens both in person and online, like in your social media presence. But, no matter whether you're

prepping for employers online or in person, you'll need to understand some keys to self-promotion. Here's a handy list to get you started.

Control Your Image

- **Online**

80% of potential employers will Google your name before interviewing you and 70% will scan social media accounts like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Every picture and profile will appear in the search. Google yourself to see what appears so you're in the know. Everything positive your name appears on like blogs, articles, and events will only further supplement the hunch they have about you.

- **In Person**

Your experiences, education, strengths, and values should be highlighted on your resume, in an interview, and any meet-up. Summarizing your experiences and connecting them to requirements of a position you're looking for will help them see why you would be a perfect fit. You can explore your strengths and personality types through well-known typology tests like Myers Briggs, StrengthsFinder, and True Colors. Your education is important to discuss, but focus on what you learned and how it applies to what you want to be doing, not just your GPA and attendance. You can bring up these qualities during the interview process or better yet, causally bring it up during an informal meet-up.

Prepare to Impress

- **Online**

Not only should you search for potential positions online, you should be prepping your image. LinkedIn is easily the fastest growing career-centric social media site. Over 500 million people are part of the recruiter network. These people have access to strategic tracking tools like guided searches, Spotlights, and advanced filters. By completing your profile entirely, growing your connections, and sharing your experience, you are more likely to be contacted by a recruiter.

- **In Person**

Consider every aspect of a meet-up like time, place, and attendees, in advance to be prepared. If you've landed an interview, get a mock interview scheduled with a mentor or a friend. The more people you practice with, the more comfortable you will be talking about yourself to different personalities. Have your clothes ironed and stain-free. If your meeting is during lunch, plan to grab a bite so your stomach isn't growling. Create a check-list for yourself of everything you may need in this meeting and use it, you won't second-guess your choices and you can focus on selling yourself.

Network With a Purpose

- **Online**

LinkedIn lets you create and join groups within similar industries or interests. Jobs will be posted here and you can get your image out in a specific industry. Meet Up is an online tool to find events in your area. You can select specific interests related to your field like writing or design. Going to related events and participating in conversations will give you the opportunity to meet potential employers and show your activity in the field.

- ***In Person***

Conferences are a prestigious opportunity to be noticed by others in your field, it's also an impressive point to bring up in an interview or informal meet up. In order to be selected as a speaker, you need to have unique well-researched content to share with an audience and experience to back it all up. TED gives you the opportunity to recommend a person, and that person can also be yourself. Look for TEDx events in the area because your chances will be better especially if you are well-established in your community.

Engaging with others in your field and establishing a positive image will help you stand out from the crowd and get the position you want. You can never learn too much about promoting yourself. Books like "The Presentation of Everyday Life" by Erving Goffman and "Self-Promotion for Introverts: The Quiet Guide to Getting Ahead" by Nancy Ancowitz explore the importance of promotion in everyday life.

The Four People You Need in Your Network

Your network is what you make it. When you're spending time trying to craft the right web of people to help you reach your career goals, you'll find yourself at event after event, handing out business cards, wondering if you're making the right connections. Networking isn't easy and sometimes, it isn't for the faint of heart. But, knowing what types of personalities you're looking for at these events might help you feel like you're making headway. Here's a helpful list of all the people you need in your network this year.

The Connector

This person knows everyone. Not only do they keep track of names, they know who works for who, and sometimes all the gossip that comes with that. "The Connector," despite sometimes being a chatty Kathy, is a valuable ally to make. Not only will they learn your history, strengths, and weaknesses, they'll keep you locked in that mental Rolodex and help ensure that you meet the right kind of people to help you reach your goals. Although this personality might not be entirely selfless, it can often feel that way. Nevertheless, don't burn connectors once you've ascertained who they are, or you may find yourself seeking a new networking circle.

The Cheerleader

This personality may actually be selfless. More than anything, they exist to support and inspire others. This is the kind of person who asks you how you're doing and craves a genuine answer. However, "The Cheerleader's" deep need to be liked can mean that they won't take sides. Cheerleaders can be frustrating in this sense, and may seem to be simultaneously supporting you and everyone else in your circle, even your rivals. However, finding a cheerleader for your network is crucial. The right person will give you support and

energy when you feel stuck and ultimately, may choose you and you alone to support as your path to success begins to sharpen.

The Mentor

Although you might find yourself in a position where you have determined you need mentorship, seeking out "The Mentor" might not be the best first step. Besides, nothing validates our ideas more than having a mentor witness your intelligence or insight and decide they'd like to offer guidance without any finagling on your part. However, that might feel like it only happens in movies. Instead, try seeking out peers in the industry you'd like to join and asking them to engage in "informational interviews." Essentially, this is asking someone you've designated as a potential mentor to have coffee with you and allow you to pick their brain. It's moves like this that show initiative and help you stand out from the crowd, least of all, gain some insight into your possible path.

The Visionary

Being in the presence of a true "Visionary" can feel invigorating. This person has new and original ideas, as well as ways of presenting those ideas. Their communication is clear and confident, and they know how to capture a room. Although these types of people are rare, there can of course be more than one visionary in any networking circle. However, it's important to decide where you stand in this cast of characters. Successful ventures need both leaders and supporters, both visionaries and cheerleaders.

Determining your role, whether you're a connector, cheerleader, mentor, or visionary, is the most logical first step in ascertaining who belongs in your 2018 network. To ascertain this, you might ask yourself some questions. What are you hoping to gain from this group of peers? Do you have an idea you want support for? Are you new to the world of networking and looking to get your business feet under you?

Writing A Great Cover Letter

When you're on the job market, it's tough not to get bogged down by the repetition of repeatedly clicking through job postings, uploading your resume countless times, and, of course, writing the dreaded cover letter. While it can seem tedious typing up a different cover letter for each job you apply for, it's important to remember that this is your only chance for a first impression: to show exactly why you're the best candidate for the job. If you truly want the gig, take advantage of the opportunity by putting your best self forward using these strategies.

Research The Company

Before you begin composing your cover letter, you should learn as much as you can about the company. It's going to be difficult to explain why you'd be a great fit if you don't know what they need or value. Review their website, check out their bio, and make sure you have a good feel for some of their key accomplishments. Sprinkling these kinds of facts throughout the letter will boost your credibility and also show you have the work ethic and drive to do research and background work.

Be Unique

It's likely that the person accepting your application is just as tired of reading them as you are of writing them. Your cover letter is a chance to stand out from the crowd and make a stunning first impression, so capitalize on the opportunity by telling them about what makes you different. Dig into your background and find the qualities you know make you unique, and find a way to weave those into your letter. Maybe you've got great attention to detail, or a knack for interpersonal skills, or even a remarkable sense of humor; touching on any of these kind of traits are going to help make your cover letter a diamond in the rough.

Ditch the Template

Starting from a cover letter template is a nice way to get a feel for the general form, but it's easy to end up sounding like everyone else. If you're simply downloading a template, switching out a few key facts and words, and signing your name, it's unlikely that the letter conveys all the wonderful qualities that make you a perfect candidate. Instead of working with a premade letter, just keep in mind the general form and let your creativity do the rest. Every cover letter should include 3-4 paragraphs:

- Begin with a strong, captivating introduction, giving a quick elevator pitch on what the job is and why you're applying.
- Your second paragraph is your chance to tell them who you are, and what makes you a great fit for the position.
- Your third paragraph is where you can detail your accomplishments and tales of success.
- Conclude with a concise summary of everything you've discussed, and leave your contact information.

Short is Sweetest

While it may seem tempting to go overboard in a cover letter, particularly when it's a job you're excited about, a lengthy cover letter is likely to go unread all the way through. A cover letter should rarely exceed a single page, so you'll want to trim the fat and make sure you're only keeping what's absolutely essential.

Proofread

The quickest way for a cover letter to get ignored is when there's incorrect spelling, improper punctuation, or sloppy grammar. Read the letter aloud to yourself or have someone else take a second (or third) look at it before sending it on its way.

Searching for a job can definitely be a daunting experience, and can make you feel like you're disappearing into a crowd. But when you're armed with a great cover letter, one that shows who you are and what makes you so wonderful, you'll find the confidence to get your foot in the door. And remember: you are the perfect candidate! Now, with this cover letter, it just makes it official.

International Business Etiquette

Travelling internationally for business can mean changing your typical approach to business interactions, depending on which country you're visiting. When working with people on an international level, showing sensitivity to their customs, practices, and beliefs will help ensure all interactions go more smoothly. Below is a list of tips and tricks regarding some of the most common problem areas in international business etiquette.

1. Punctuality

Although punctuality is important in many countries, such as Japan, China, Ireland, and Germany, others have more lax cultural expectations around punctuality. In fact, in countries like India, Finland, Brazil, and France, diving right into business matters is actually considered rude. In cases like this, it's important to leave your preconceived notions of how business should operate at the door. You can end up disappointed if you expect to cut to the chase and find that everyone else would rather see a soccer match and drink beer first.

2. Business Cards

Be sure to bring enough business cards. As you're making contacts in other countries, you'll want to be sure and understand the formal expectations of exchanging business cards. For example, in China, business cards are typically exchanged using both hands. It's also wise to have your cards printed both in English and the language of your host country.

3. Personal Space

Recommendations on personal space will vary widely from culture to culture. While most Asian countries, Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland are most often physically reserved and maintain personal boundaries, a great majority of countries including, Brazil, France, the Netherlands, much of South America, and Australia, exchange hugs or kisses on the cheek. This applies especially for female executives.

4. Workflow

As mentioned above, many countries have specific protocol around how meetings should run. In several cases, meetings might flow more slowly than anticipated, with much time taken out for conversation about family and local historical sites or points of pride. For example, in Finland, business meetings may be conducted in saunas with little to no actual "business" conversation taking place. This is simply a time for building up trust and establishing rapport.

5. Cultural Awareness

Take time to understand the cultural expectations, dietary restrictions, and major religions you might encounter in your travels. For example, when making small talk with a Chinese business man, it would be rude to ask him how many children he has—considering anyone of the Han ethnic majority in China can only have one child as mandated by their government. Questions that might be friendly and benign to Americans can have far reaching consequences elsewhere. There are also smaller cultural habits that might wreak havoc for your business communications, such as the notion in Germany that it's rude to remove your suit jacket during a meeting.

Part of preparing for any international business trip should be researching the specific cultural practices that can affect the success of your venture. Staying informed and cultivating a plan to address these differences and react appropriately will help ensure your trip goes well.