

## Paving the way to being a professional: strategy and goals

If you become a professional translator or language practitioner and want to be part of the premier league, you have to build your professional profile and stand out from the crowd. One of the magic words here: Strategy.

A key issue for freelancers – and, of course, the same applies to language practitioners in general – is that of strategy. Strategy is generally taken to mean "a long-term focused striving for a goal using available means and resources", as one definition in Wikipedia puts it.

The first step is to formulate **goals**. These are the guidelines which determine our actions in everyday life; together, they form the plan which gives us direction. As Seneca, the Roman philosopher wrote 2,000 years ago, 'If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable'.

Answering the following questions may be of specific help to freelance translators:

- What do I want to achieve as a freelance translator?
- Do I simply want to 'translate a bit' and see the whole thing as a 'nice job'?
- Do I want to just make ends meet, or do I want to go as far as enjoying financial freedom, and soon?
- Do I want to take my chances when I reach the age when I can no longer work, or do I want to build up reserves, and perhaps even buy an apartment so that I won't have to pay rent anymore?
- Do I want to be successful, in terms of gaining an excellent reputation among clients, engaging in little or no marketing activity, getting interesting and well-paid jobs...?
- Do I want to act as an agency, passing on and handling translation projects?
- Do I want to restrict myself to translation work only or possibly (later) add another string to my bow?
- What clients do I want to acquire and keep?
- Do I want to continue working for agencies only? Do I want to acquire direct clients?
- What annual income do I want to achieve?

### **Practical tips for formulating goals**

Don't reach for the stars; set your sights a little lower, and put in place achievable milestones to pave your way.

Remember, each of your goals must be **SMART**. What does that mean? Each letter of this well-known acronym stands for something:

<b>S</b>	= specific	The goal must be unambiguous and clearly defined; it should be precisely formulated and be compatible with other goals you may have. Avoid vague, meaningless statements, such as, 'I want to work on interesting texts'.
<b>M</b>	= measurable	The result as well as the interim results must be able to be quantitatively or qualitatively measured, monitored and tracked, e.g. 'By the end of 2014, I will have earned X thousand euros'.
<b>A</b>	= action-orientated and appealing	The goal must be stated positively, be motivating and 'interesting' to you, and be something that you would like to accomplish. After all, it is much more appealing to say, 'By the end of the year I will have at least one new direct client' than 'I don't want to stress about the work ethics of agencies anymore'. The goal should clearly demand action on your part and challenge you.
<b>R</b>	= realistic	The goal must be realistically achievable by you. You gain nothing by knowing that others have managed something similar before. Your goal is realistic if you can actively influence the outcome through your actions. Although you should also think of other goals and anticipate any obstacles to their achievement, your goals should be – and may even have to be – demanding!
<b>T</b>	= time-based	The goal should have a time frame – a precise start date and end date (If I begin this goal on X date, by when exactly do I want to have achieved my goal?) – as well as interim deadlines, called milestones (By exactly when do I want to have reached milestone A, milestone B, etc.?). Give yourself more, rather than less, time than you think, because as the wise saying from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing goes, 'Even the slowest people, who do not lose sight of their goals still go faster than those who wander aimlessly without one'.

Set yourself one or two medium-term goals which form part of your strategy. For example:

- By the end of 20xx I will have acquired one new direct client with whom I work regularly.
- By the end of 20xx I will have acquired a second direct client who regularly sends me work.
- By the end of 20xx my annual (pre-tax) income will be xx,000 euro.

Positioning yourself well in the market protects you from what are presumed to be economic trends and makes you strong. Anyone who starts out saying 'it's impossible

to find direct clients' is not only wrong, but ruins their chances of finding one with such a fatalistic approach.

Whether there is a financial crisis or the economy is booming, translations are always required. We translators and copywriters are, as it were, the midwives, helping companies bring their products and services into the world.

You have to succeed in connecting with precisely those clients who will generate work even in times of economic difficulty and will give that work to YOU.

One thing is clear: No one said that it is easy. We have to – no, let me rephrase that – YOU have to just knuckle down and do something. A 40-hour week is often not enough if you want to push ahead with your strategy. But it's worth it if you do!

By the way, strategically ineffective goals are things such as:

- I want to participate in two translator conferences every year in future; and
- I want to network more with colleagues.

Strategically effective goals, apart from the three (time-based) examples given above, would be statements such as:

- By the end of September this year I will have decided on my specialist field.
- With effect from October this year, I shall work for five hours every week on expanding my knowledge in my chosen field of specialisation, [state name of specialisation].

If you don't manage to achieve the first part of this goal on your first try, never mind. Try again. Ask your parents or older siblings how you learned to run when you were small. Did you succeed on the very first try? No. Like everyone else the world over, you most probably fell. And did you just give up? Of course not! So, stand up, hold your head up high, take a deep breath, and move on!