



NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

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Do you make new year's resolutions each year? A survey found that in 2022, just 23% of survey participants intended to make new year's resolutions.

The most popular resolutions for 2022 were living healthier (23%), personal improvement and happiness (21%), and losing weight (20%).

Anyway, who really cares? By the time we get to 31 January, those new year's resolutions are mostly just long forgotten memories. It's just a bit of fun.... or is it?

In business, making resolutions is also known as setting goals and they're not really an optional extra. For many business owners, goals are vital to providing clear focus, motivating employees, and setting targets to work towards. Achievement of goals is a measure of success.

Setting goals doesn't have to be something you do on 1 January. But it does need to be done periodically. In the case of quality objectives or goals, the regular process of setting objectives, planning on how to achieve them, and reflecting on whether or not the objectives have been achieved is a requirement of all of the quality management system standards.

The reality of setting objectives is sometimes viewed as an airy-fairy exercise done just to satisfy the external auditors. That prompts the question, *who are these objectives really serving if this is your reality?*

So, let's talk about how to make good objectives that will serve your business.

What do you need to do?

This is where the various standards diverge in terms of what is required (sigh!). ISO 9001 requires that quality objectives are:

1. consistent with the quality policy
2. measurable
3. formed with consideration to applicable requirements
4. relevant to conformity of products and services and to enhancement of customer satisfaction
5. monitored
6. communicated
7. updated as appropriate.



ISO 17025 does not actually call for objectives for quality.

Rather, it requires objectives for the “*fulfilment of the purposes of the Standard*” (they are found in the Introduction of the document).

These objectives must also address the competence, impartiality, and consistent operation of the laboratory.

ISO 15189 (2022) reflects the wording in ISO 17025, except that it does reference quality.

ISO 17020 requires the establishment of objectives for the “*fulfilment of the Standard*”.

So, if you happen to have an integrated management system which deals with multiple standards, you will need to take care when developing your quality objectives. But perhaps that’s just a matter of semantics.

Fortunately, most labs only need to deal with one standard.

Setting objectives that are meaningful and work

Much has been written about what makes a good objective. Acronyms like SMART (and SMARTER) abound in internet searches. But setting a good objective requires a little more thought.

The starting point is to understand why you’re setting goals. Ideally, you do it because you want to, not because a standard or external auditor tells you that you have to. Remember, goals and objectives provide focus, motivate people, and set the target to work towards. But if you are setting an objective to tick a compliance box, then make sure it fits into the box.

However, when you set a goal, you communicate what is and isn’t important to others who help to achieve that goal. It’s necessary to understand the consequences of the path to achieving the objectives. Are you sacrificing other things that are important by not setting an objective?

Remember, there’s no rule about the number of objectives you can set.

Now you can adopt your favourite framework, like SMART, to set those objectives.

What’s SMART?



SMART is an acronym for ensuring creation of good objectives.

- S** - specific
- M** - measurable
- A** - achievable
- R** - relevant
- T** – time-bound

An objective to test more samples is a little vague if you're aiming to expand your lab. An objective of testing 50 % more samples in a new market that you already do a little work for, in the next six months, provides much more focus and direction.

A good quality objective might be something like: *Receive no more than five customer complaints across the entire lab for the next 12 months.*

That's great to aim for, but if you never receive any more than three complaints each year over the past five years, is it actually meaningful? Of course, you'll probably smash it, but does it lead to improvements in quality in your business?

Some ideas for making meaningful objectives:

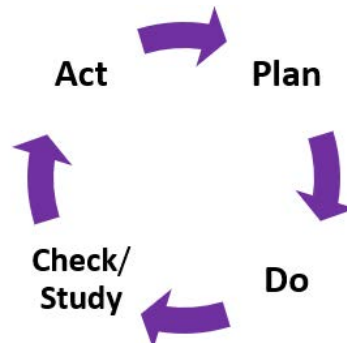
- Use data from quality monitoring tools like trends in corrective actions, internal audits and identified risks
- Ask your staff what matters to them
- Ask your customers what they value in your service or one like it.

Finally, write the objectives down and communicate them to the people who will help your organisation achieve them.

What's next?

Once you've set those meaningful objectives, then you have to plan how to achieve them. What resources do you need to devote to achieving the objective? Do you have to bring in additional staff or skill up existing staff? Do you need to refine your system to get better customer feedback? The options are endless, but remember, they are your plans and not those of the external auditor.

And then it's over to a well-used model in Quality, the PDCA or PDSA cycle.



The Final Word

Setting meaningful objectives that serve your organisation well is possible, but it does require some thinking and the right attitude. They will be the objectives that sustain and inspire you past 31 January.

We know that business owners and managers don't have a lot of time on their hands for deep thinking. There's ALWAYS something to do!

If you'd like to discuss any of the issues we've raised in this article including training or business support, email info@masmanagementsystems.com.au or contact Maree (0411 540 709) or Diane (0402 012 781) or to set up a confidential discussion.

Remember, you don't have to do this alone!