

A Goal-Setting Framework for Independent Work

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ENDS

Describe the finished state

How will the world look when this is complete?

CONSTRAINTS

Accept the shape of reality

Time - Energy-Place-Psychology

FORM

Choose one path that suffices

This closes doors

ACTIONS

Small, irreversible steps

- Physically performative
- Independent of motivation
- Conclusive

Introduction

Conventional goal-setting frameworks such as SMART goals, OKRs, or Blue Ocean Strategy are not something that I have ever been able to take very seriously. There is nothing inherently wrong with them, but they are designed for a different kind of person.

These systems prioritise quantification, and claim that clarity can be derived from metrics alone. They say that the targets themselves are the motivational factor, and that value is demonstrated through the attainment of the predicted definition of achievement.

These methods are designed for organisations, managers, bureaucrats, administrators, and corporate drones. They are a very effective set of tools in all sorts of institutions where parameters that govern the scope of what is possible pre-exist. Optimisation, not innovation, is really the goal.

For someone like me, who values a creative space where new ideas can emerge unhindered and not prejudged, they are counterproductive.

They are more of an accounting technique than an aid to original thinking. They replace discernment and taste with compliance, and activity for its own sake over correctness. Most importantly, they optimise systems and discount human vitality.

This framework exists for people who value autonomy over conformity, sufficiency over growth, and aliveness over optimisation.



Ends — Describe the Finished State

Do not start with goals, metrics, or milestones. Begin by describing the conditions under which the work is done.

An End must be imaginable as complete. If it cannot be pictured as finished, it is not an End but is just an aspiration or wishful thinking.

Typical Ends may include material independence, creative sovereignty, aliveness, or a quiet life lived without performance.

Constraints — Accept the Shape of Reality

Constraints are not obstacles but fixed dimensions of reality.

Time is finite. Energy is limited. Psychological quiet is essential. Geography matters.

Once constraints are stated plainly, most options disappear. This is about clarity.

Forms — Make a Clear Choice

Forms are concrete mechanisms that realise the Ends while respecting the Constraints.

Only one Form should be chosen. This avoids ambiguity, deferral, and cognitive drag.

Actions — Small, Irreversible Steps

Actions appear last.

They must be physically performable, independent of motivation, and conclusive.

Actions conclude something.

Anything else is deferral.

