

OBRs vs. SMART Goals vs. Activity Goals

Goal-Setting Reference — Session 7 | GD-OTS Decathlon Program

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Not all goals are created equal. **Activity Goals** track tasks. **SMART Goals** add measurement and a deadline. **OBRs (Outcome Based Responsibilities)** define the *enduring result* a role is accountable for — tied directly to what the team needs to succeed. Each level builds on the last, but only OBRs create a continuous, business-connected standard of ownership.

	Activity Goal	SMART Goal	OBR (Outcome Based Responsibility)
What it defines	A task or action to be performed	A specific target with measurable criteria and a deadline	The enduring outcome a role is accountable for, on an ongoing basis
Answers the question	"What will you do?"	"What will you achieve, and by when?"	"What does success look like in this role, always?"
Expires when	The task is checked off	The deadline passes or the target is hit	It doesn't — it evolves with the role and the business
Business connection	Often none	Sometimes — if the metric matters to the team	Always — tied directly to a team or org KPI
Accountability lens	Activity tracking	Project management	Leadership and ownership

SAME WORK — THREE FRAMINGS

How the same responsibility looks when expressed as each goal type. Scenario: a Change Management Specialist supporting process rollouts across operations.

Activity Goal <i>What will you do?</i>	SMART Goal <i>What will you achieve by when?</i>	OBR <i>What does success look like, always?</i>
"Conduct monthly stakeholder meetings, deliver training to supervisor groups, and hold 30/60/90-day check-ins after each rollout."	"Complete all training for the Q2 ERP rollout by June 30, with 90% completion across supervisor groups."	"Reduce productivity recovery time after each change initiative to under 30 days, sustaining on-time delivery above 92% throughout every rollout window."
✓ Describes activity — not outcome	✓ Adds measurement + deadline — still project-bounded	✓ Owned continuously — tied to real business impact

ANATOMY OF A STRONG OBR

Every strong OBR has four identifiable components. If any one is missing, the statement likely describes a task or a project — not an ongoing standard of ownership.

Component	What it does	In the example — “Reduce recovery time...”
Outcome verb	A result-oriented action — not a task verb	<i>“Reduce” not “conduct” or “deliver”</i>
Measurable threshold	The specific metric that defines success	<i>“under 30 days”</i>
Ongoing signal	Signals this is perpetual, not a one-time project	<i>“throughout every rollout window”</i>
Business connection	Ties the outcome to team or org performance	<i>“sustaining on-time delivery above 92%”</i>

WHY OBRs WIN

They don’t expire	SMART goals end when the deadline hits. OBRs evolve with the role. They live on your 1:1 agenda and Performance Snapshot — creating a continuous standard, not a one-time target.
They connect to value	An OBR isn’t complete when the activity is checked off — it’s alive when the business outcome improves. The question shifts from “Did you do it?” to “Is it working?”
They build ownership	When everyone owns a result — not just a task — accountability becomes strategic. Teams stop reporting activity and start reporting impact.

UPGRADING YOUR GOALS — A 3-STEP REWRITE

Use these three questions to stress-test any goal you currently own or assign. Each question targets a different gap — task framing, missing measurement, or no business connection.

	Ask yourself...	If the answer is yes — reframe it this way
1	Am I describing an action I will take, rather than a result I will produce?	Replace the task verb with an outcome verb. “Conduct meetings” → “Reduce response time.”
2	If I complete every item on the list, but nothing measurably improved — did I succeed?	Add a measurable threshold. What number or observable standard proves the outcome was achieved?
3	Which team result or KPI does this directly protect or improve?	Name it explicitly. An OBR without a business connection is still just a sophisticated task.

SELF-CHECK

Ask these two questions about any goal you currently own or assign:

1. If the task is done but nothing measurably improved, have I succeeded?

If yes — it’s an Activity Goal. An OBR always asks: did the outcome move?

2. Does this goal expire, or does it continue to define what “good” looks like in this role?

If it expires — it’s a SMART Goal. OBRs don’t finish; they become your standard.

Use OBRs to define what “great” means in your role — then track it every week.