

Setting Up Goals and Strategies

Introduction

The Importance of Narratives

Think of your goals as chapters in your personal narrative. Each step you take, no matter how small, moves the story forward. Without a clear narrative, goals can feel like disconnected tasks. But when you tie them to your purpose, they become part of a bigger picture, a story that motivates you and gives your efforts meaning. While a strong personal narrative gives meaning to your goals, you also need a concrete plan to bring them to life. This is where the SMART framework comes in—helping you turn inspiration into actionable steps.

Smart Goals & Small Steps

To make your goals actionable, it helps to use the SMART framework, you probably all know it but there is no arm to remind ourselves

But even the most well-defined goals can feel daunting without breaking them into smaller steps.

Success comes not from giant leaps but from consistent, small actions.

For example, instead of saying “*I’ll get fit this quarter*,” focus on a small, actionable step like “*I’ll walk for 20 minutes three times a week*.” These manageable actions build momentum and confidence.

- **Specific:** Be clear about what you want to achieve.
- **Measurable:** Track your progress to stay motivated.
- **Achievable:** Ensure your goals are realistic.
- **Relevant:** Align them with your values and priorities.
- **Time-Bound:** Set a clear deadline to create urgency.

The Dangers of Bad Strategies

According to Rumelt, a bad strategy often stems from vague goals, wishful thinking, or failing to address real challenges.

For example:

Saying “*I want to succeed this quarter*” is an admirable goal, but it lacks clarity and actionability.

Bad strategy assumes that ambition alone will yield results, without recognizing the obstacles that stand in the way.

This is why it’s important to avoid vague aspirations and instead craft goals tied to a clear narrative and actionable steps. Goals should focus not only on what you want to achieve but on how you will overcome challenges to get there.

Crafting a Good Strategy

Why This Matters for Personal Growth

Rumelt's framework is not just for businesses—it applies to personal and professional development. Whether setting career goals, improving well-being, or building resilience, a good strategy ensures that ambitions are backed by clear, actionable steps rather than wishful thinking.

Rumelt emphasizes that a good strategy has three key components:

1. Diagnosis – Identifying the Core Challenge

A good strategy begins with a deep understanding of the real problem at hand. Instead of setting vague or overly ambitious goals, it requires pinpointing the specific obstacle that stands in the way of success.

💡 *Example: Instead of saying, "We need to be more productive," diagnose the core issue: "Our team struggles with time management, leading to missed deadlines."*

2. Guiding Policy – Establishing a Clear Approach

Once the challenge is identified, the strategy must define an overarching approach to tackle it. This is not a step-by-step plan but rather a direction that informs all decisions and actions. A strong guiding policy helps prioritize efforts and align resources effectively.

3. Coherent Actions – Taking Concrete Steps

A strategy is only as strong as the actions that follow. Coherent actions ensure alignment between the diagnosis and the guiding policy. These steps should be specific, practical, and designed to address the core challenge directly.

Rumelt's **Good Strategy** framework can be further strengthened by integrating key success factors:

Beyond identifying the challenge (Diagnosis), setting a clear direction (Guiding Policy), and defining actions (Coherent Actions), a truly effective strategy considers six essential factors:

1. Resources – What Do You Have?

- What tools, skills, or support do you have?

A strategy must be grounded in reality. Identify the tools, skills, and support systems available to help achieve your goal. This prevents overreliance on wishful thinking and ensures that actions are realistic.

💡 *Example: If the goal is to build confidence in public speaking, available resources might include a speaking coach, online courses, supportive peer groups, or local Toastmasters meetings.*

2. Understanding – What Challenges or Opportunities Exist?

- What challenges or opportunities are you addressing?

Clarity is key. Before taking action, deeply understand the problem or opportunity. This means looking at internal and external factors that could influence the outcome.

💡 *Example: If someone struggles with time management, they should assess whether the root cause is a lack of prioritization, distractions, or an overwhelming workload—and adjust their approach accordingly.*

3. Motivation – Why Does This Matter?

- Why does this goal matter to you

Without strong motivation, even the best strategy will fail due to lack of follow-through. Connecting the strategy to a deeper purpose increases commitment.

💡 *Example: If someone wants to exercise more, motivation could be improved energy, mental well-being, or setting an example for their children.*

4. Engagement – How Will You Stay Consistent?

- How will you stay consistent and accountable?

A strategy must be sustainable. Commitment is easier when actions are engaging and aligned with personal or team values. Accountability structures, rewards, or social support can drive consistency.

💡 *Example: Someone working on building resilience could stay engaged by joining a mastermind group, tracking small wins in a journal, or setting up monthly check-ins with a mentor.*

5. Learning – What Skills or Knowledge Will You Gain?

- What skills or knowledge will you gain?

A strategy should facilitate growth. Whether it's learning from mistakes, gaining new skills, or refining existing ones, every step should contribute to long-term development.

💡 *Example: If someone is improving their emotional intelligence, they might learn active listening techniques, practice self-regulation strategies, or study conflict resolution skills to enhance their relationships.*

6. Transfer – How Does This Impact Other Areas?

- How will achieving this goal impact other areas of your life?

A strong strategy has ripple effects beyond its initial goal. Skills, habits, and insights gained should be transferable to other areas of life or work.

💡 *Example: Developing public speaking skills for leadership roles can also improve confidence in personal interactions and networking.*

💡 *Example: Developing a habit of daily reflection not only improves self-awareness but also enhances decision-making, leadership skills, and overall mental well-being.*

A **good strategy** is not just about setting a goal; it's about ensuring success through deep **understanding**, leveraging **resources**, staying **motivated and engaged**, fostering **learning**, and ensuring that progress has a lasting **impact**.

Examples of good strategy

Strategy for Exercising More

1. Diagnosis:

"I know I need to exercise more, but I always find excuses—I'm too busy, too tired, or I just don't feel like it. I start with good intentions, but after a week or two, life gets in the way, and I stop. I want to feel healthier, have more energy, and be proud of myself for sticking with it."

2. Guiding Policy:

Make exercise simple, enjoyable, and realistic. Instead of aiming for perfection, focus on consistency. Build movement into daily life rather than relying on motivation alone.

3. Coherent Actions:

- Start small: Commit to just **10 minutes a day** instead of overwhelming workouts.
- Attach exercise to existing habits: **Walk while listening to podcasts**, do **bodyweight exercises while watching TV**, or **take the stairs instead of the elevator**.
- Choose fun activities: Dance, bike, or play a sport instead of forcing a gym routine you don't enjoy.
- Plan ahead: Set workout reminders and lay out workout clothes the night before.
- Be flexible: If the day gets too busy, a quick stretch or a few squats still count.
- Track progress: Use a calendar, an app, or a simple checklist to stay motivated.
- Celebrate small wins: Treat yourself to a relaxing bath, a new workout playlist, or a healthy snack after exercising.

Strategy for Reading More Books

1. Diagnosis:

"I want to read more, but I struggle to find the time. I often start a book but lose momentum, and distractions like my phone, TV, or work get in the way. I admire people who read regularly and wish I could make it a habit."

2. Guiding Policy:

Make reading a daily habit by integrating it into existing routines. Prioritize enjoyment over quantity, and remove distractions that prevent focused reading.

3. Coherent Actions:

- **Start small**: Read for just **5–10 minutes a day** to build momentum.
- **Link reading to a routine**: Read with your morning coffee, before bed, or during lunch breaks.
- **Make books accessible**: Keep a book on your nightstand, in your bag, or use an audiobook while commuting.
- **Limit distractions**: Put your phone in another room or use "Do Not Disturb" mode while reading.
- **Choose books you enjoy**: Don't force yourself to read "serious" books—fiction, biographies, or self-improvement books all count.
- **Join a book club or share progress**: Discussing books with others can boost motivation.
- **Track progress**: Use a reading app or a simple checklist to stay accountable.