

15Five's Guide to Goal Setting

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the challenge of effective workforce goal setting and its connection to employee engagement, retention, and productivity. Produced by 15Five, a performance management software vendor, the article argues that clear, structured goals aligned across organizational levels are essential to business performance and employee engagement. The article presents OKRs and SMART goals as the two primary goal-setting frameworks, outlining their respective strengths and limitations. Key evidence includes a cited statistic that only 32% of American employees feel their company's mission makes their job important, a claim that 80% of employees receiving meaningful weekly feedback describe themselves as fully engaged, and Gallup data indicating 51% of remote-capable employees have hybrid arrangements. The article concludes that performance management technology — particularly AI-enhanced tools — centralizes goal tracking, reduces managerial burden, and improves alignment. Throughout, 15Five's own platform is positioned as the solution to the challenges described, making the piece function simultaneously as an educational resource and a product marketing document.

Key Insights

1. Goal alignment across organizational levels — from individual to team to company — is presented as the central mechanism connecting day-to-day work to broader strategic priorities.
2. OKRs are characterized as stronger for cross-team alignment and flexibility, while SMART goals are described as more suitable for goals requiring additional clarity and specificity, though less effective for alignment.
3. Hybrid and remote work arrangements are identified as an emerging structural challenge to goal-setting frameworks, with proximity bias and reduced visibility cited as specific risks affecting approximately half of remote-capable employees.

Practical Takeaways

- Organizations can distinguish between OKRs and SMART goals based on use case: OKRs for alignment and iteration across teams, SMART goals for goals requiring precise definition and measurability.
- Continuous feedback loops, regular check-ins, and recognition of milestones are identified in the article as practices associated with higher employee engagement and goal completion rates.

Frameworks Mentioned

OKRs — Objectives and Key Results — a goal-setting method where employees define a qualitative objective and list quantifiable metrics to track progress toward it.

SMART Goals — A framework that breaks goals into five characteristics: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article provides a coherent, accessible overview of two widely recognized goal-setting frameworks and organizes the goal-setting process into a logical sequence. The inclusion of specific statistics adds surface-level empirical grounding. **Limitations:** All statistics are presented without citation to their original sources, making independent verification impossible. The article is authored and published by 15Five, a commercial vendor, creating a direct conflict of interest — the problem-solution structure consistently positions 15Five's product as the answer to every challenge described. No alternative tools, competing research, or critical perspectives on performance management technology are presented. The claim that AI will 'take on more goal-setting tasks' is speculative and presented without supporting evidence. The 80% engagement statistic tied to weekly feedback is not sourced. Overall, the article functions as branded content and should not be treated as independent research or neutral guidance.

Organizational Practice

The article describes practices including cascading goal alignment from organizational to team to individual level, use of OKR and SMART goal frameworks, centralized goal tracking via performance management platforms, continuous feedback loops through 1-on-1 sessions and surveys, leadership participation in shared goal-setting, and integration of learning and development objectives with performance goals.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects an industry trend toward integrating AI-assisted features into performance management platforms for goal drafting, bias reduction, and data synthesis. The emphasis on hybrid work accommodation signals that goal-setting frameworks are under pressure to evolve beyond co-located team assumptions. The convergence of performance management, engagement, and development data into unified platforms is presented as a direction the market is moving toward, with implications for how organizations structure their HR technology stacks.

Validation Status: passed
