

## **SMART EXPECTATION SETTING – CLEAR GOALS FOR ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Use SMART for Expectation Setting**

SMART is an acronym commonly used in businesses for setting goals. While goals are great, Trident focuses on achieving results through active management at the point of execution. That is, we work with clients to instill a continuous practice of clear expectation setting between managers and employees over short time horizons that eventually add up to achieving the business goals.

There are a few variations of what SMART stands for, but we use the following:

- S** – Specific
- M** – Measurable
- A** – Achievable
- R** – Results Oriented
- T** – Time Bound

Trident works with supervisors and managers to use this acronym every time they ask an employee to do something. We believe that the best way to get the most out of employees is to have totally clear and complete communication with them. By covering off each of the five letters in SMART, managers can reasonably assume that the expectation they set with their employees will be understood clearly and completely.

Management direction that is specific allows for clarity and agreement between the manager and employee on what work will need to be completed. This step is often overlooked, and can be the cause of frustration especially for employees who work on relatively similar activities throughout each day.

Next, creating direction that is measurable allows for an objective evaluation of progress. That is, if an employee is asked to “do a few” could do two and feel that they have satisfied the manager’s request while asking an employee to “do 10” leaves no question as to how many are expected.

Ensuring that direction is “achievable” is often less discreet then setting a specific and measurable outcome, however strong managers make this just as simple and practical. For example they might move this to the last portion of the direction and add a simple question, “do you think you can accomplish this?” Results oriented is generally the most nebulous portion of SMART expectation setting, but can yield the greatest results for a manager long term. Setting “results oriented” expectations refers to explaining the underlying need of the expectation to the employee so as to create an understanding of the intent or

importance. Managers can most effectively communicate the results orientation of any expectation by adding “so that...” or “because...” to the end of the task. This especially pays off when setting expectations of employees to complete tasks that are otherwise outside that employee’s normal responsibilities.

Finally, the simplest way to specify a completion target is to set a specific day and time to have the task completed by. Strong managers use this hand in hand with the Specific step to come to an agreement on the format of the output as well as the timing and mode to be used to verify completion. For example, “put a copy of the completed purchase order on my desk before you leave Monday evening.”

Going through each of these points one by one will seem excessive or feel like micro-managing at first. However, with a little practice – usually diligent use for a week – managers AND employees will begin to rely on the clarity and completeness of the direction. Furthermore, managers will realize that they now can work specifically with employees who fail to meet the expectations. The manager can identify which of the 5 aspects of the expectation (S, M, A, R, or T) were not clear, and effectively reset the expectation based on the missed aspect.