

EQUIPPD · FREE RESOURCE

Goals That Survive Real Life

Most goals fail in the design, not the effort.

How to write a goal you will actually finish,
and a quarterly review that takes twenty minutes.

Built for the Equippd community · equippd.io
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The problem with most goals

“Get better at coding.” “Be more organised.” “Save more money.” These are not goals. They are directions. There is no way to tell whether you are doing them, no way to tell when you are finished, and therefore nothing to feel good about along the way.

That vagueness is not a motivation problem. It is a design problem, and it is fixable in about ten minutes per goal.

The single most useful test

Could a stranger look at your goal and tell you, without asking a question, whether you hit it? If yes, it is a real goal. If they would have to ask “well, what counts as better?” — it is a wish, and it will quietly expire.

Five properties of a goal you will finish

Property	The question	Weak → Strong
Specific	What exactly, and how much?	“Get fit” → “Run 5km without stopping”
Measurable	How will you know?	“Learn Python” → “Build and ship three small projects”
Achievable	Is this possible in the time, given your actual life?	“Read 50 books” → “Read one book a month”
Relevant	Does hitting this move something you care about?	“Learn Rust” → “Learn SQL — every job I want asks for it”
Time-bound	By when, exactly?	“Eventually” → “By 31 March”

Achievable is the one people get wrong in both directions. Set it too high and you quit in week three; set it too low and you never take it seriously. Aim for something you are roughly 70% confident of hitting.

The part SMART leaves out

A well-formed goal still fails if nothing in your week changes. Three additions do most of the work:

1. Name the very next action

Not the plan — the literal next physical thing. Not “learn SQL” but “open the free Mode SQL tutorial and finish lesson one.” Goals stall at the moment you have to figure out what to actually do, so decide that in advance while you are motivated.

2. Attach it to time that already exists

“I’ll study more” loses to “Tuesday and Thursday, 7–8pm, before dinner.” A goal with no slot competes with everything else in your week and usually loses.

3. Decide the failure plan in advance

You will miss a session. Decide now what happens when you do, because the deciding-in-the-moment version is always “I’ve ruined it, forget it.” A good rule: **never miss twice**. One missed session is life. Two is a new habit forming.

Process beats outcome for anything hard

You do not fully control “get a software internship” — hiring markets and luck are in that. You *do* control “send five tailored applications a week for ten weeks.” Set process goals for the work and outcome goals for the direction, and judge yourself on the process. It is the only part that is actually yours.

Write yours

Three goals for the next quarter. Three, not ten — a list of ten goals is a list of zero priorities.

	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3
What, exactly			
How I'll measure it			
By when			
Why it matters			
The very next action			
When in my week			

The twenty-minute quarterly review

Put it in the calendar now, for the last week of the quarter. Four questions:

- 1 What did I actually finish?** Write it down. You will have done more than you remember, and forgetting that is corrosive.
- 2 What did I not finish, and why?** Be specific. "Ran out of time" is not a reason — it is a description. Was it badly scoped? Did it stop mattering? Did something else take the slot?
- 3 What should I drop?** A goal that has stopped mattering is not a failure to abandon. Carrying dead goals from quarter to quarter is how people learn to ignore their own list.
- 4 What are the three for next quarter?** Carry forward what still matters, and be honest about what does not.

On abandoning goals

Dropping a goal on purpose, with a reason, is a completely different act from letting one quietly rot. The first keeps your list trustworthy. The second teaches you that the things you write down are optional — and once you have learned that, no system will help you.