
Using Goals to Develop Subordinates

CPT JACOB MOOTY

“What are you doing after you get out?”

“Going back home.”

“Do you have a job lined up?”

“I’m going to college.”

“That’s great, which one?”

“Probably the community college.”

“So you haven’t applied anywhere yet... do you know what do you want to study?”

“I’m thinking I’ll just knock out general classes first.”

“What degree do you want?”

“Um... business?”

“What do you want to do with that?”

(Conversation devolves into awkward eye contact.)

If I had a nickel for every time I’ve had the above conversation with an ETSing Soldier, I’d probably be pushing a dollar. Small change, but it breaks our hearts as leaders and mentors when service members leave the Army without a plan. We shouldn’t be surprised though. Many of our Soldiers seem to listlessly drift from job to job without thinking about what they want out of a career or even just a single enlistment. A lot of potential goes completely unrecognized because individuals simply don’t have anything they are working towards beyond the next paycheck. As leaders, I believe some of our duties are to gauge that untapped potential and ensure that our Soldiers are serving in a capacity that allows them to get the most out of their service. We’ve all heard of the SMART goals acronym (specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely) and know how to make our own goals using it, but do you know what your subordinates’ goals are? Have you ensured that those goals are SMART? And most importantly, are you developing your subordinates towards achieving those goals?

When I first commissioned, I had a vague sense of what I wanted to do with my career but no clear definition of success or idea of how to get there. Fortunately for one 2LT Mooty, my battalion commander didn’t just ask his lieutenants for a single SMART goal, he asked for 12 of them: personal goals, professional goals, physical fitness goals, and financial goals. Each category required a near-, short-, and long-term goal. Your near-term goals are within a year, your short-term goals are within five years, and your long-term goals are beyond five years. After completing my platoon leader and executive officer (XO) time, I was the “new-lieutenant sponsor” (now a nickel for every made-up additional duty...). Part of my duties was helping new LTs develop their goals prior to initial counseling with the battalion commander. Almost every one of them had a goal along the lines of **“I want to max the ACFT (Army Combat Fitness Test).”** I sincerely

hope you all recognize this as a bad goal — not a bad desire but a bad goal. Let’s make it into a good goal using the SMART acronym.

First, this is not a specific goal. The ACFT has six sub components, and they intentionally have little overlap when it comes to muscle groups and how we use those muscle groups. To better specify this goal, we’ll say that the subject is unable to achieve the Army leg tuck standard. To better specify their goal, we’ll switch it from a broad scope to a narrow, specific one: **I want to max the ACFT leg tucks.**

Next, we need to describe how we will define success. Yes, maxing the leg tucks can be measured by, well, maxing. But by not refining this measure, we have a narrow but scary goal. We can’t measure our progress. To make this goal measurable, we amend it to say: **I want to max the ACFT leg tucks by improving my rep count to 20 reps.**

Now we’re getting somewhere. However, this goal still has a way to go. What are we going to do to get to 20 reps? I don’t think I’m being too controversial saying Army physical training (PT) is not going to get the results the subject wants. Additionally, is this a good goal if it would be achieved by just doing what we already do day-to-day? NO! A good goal is action oriented. To truly be a goal and not a conclusion, we need to have to fight for it. In this example, we can improve our goal as such: **I WILL max the ACFT leg tuck by improving my rep count to 20 reps. I will do this by completing 20 extra pull-ups and 40 extra sit-ups every day after PT.** I would also like to draw attention to the change in wording — from I want to I will. It’s a small change, but it adds ownership and purpose to goal.

Realistic goals require self-reflection. This is not so much a written part of our goals, but an honest assessment to ensure that we are not setting ourselves up for failure. I figure most of you scoffed when we kept “maxing something” as part for the goal of someone who cannot yet achieve the standard. While leaders should not discourage development on the parts of our subordinates, we should make sure they are able to develop at a reasonable rate. We should not tell the subject that maxing the ACFT is impossible, but we may need to encourage them to make that a short or even long-term goal. Let’s revise our subject’s goal to: **I will increase my ACFT leg-tuck score from 0 (0 reps) to 70 (5 reps) by completing 20 extra pull-ups and 40 extra crunches at the end of PT every day.**

I also would like to mention that as a leader, you will have very large say in what is realistic for your subordinates. Whether you mean to or not, you serve as a gate to many goals such as schools or special programs for your Soldiers. A funny story I bring up is that when I took my platoon and

	Near	Short	Long
Personal			
Professional			
Physical			
Financial			

Example Goal Sheet

asked how many of my Soldiers wanted to go to Ranger School, over half raised their hands. After I sent the first one, the number of volunteers dropped to two. I asked my NCOs what happened and discovered that it had been over a year since anyone from the platoon had gone because of the paperwork nightmare associated with brigade schools. None of the Soldiers thought it was realistic for them to go, so they had no problem advertising Ranger School as goal. As a leader, find out what your subordinates believe to be realistic and use that to help them. Develop goals that will further their interests, not just sound good on paper. We need to make sure that we are not holding our Soldiers back, but we also need to make sure that their goals are driving them to achieve something.

Lastly, we need to give our subject's goal an expiration date. The number one reason I see Soldiers failing to achieve their goals is that they are waiting until they are "ready." There will always be something we can do to be more ready to achieve something, so this is a terrible way to determine when we will achieve our goals. I always make my Soldiers choose a specific date they intend to accomplish their goals by. In the case of our subject, the last piece of their goal

will be added as such: **I will increase my ACFT leg-tuck score from 0 (0 reps) to 70 (5 reps) no later than 31 May 2022 by completing 20 extra pull ups and 40 extra crunches at the end of PT every day.**

Now that's a goal! The final piece I give to my Soldiers is two-fold. Place a copy of their goals in a place where they will see them daily and have them share their goals with someone. This helps to prevent us from cheating ourselves and abandoning our goals when they get tough. For every Soldier I rate, I keep a copy of their goals sheet for us to talk about and update at each counseling. For every leader that I rate, it is my expectation that they are doing the same

for their Soldiers. By identifying what our Soldiers want out of their time in the Army, we are better able to utilize their drive and motivation. By identifying their goals and helping them to improve themselves, we improve morale. No longer are Soldiers coming to work to further the goals of a leader many echelons above them that they may have never met; we are empowering them to come to work to meet their own goals.

Ultimately, no one is responsible for achieving our goals besides ourselves. However, as leaders development is 100-percent our responsibility. It is a responsibility that we easily push to the back burner because it is ill defined, and I encourage you to keep a goals sheet for each of your junior leaders and include it as a part of your quarterly counseling.

At the time this article was written, **CPT Jacob Mooty** was attending the Military Intelligence Captains Career Course (MICCC). He completed his branch detail as an Infantry officer in May 2021. His previous assignments include serving as a rifle platoon leader, headquarters and headquarters company executive officer, and assistant S3 with the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, NY.

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