

# HOW TIME PLAYS A BIGGER ROLE IN YOUR SUCCESS THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

*by Glenn Williams*



You've set **SMART goals** for yourself and your team. They're specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic. You've even set the deadline for when you'd like to tick them off your list. But have you ever considered that the time frame you put on your goals is a big factor in whether or not they get accomplished?

A study<sup>1</sup> by the University of Scranton showed fewer than 46% of people are still focused on their new year's resolutions by the sixth month. By the end of the year, fewer than 12% successfully achieve the goals they set. What's the difference between those who accomplish their goals and the majority who don't?

James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*, suggests it's not the goals themselves that are the issue, but the system used to achieve them<sup>2</sup>.

"Breakthrough moments are often the result of many previous actions, which build up the potential required to unleash major change".

## Small steps lead to big change

Clear describes success as the science of small habits, a "long series of small wins".

If goals are the **roadmap to success**, consider time frames as the rest-stops along your journey. They are markers of distance covered and opportunities for re-evaluation of your trajectory. When making a cross-country trip, you would break up the journey into manageable distances to avoid fatigue and to gather resources needed for the next leg of the trip. Not checking in along the way - with your energy levels, with the tyres and oil - runs the risk of your plan being derailed by factors that were avoidable if time was leveraged in a more valuable way.

"Time magnifies the margin between success and failure"<sup>2</sup>

There are both personal and corporate goals that require, by their very nature, to be set over the long-term, like waiting for lengthy legal processes to take place before setting up a new venture. However, for goals that are within your capacity to influence, time affects momentum. Allowing too much time to achieve a goal can create a roadblock of procrastination, and conversely, you can become overwhelmed by the pressure of a time frame that is too short<sup>3</sup>.

## The optimal time frame for setting goals

If time is a such a crucial factor in success, the question then becomes:

*What is the optimal amount of time needed to effectively accomplish the goals I have set for myself, my team, or my business?*

Professor of Leadership and Organizational Change, Michael Watkins, highlights that the first 90 days are key because “small differences in your actions can have a huge impact on long-term results”<sup>4</sup>.

Small, simple steps have a cumulative effect. Change is “a gradual evolution”<sup>2</sup>, a compounding process. Like compounding interest, even if progress is measured in incremental amounts, over time, the small changes lead to big transformations.

The most effective way of transforming your capacity is to harness the power of momentum through setting 90-day goals. 90 days is an optimum amount of time to affect positive change, as it is short enough to sustain focus and long enough to gain traction and make a measurable difference.

A long-term goal can be achieved through any number of cumulative 90-day periods. Adopting a [90-day goal setting process](#) for your personal, professional, or organizational goals, utilizes time to create focused momentum, leading to sustainable change.

## What’s the bottom line?

It is important to consider the process of how you will achieve your goals, not just what those goals are.

When it comes to making progress, time can be the difference between success or failure. Combating common roadblocks of pressure or procrastination, goals that are measured in successive 90-day time periods can lead to sustainable long-term change as they create focused and measurable momentum that compounds into meaningful results.

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### References

- <sup>1</sup> Norcross, J., & Vangarelli, D. (1988-89). The Resolution Solution: Longitudinal Examination of New Year's Change Attempts. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 1(2), 127-34
- <sup>2</sup> Clear, J. (2018). *Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones*. Random House, US.
- <sup>3</sup> Duhigg, C. (2016). *Smarter, Faster, Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity*. Random House, UK.
- <sup>4</sup> Watkins, M. (2003). *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders At All Levels*. Harvard Business School Press, US.



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