

# Personal Goal Setting Behavior and Professional Outlooks of Academic Library Employees

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**Abstract:** Studies indicate correlations between personal goal-setting behaviors, performance and attitude in professional roles. An online study was developed and conducted in 2016 with academic library employees to better understand the goal-setting behavior of library employees in a particular context, via setting New Year's resolutions, which is defined as "a decision to do something or to behave in a certain manner". Results show that nearly half (49.6 percent) of all respondents set New Year's resolutions in 2016. Goals related to health and fitness topped the list of goals that were set, followed by occupational goals. Of those who felt unclear about their purpose in life, 57 percent felt they were somewhat to very likely able to accomplish their top goals. Comparatively, 82 percent of those who had a clear sense of purpose in life felt the same.

Keywords: *employee motivation, new year's resolutions, goal setting*



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## Introduction

Many organizations use goal setting as a professional tool to motivate employees to achieve better job performance and accountability. These goals are often incorporated into a formal employee review process, such as annual evaluations for retention and promotion. Studies indicate correlations among personal goal-setting behaviors, performance and attitude in professional roles. Though exact numbers are not known, a number of poll results suggest that approximately 40 to 50 percent of Americans set New Year's resolutions each year (Ballard, 2018; Epcot Poll, 1985; Goo, 2014; Marist Poll, 2018), and they are often tied to a person's personal interests and values, which suggests that a person might be more likely to be motivated to set these goals. While these goals vary, some set their New Year's resolutions to include professional development or career advancement. For the purpose of this study, the term resolution is defined as "a decision to do something or to behave in a certain manner;" (Resolution - Dictionary Definition), and the term "goal" is defined as, "the state of affairs that a plan is intended to achieve and that (when achieved) terminates behavior intended to achieve it" (Goal - Dictionary Definition).

Many library employees participate in setting New Year's resolutions as part of their personal goal-setting behavior. By learning about how library employees set and achieve New Year's resolutions in relation to their professional outlooks, the researchers posit that it could provide insight into how organizations can improve employee goal-setting. In this study, academic library employees are defined as full-time employees who work for academic libraries which includes 1. Administrators; 2. Librarians (including those who are classified as faculty and/or staff); 3. Professional Staff (such as IT professionals); and 4. Paraprofessionals.

This non-experimental study sought to address these research questions:

1. How do academic library employees describe their experiences with New Year's resolutions?
2. What are the contributing factors for academic library employees who choose not to set New Year's resolutions?
3. For those who set them, what techniques do academic library employees use to help achieve their goals?
4. To what extent do personality and life outlooks affect goal-setting behavior of academic library employees?

This paper builds on the survey and results presented in a previous paper (Anderson & Lo, 2019) but focuses on academic library employees and the relationship between resolutions and professional goal setting.

### **Literature Review**

Though no specific literature about goal setting behavior and academic library employees is available, previous works exploring goal setting theory and goal setting within the workforce provide helpful context for this study. Additionally, support can be drawn from publications within academic librarianship about mentoring and working toward achieving tenure.

#### ***Goal Setting Theory***

Through studies spanning more than a decade, Locke and Latham found that challenging, specific goals lead to a higher level of task performance than those that are either simple or have vague parameters (1994; 2006). A positive linear relationship between goal difficulty and task performance is typically shown as long as a person is committed to achieving the goal, has the ability to achieve it, and has no other conflicting goals (Locke & Latham, 1994; Locke & Latham, 2006).

A central tenet in goal setting theory is the goal hierarchy, which defines how a goal is conceptualized in the future by proximity. Theorists describe at least three levels within this hierarchy: peak goals, distal goals, and proximal or task goals. Goals can be found in different life domains, including personal life, family life, and professional life. Though all time frames are relative and may be different for each individual, peak goals are the most distant goals a person can set within this framework. These can be used to aim toward targets far into the future. Distal goals are also complex and often ample time is allowed to plan for their completion. Finally, task goals are proximal or more immediate, and are often employed as achievable benchmarks in the quest to work toward distal or peak goals. All goals within this hierarchy have been shown to play a role on human motivation (Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1994; Masuda, Kane, Shoptaugh, & Minor, 2010).

SMART goal setting, first described in 1981, stands for goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (Doran, 1981). Of all goal setting techniques, perhaps the most widely applied method is in using the SMART criteria.

### ***Goal Setting and Leadership***

Goal setting is important within organization leadership, and studies show that successful leaders typically have their own plan, or a goal, and work to achieve that goal within their organizations. Leaders, including managers and administrators but also natural leaders within all layers within an organization, typically not only have goals for their teams, but also work on their own professional goals. The goals they set for themselves might be considered within the term professional development. Leaders within organizations can be distinguished from administrators, as leadership does not have to be associated with a job title and administration is typically designed to simply uphold adherence to organizational policies and procedures (Zaleznik, 2004). Leaders are often goal-

oriented, and as described in one study, “(l)eaders, as opposed to administrators, direct or nudge their followers in the direction of an established goal” (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, p. 644). Leaders that are considered to be transformational or charismatic are those who are particularly inspiring for their followers, whether those followers are employees, coworkers, or otherwise (Bono & Judge, 2003; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). Transformational leaders go beyond simply nudging their followers, and instead work to transform them (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). In learning environments, one study showed that principals must create a learning environment in which they are setting and meeting goals in order to inspire their employees to follow suit. As they describe, “(l)eaders must devote sustained attention to creating structures and cultures of learning if they wish to become continuous learners and stimulate others to learn along with them” (Kochan, Bredeson, & Riehl, 2002, p. 304).

### ***Performance Evaluations***

Performance evaluations occur regularly for employees in most organizations, and libraries are no exception. Often, these evaluations take place annually and might be referred to as the annual evaluation or annual review, though time frames vary by organizations. Annual evaluations are often a time in which employee and employers discuss progress made over the previous year or evaluation period and discuss plans or goals for the upcoming evaluation period.

More than 20 years ago, researchers proclaimed that performance evaluations were beginning to be viewed in a broader context beyond simple execution of basic tasks; at the time, researchers noted that multiple variables were being taken into account for employee performance reviews (Arvey & Murphy, 1998). Not only was this the point at which job performance was judged based in a broader context, but researchers noted that performance would be more predictable “within job contexts through the use of a larger number of predictor vehicles tapping different constructs” (Arvey & Murphy,

1998, p. 162). The study noted that “(t)he notion that job performance is more than just the execution of specific tasks and that it involves a wide variety of organizational activities has important implications for the understanding and measurement of job performance” (Arvey & Murphy, 1998, p. 162).

An employee’s prediction of his or her performance may create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Shrauger & Osberg, 1981). One study further explored the effect of self-assessment (SA) on employee’s annual evaluations and noted that “SAs, particularly future-oriented SAs, can be tied into existing theoretical orientations. These connections suggest that future-oriented SAs contain potential for improving an individual's job performance” (Campbell & Lee, 1988, p. 310). Future-oriented SAs could have a positive effect on job performance and, in turn evaluations and performance reviews. And while “important differences exist,” many other features are shared between SAs and traditional goal setting (Campbell & Lee, 1988, p. 310).

### ***Employee Motivation***

Employees are inspired to be leaders through multiple means, and studies on workplace motivation help us understand some of this drive. One framework that has widely been used to understand job satisfaction and motivation is Herzberg’s two-factor model (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1967). In this model, two sets of factors are present for job satisfaction and performance in organizations: satisfiers/motivators, and dissatisfiers/hygiene factors. When satisfiers are present, employees experience job satisfaction. When dissatisfiers are present, employees experience dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1967). This model suggests that satisfier/motivating factors are intrinsic; that is, dependent on the employee him or herself, while dissatisfier/hygiene factors are extrinsic and are dependent on someone other than the employee, often a supervisor (Herzberg et al.,

1967). This suggests that much of job satisfaction relies on an employee's own motivators, though, of course, dissatisfaction can occur with negative extrinsic influences.

### ***Academic Librarian Goal Setting***

All academic librarians have standards and expectations they must meet, and many have tenure as a specific preestablished goal set for them by their workplace. Mentoring has been shown to help support academic librarians work toward this goal, among other professional goals. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) published a document in 1999 that brought together examples from university library mentoring programs, synthesizing available literature at the time (Wittkopf, 1999). Along with working toward increased progress professionally, mentoring relationships functioned the best when pairs set goals even more specifically for the relationships themselves (Wittkopf, 1999; Wunsch, 1994). Along with formal mentoring, midpoint evaluations have been described as a positive trend, in which academic librarians can track progress toward the overarching tenure goal, and adjust progress accordingly (Crump, Drum, & Seale, 2008). Similarly, Oregon State University librarians developed a model for aligning with Association of College and Research Library (ACRL) standards; in this study, the national standards are described as “aspirational goals” that should guide academic librarians as they identify opportunities and work toward improvement (Hussong-Christian, 2013). Though these studies do not indicate the personal goal setting behaviors of participants, they (...) a culture of academic librarians' general work toward goal attainment.

### **Methods**

Building from the available literature, a study was developed to better understand the goal-setting behavior of library employees in a particular context, setting New Year's resolutions, to address

the aforementioned research questions. This paper describes the results specifically from academic library employees.

### ***Survey Design***

The survey questionnaire (Appendix A) began with a screening question to omit respondents who were under 21 years old. These respondents were directed to an end-of-survey thank you message. The research design of this study was non-experimental. It sought to explore the correlational relationships of academic library employees' attitudes towards setting goals for the new year, their behavior contributing toward the outcome of their goals, as well as their outlook on life and demographic characteristics.

### ***Participants***

Participants were recruited using invitations posted on targeted professional library electronic mailing lists. The invitation included an explanation of the survey, a statement of the goal of the project, and a hyperlink to the survey. The survey, which was administered online through Qualtrics, was active between February 1 and February 26, 2016. Of the 577 total respondents, 512 completed the survey, and 308 of them worked in academic libraries. Participation in the survey was voluntary with no financial incentives offered. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they would be interested in participating in follow-up studies. Only respondents who answered "yes" were asked to provide their email addresses. All identifying information was separated from responses in order to protect respondents' identities.

### ***Demographic Data***

This study only focuses on the 308 respondents who reported that they worked at academic libraries. Of the 308 responses, 56% (n = 173) indicated that they were in "Professional Librarian"



positions, followed by “Middle Management” (19%; n = 58), “Senior Administration” (10%, n = 32), Para-Professional Staff (6%; n = 20), , and “Professional Staff” (6%, n = 20). A small percentage, 2% (n = 5) indicated “Other,” which includes part-time workers, and student employees.

### Findings

Results as relative to the four broad research questions are presented as follows.

#### *How Do Academic Library Employees Describe Their Experiences with New Year’s Resolutions?*

A total of 308 individuals responded to the opening question, asking respondents to indicate if they had made any New Year’s resolutions for the previous year, 2015. Fifty-nine percent of respondents answered “No” (n = 182). Respondents who selected “Yes” (41%, n = 126) were asked a follow up question of whether they accomplished all of their 2015 New Year’s resolutions, to which about only 25% answered “Yes”, while 33% selected “No, but I tried quite hard,” and 36% selected “No, but I kind of tried”. Seven percent of the respondents said, “No, I gave up quite quickly.” These distributions are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. (New Year’s should be capitalized and apostrophized throughout manuscript, including in figures’ headings.)

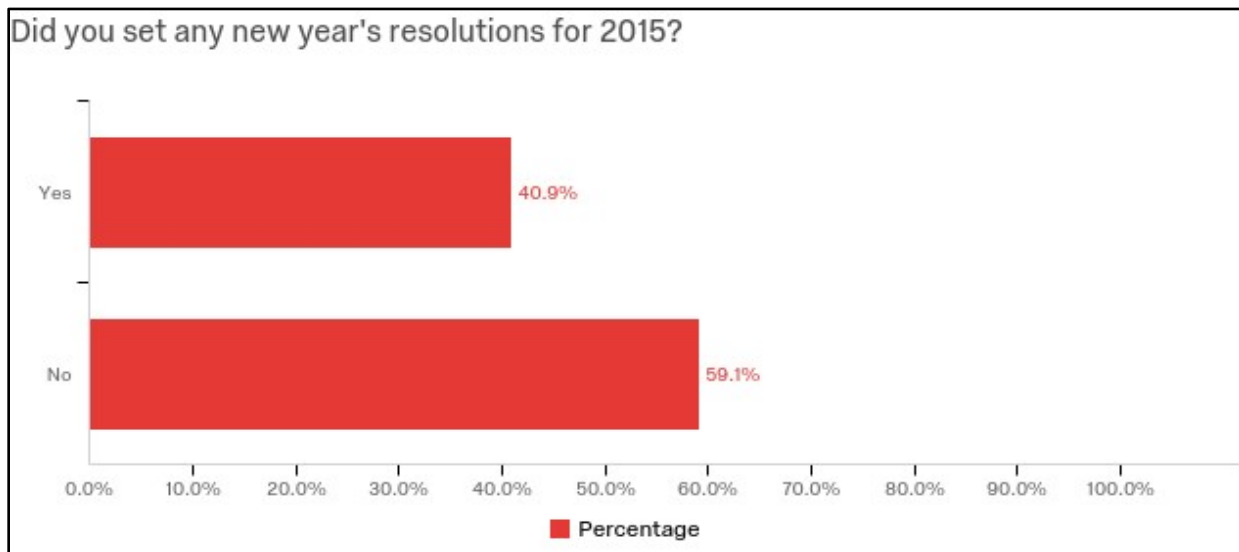


Figure 1

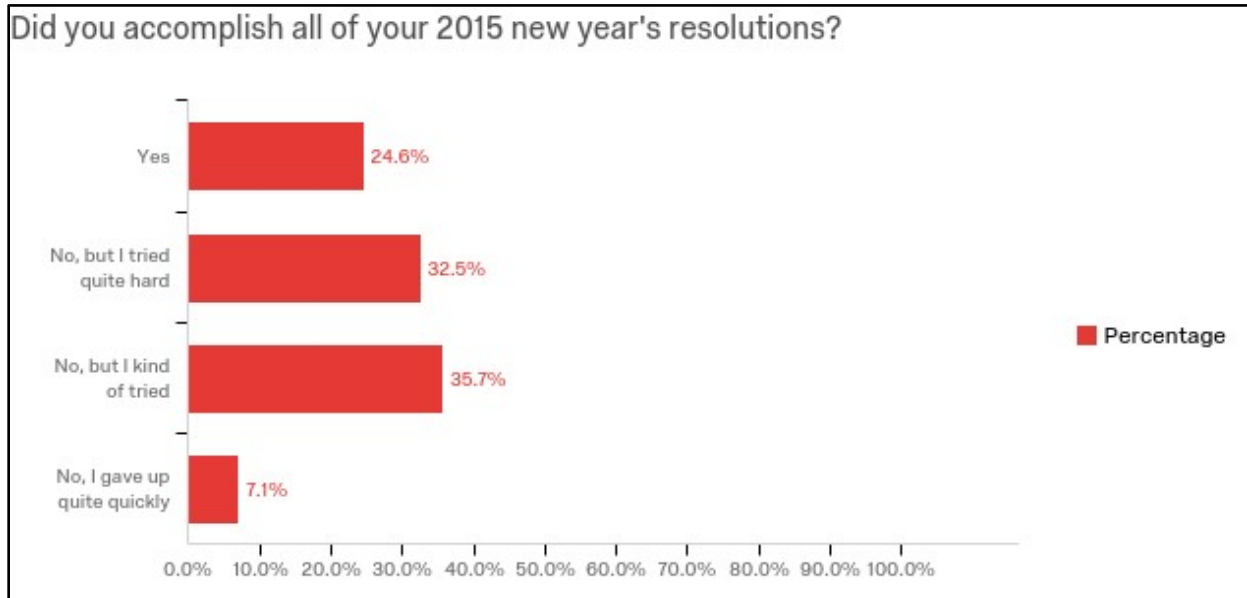


Figure 2

When asked if they had made any New Year’s resolutions for the current year at the time of the survey 2016, a higher number of respondents answered “Yes” (50%, n = 153) than for the previous year (41%, n = 126). The distribution is shown in Figure 3.

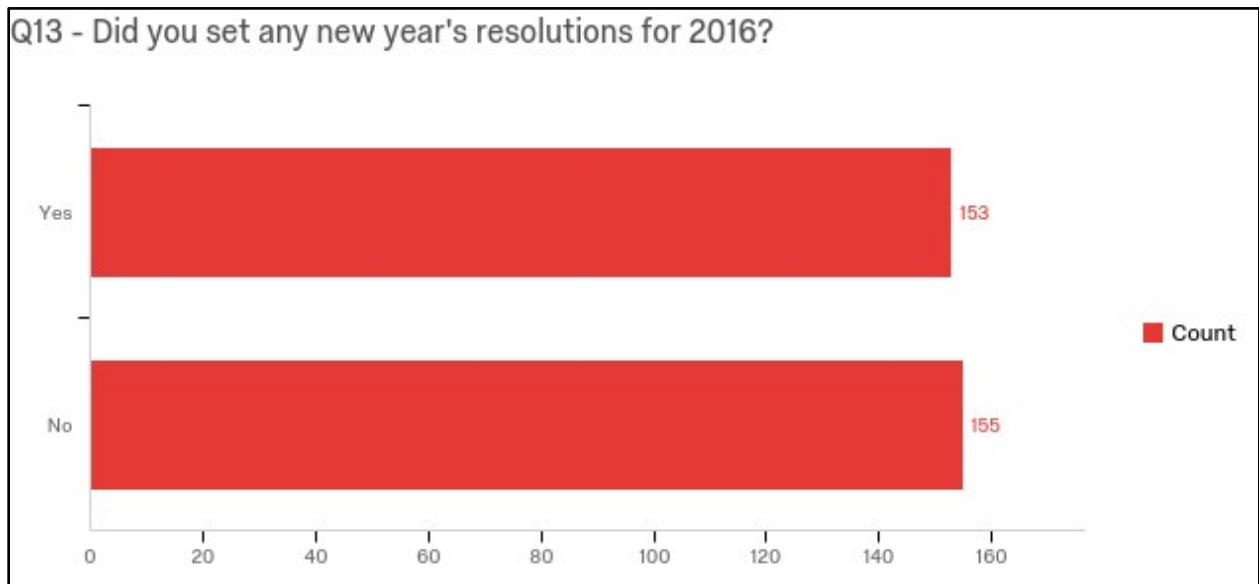


Figure 3

The respondents who set New Year’s resolutions for 2016 were asked a series of follow-up questions. The researchers were interested in finding out what types of goals the respondents set. Physical goals (such as being physically fit, eating healthily (or healthfully which must have gone out of use), etc.) were by far the most popular with over 40% of the respondents putting their top goals in this category. Occupational goals (such as developing professional skills, utilizing their talents in their careers, etc.) were second at 19%, followed by emotional goals (such as being more optimistic, being aware of their feelings, etc.), and intellectual goals (such as stretching and challenging their minds with intellectual and creative pursuits, etc.). The numbers are presented in Figure 4.

Q14 - If you have made more than one goal, how would you categorize your top goal...		
#	Field	Choice Count
1	Emotional (such as being more optimistic, being aware of your feelings, etc.)	15.03% 23
2	Intellectual (such as stretching and challenging your minds with intellectual and creative pursuits, etc.)	11.11% 17
3	Occupational (such as developing professional skills, utilizing your talents in your career, etc.)	18.95% 29
4	Physical (such as being physically fit, eating healthy, etc.)	41.83% 64
5	Social (such as contributing to the common welfare of your community, living in harmony with others, etc.)	3.27% 5
6	Spiritual (such as living each day in a way that is consistent with your values and beliefs, etc.)	3.27% 5
7	Other	6.54% 10
		153
Showing Rows: 1 - 8 Of 8		

Figure 4

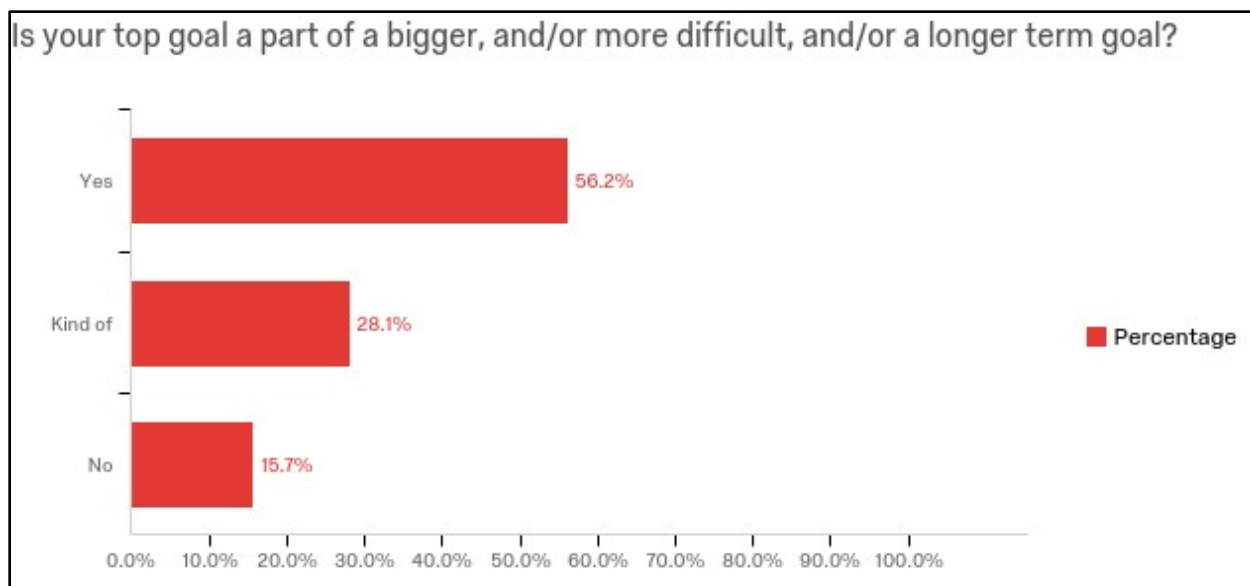


Figure 5

***Why Do Some Academic Library Employees Not Set New Year’s Resolutions?***

Of the 182 respondents who did not set New Year’s resolutions for 2016, 155 answered the follow-up question on why they did not set resolutions. About 23% reported that “the thought did not occur” to them. About 9% “did not think that goal setting is important”, and the same number did not think they “would have time for new goals”. About 5% of the respondents “was afraid that [they] would not be able to achieve” the goal. None of the respondents did not set goals for 2016 because they “did not know how to set goals”. However, over half of the respondents selected “Other” and provided their own reasons for not setting New Year’s resolutions for 2016.

Most of the respondents who provided their own reasons did not believe in setting goals based on an “arbitrary date” such as January 1. For example, one respondent wrote, “I see nothing important about making New Year’s Resolutions. Instead, I feel goal setting should happen organically and in its own time, rather than be tied to an arbitrary date”. Another popular reason for not setting New Year’s resolutions is that respondents followed the academic year rather than the calendar year to set goals,

while some believed that they already had adequate goals to work on, and there was no need to add new ones. One respondent wrote, “I have a lot more going on this year, personally and professionally, than last year. I don’t need resolutions when I already have some incredible goals”. Interestingly, some believed that setting New Year’s resolutions puts too much pressure on them. One respondent offered this insight, “I think New Year’s Resolutions put pressure on you, and I know myself. The minute I say I must do X, then X is the last thing I want to do. Natural rebellion,” while another questioned the concept of goal setting in general, “I think it is a waste of time. Society perpetuates this notion that we MUST set goals in order to be happy and accepted”.

### ***What Techniques Do Library Employees Use to Help Achieve Their Goals?***

The researchers were interested in finding out the goal setting techniques or best practices employed by the respondents. Of the 153 respondents who set 2016 goals, about 36% of the respondents wrote down/typed up their top goals for 2016. About 59% of the respondents shared their top goals with someone else. Almost 90% of the respondents made some small and big changes in their daily routines. Almost all of the respondents had made plans to various degrees to achieve their plan and only 2% reported that they did not have a plan at all.

Twenty-six respondents employed all four of the goal setting techniques for their 2016 goals, which included writing down/typing up their goals, sharing their goals with someone else, having a plan to achieve their goals, and making changes to their daily routines. This group of people tended to feel that achieving their top goal in 2016 was either extremely or very important. And most of these respondents believed that they were either very or somewhat likely to achieve their goals. Comparatively, the small number of the people (n = 4) who did not employ any one of these techniques felt a lot less confident, as none of them thought they were very likely to achieve their goals.

Out of the four techniques, those who made big changes to their daily routines were the most confident as about 58% of them thought they were very likely to achieve their 2016 top goals. Most respondents were optimistic about their chances of achieving their goals. More than three-quarters of the respondents thought that they were somewhat or very likely to achieve their top 2016 goals, even though most of the respondents (81%) felt that their goals were somewhat or very difficult to achieve. At the same time, a large percentage of respondents (76%) felt that it was very or extremely important for them to achieve their top 2016 goals.

### ***How Do Personality and Life Outlooks Affect Goal-Setting Behavior?***

The researchers posit that the employee's attitude towards both personal and professional life could be associated with their goal setting behaviors. In the survey, respondents were asked how they would characterize their sense of purpose in life. Out of the 308 responses, about half of the them thought that they were "somewhat clear", and about a quarter of them reported to have a "very clear" purpose in life. On the other hand, about 14% of the respondents were either "somewhat unclear" or "very unclear" in their purpose in life. The chart is presented in Figure 6.

About 57% of those who were unclear about their purpose in life believed they were either somewhat or very likely to accomplish their top 2016 goals. Those who had a clear sense of purpose in life were much more optimistic about their chances, as about 82% of them thought that it was likely for them to accomplish their 2016 goals.

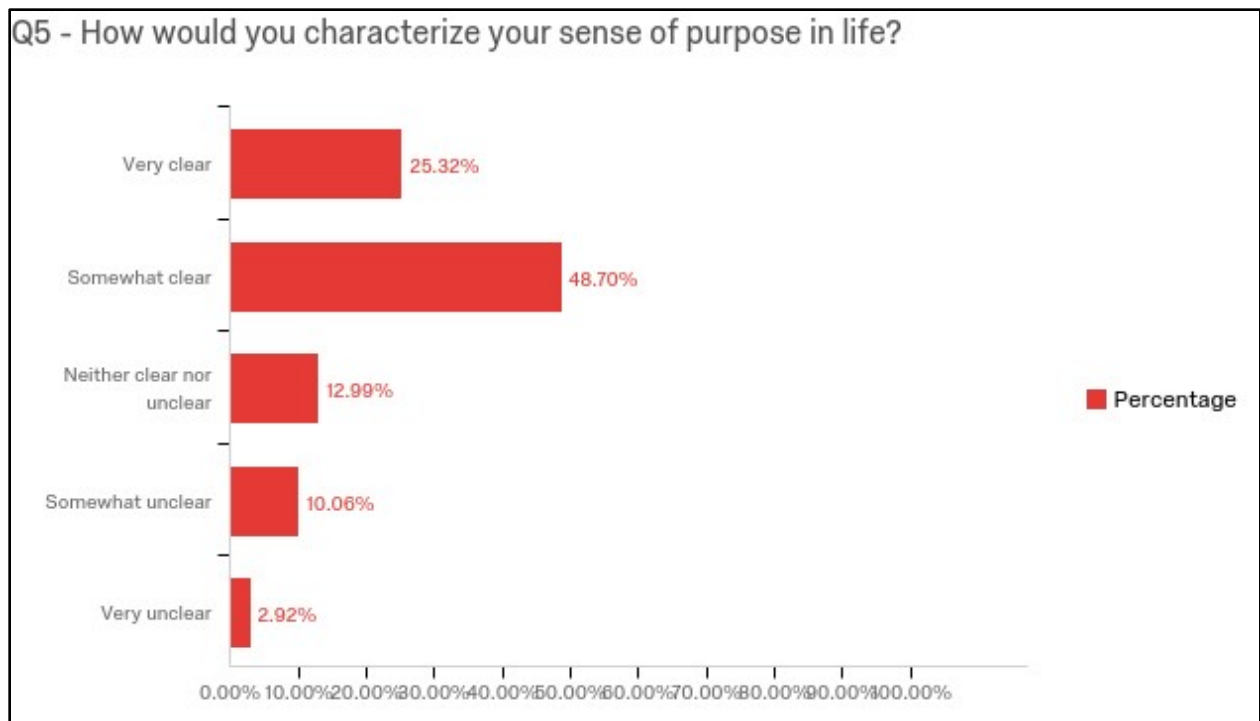


Figure 6

Most respondents considered themselves either somewhat (49%) or very optimistic (24%) in life. Of those who were pessimistic in their life outlook, almost all of them (96%) thought it was somewhat or very difficult to accomplish their goals. On the other hand, there is 16 percentage point drop to 80% for those who were optimistic in life.

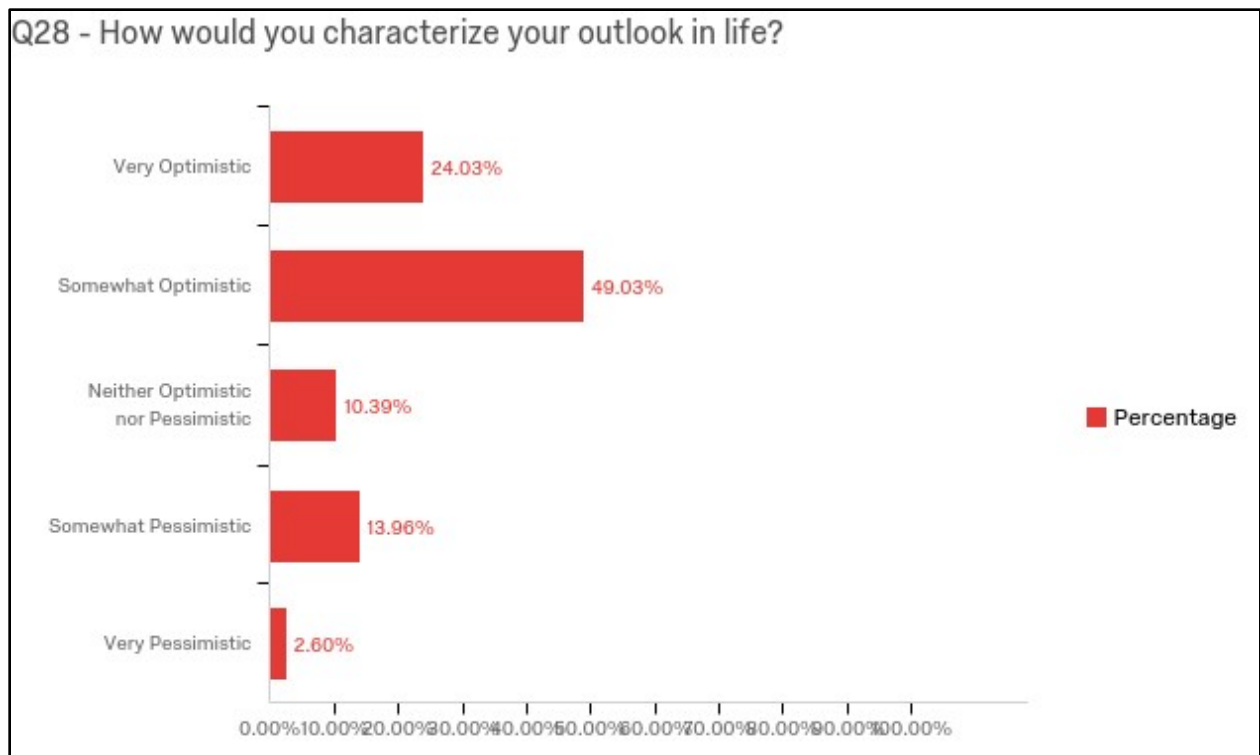


Figure 7

Out of the 308 respondents, about 11% considered themselves as very competitive; a little under half (45%) of the respondents considered themselves to be somewhat competitive. About 22% considered themselves to be somewhat or very uncompetitive (see Figure 8). When asked about their career outlook, about 70% reported to be either very or somewhat ambitious. Only about 7% thought that they were somewhat or very unambitious (see Figure 9). Interestingly, of those who reported to be “very ambitious”, the highest percentage (37%) set an “occupational goal” as their top goal for 2016; followed by “emotional goal” (29.63%, n=8) and “physical goal” (25.93%, n=7). Only two of the respondents set “social goals”. None set “intellectual goals” nor “spiritual goals”.

About 81% of the Dean/Director level respondents considered themselves to be somewhat or very ambitious, and about 85% of these respondents considered themselves to be somewhat or very optimistic. Comparatively, for the middle management respondents, 75% thought they were



somewhat or very ambitious; and 72% somewhat or very optimistic. The percentages continue to drop for professional librarians. About 66% considered themselves ambitious and 72% were optimistic.

A whopping one hundred percent of the Dean/Director level respondents felt that they were either somewhat or very likely to accomplish their top 2016 goal. About 73% of the middle management and 79% of the professional librarians felt the same way.

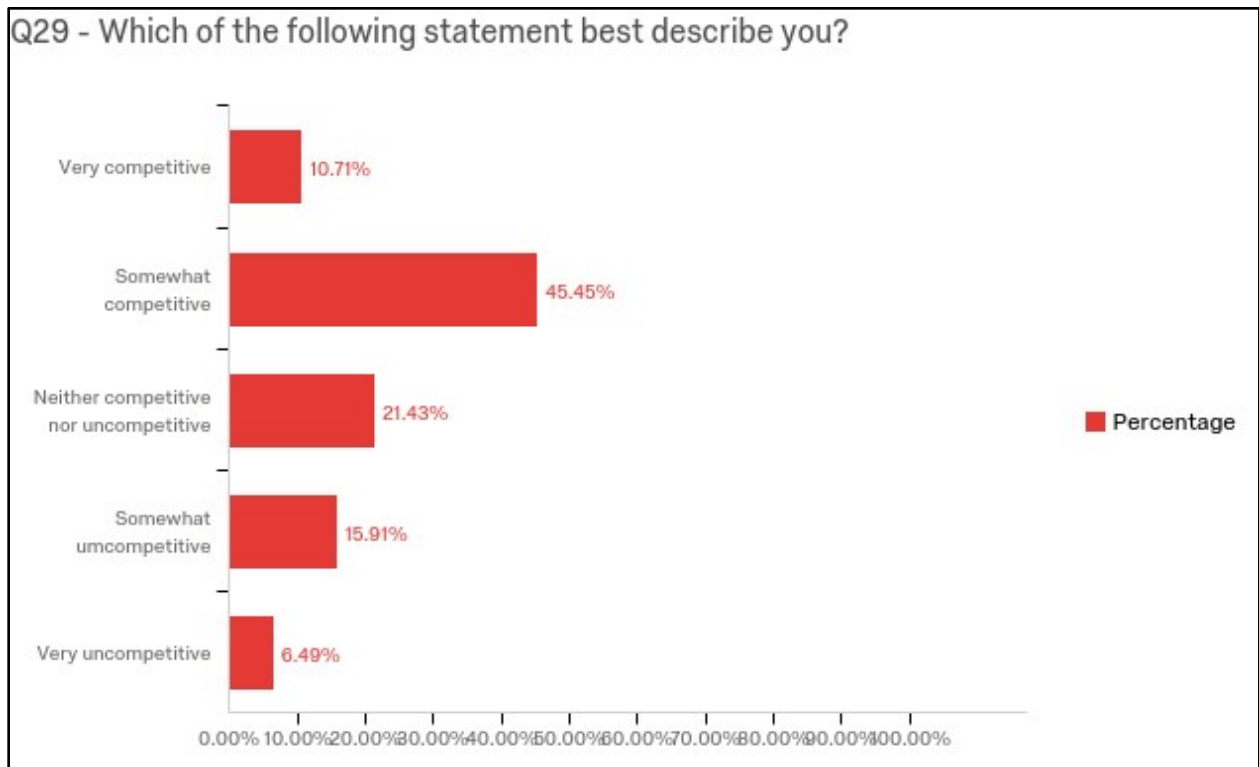


Figure 8

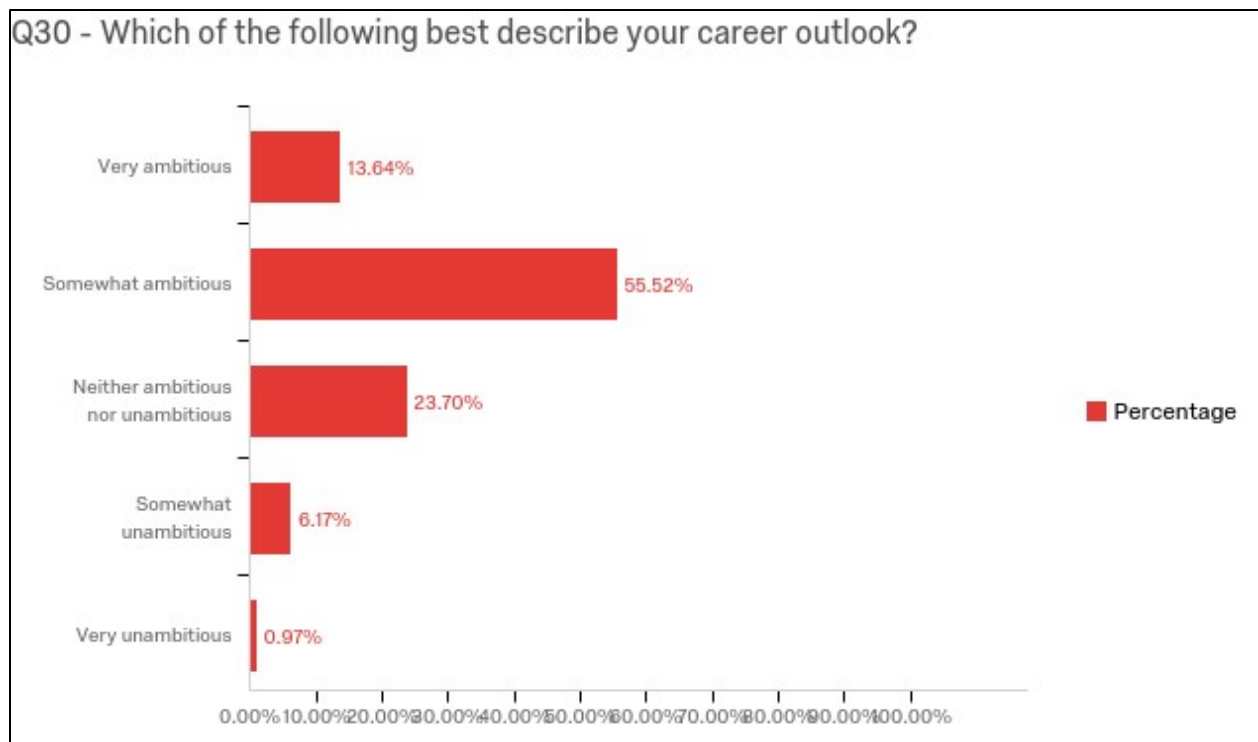


Figure 9

### Discussion

Based on the findings from this study, academic library employees both set and resist setting New Year’s resolutions. While many academic library employees describe their process of setting and working to achieve New Year’s resolutions, many others describe the process of avoiding, forgetting, or actively resisting them.

#### *Reflecting on Previous Years*

When participants in this study reflected back on a previous year, in this instance 2015, most academic library employees reported that they did not set a New Year’s resolution (59%). Comparing this to one of the seminal works about New Year’s resolvers, this number is in exact alignment; Norcross, Mrykalo, and Blagys found that 59 percent of all Americans do not set New Year’s resolutions (2002).

Alternatively, of those academic library employees in this study who did report setting New Year's resolutions in that same year, more than half, at 75 percent, did not accomplish them. Norcross et al. found that after six months, 46 percent of Americans who set New Year's resolutions self-reported "continuous success" (2002, p. 404) meaning that another 54 percent, or more than half, did not accomplish them. Though the previous study did not track participants through an entire year, one might assume that some attrition would continue to occur as the year progressed. Whether the number of all resolvers who did not accomplish their goal would reach 75 percent after one year, as is reported by academic library employees in this study, is unknown.

### ***Reporting on Current Year's Progress***

In contrast to reflecting on previous years, when asked if they set a New Year's resolution for the current year of the study, nearly half (49.6 percent) said "yes"; in comparison, when asked if they set a resolution for the prior year, the majority said "no". Also, this percentage is slightly higher, though not by a significant amount, than what is reflected in the national averages (Norcross et al., 2002). What might account for this discrepancy? It is possible that academic library employees, at the time of the study, were still actively working to complete their goals for the current year and were thus motivated to respond in the positive. When reflecting on the year prior, perhaps those who were non-completers downplayed the goal setting process in its entirety. Instead of reporting that they had failed to complete a resolution, perhaps it was easier to simply say that none was ever set. Of course, this is not something that can be resolved from this data, but might provide guidance for future studies in this area to further explore goal setting behaviors.

It is also possible that this study itself influenced participants to set and work toward a New Year's resolution. One of the findings noted that 23 percent of participants who did not set a New Year's

resolution did not do so because “the thought did not occur to them.” Perhaps by inviting them to participate in this study at the onset of the New Year, the thought was introduced. As noted by Norcross et al., (2002), “a minimal and unintended ‘intervention’ to nonresolvers... may facilitate the progression from ‘thinking about’ change to ‘doing something about’ change in a sizable proportion of the adult population” (p. 404-405).

### ***Goal Setting Behaviors***

Goals related to health and fitness topped the list of goals that were set the most by academic library employees. Following health and fitness, participants listed their next most common top goal as occupational, followed by emotional. Interestingly, most participants said that their top goal was part of a bigger, more difficult, or longer-term goal. Academic library employees are thinking about their top goal in terms of a broader scheme, and chunking their overarching goals into smaller, more manageable pieces. This strategy, whether the study participants realize they are utilizing it or not, aligns with goal theory, which suggests that task-oriented, or proximal goals, can be used in the process of working toward distal or even peak goals (Locke & Latham, 1994; Masuda, Kane, Shoptaugh, & Minor, 2010).

For academic library employees in this study, feelings about one’s purpose in life are associated with feelings about ability to accomplish goals. Of those who felt unclear about their purpose in life, 57 percent felt they were somewhat to very likely able to accomplish their top goals. Comparatively, 82 percent of those who had a clear sense of purpose in life felt the same. Whether one aspect influences the other is unknown; however, it is clear that there is a relationship between life outlook and sense of ability to accomplish goals.

Similarly, 96 percent of respondents who felt pessimistic also described their top goal as somewhat or very difficult. Comparatively, only 80 percent of respondents who felt optimistic felt the same way. Again, whether one influences the other is unknown; causation is not something that can be explored within this study. However, it should be noted that thinking of a goal as difficult is not an obstacle to its completion; instead, goal setting theorists note that setting “specific, difficult goals consistently (leads) to higher performance than urging people to do their best” (Locke & Latham, 1990, in Locke & Latham 2002). It is then not unexpected that those who set New Year’s resolutions would describe them as difficult. What remains unknown is whether those who are pessimistic view this difficulty as a hindrance or as an achievable task.

### ***Implications for Practice***

How can academic library administrators and supervisors use the results from this study to support workplace practices? At first glance, it might be disheartening to see that occupational, or professional goals trailed behind health and wellness goals as top goals for academic library employees. But to view this in a different light, nearly 20 percent of all participants listed occupational goals as their top goal, which was the second most popular category. These occupational goals were listed as a top goal more often than emotional goals, intellectual goals, social goals, and spiritual goals. It needs to be said that these responses were gleaned in a study not specifically about workforce development, and that calls for participation were instead focused to gather information from academic librarians about their personal goal setting behavior in general. In this respect, to have such a high response of those who report that their top personal goal is one that supports their professional growth actually seems quite heartening for academic library organizational culture.

Academic librarians in particular, in contrast to public, special, or K-12 librarians, might have goals that support professional growth in part due to the academic culture itself. Tenure and promotion is unique to academia, and though this process is not intertwined with all academic library jobs, it is also not uncommon. Tenure might be the ultimate career goal, and it is one that many academic librarians strive for. This pattern of working toward a large goal might have had some influence on how some participants in this study responded.

Even though academic library employees in this study largely felt that their goals were at least somewhat hard to achieve, they also felt confident that they could accomplish them. The majority of participants had plans in place to achieve their top goals, and were optimistic about their potential for success. This indicates that academic library employees are willing to work hard to accomplish challenging goals that are self-directed, such as those that are set for a New Year's resolution. When considering that nearly 20 percent of these self-directed goals are related to the workplace or professional development, there are ample opportunities here for academic library administration to take notice.

The most highly reported New Year's resolutions by academic library employees were those related to health and wellness; this aligns with the data for all adults. Goals focused on health and wellness such as quitting unhealthy behaviors or embarking on a more healthy lifestyle are the most common goals for all adults who set New Year's resolutions (Marlatt & Kaplan, 1972; Norcross, Ratzin, & Payne, 1989). This also carries implications for library administrators. Being in good health can lead to better performance on the job, with less chance for absenteeism or lack of focus at work. Library administrators could use these goal-setting interests of academic library employees to develop and implement a wellness program on the job. As noted in one study, "a well-implemented

multicomponent health promotion program can not only improve the health status of participants but also improve their work performance” (Mills, Kessler, Cooper, Sullivan, 2007, p. 52). Additionally, studies indicate that working toward goal attainment in itself is a practice that can contribute to a person’s wellbeing (Koestner, Lekes, Powers, & Chicoine, 2002; Sonnentag, 2002); thus, administration encouraging work toward any goal could improve library employees’ general sense of wellness.

Of course, some academic library employees reported that they did not set New Year’s resolutions at all. Of those who reported that they did not for the current year at which the data was being collected, most selected “other” and indicated that they set goals but not necessarily according to the New Year’s date. The next greatest percentage, 23 percent of those who did not set resolutions, said that “the thought did not occur to them.” For library administration, this demonstrates that these employees largely do know how to set and work toward achieving goals; perhaps they just need the spark of encouragement. Employers might consider introducing these thoughts by incorporating discussion about goal setting either before the New Year or as part of ongoing, yearly meetings and professional development. These conversations could be incorporated into a mentoring framework. Fifty-nine percent of academic librarians in this study shared their top goals with someone else. Employers could encourage a voluntary peer mentoring program for goal achievement, providing the structure for librarians to share goals with a trusted peer. Mentoring programs are already implemented often in the profession; one comprehensive report found that “...many university libraries, particularly those in the United States, have introduced mentoring programs as a means of facilitating the professional development of academic librarians” (Lorenzetti & Powelson, 2015, p. 194). While some libraries might put a program such as this in place to encourage professional goals, there might also be value in encouraging employees to use this time to discuss strategies for, and

achievements in working toward personal goals as well, some of which, when viewed in the context of this study's findings, will still be professionally-oriented.

### ***Limitations***

Some study limitations must be noted. First, this study was done through purposive and not random sampling, so results cannot be truly generalizable to the entire academic library employee population. Additionally, participants not only self-selected to participate, but their answers were self-reported. As noted in previous New Year's resolutions studies (Norcross et al., 2002), success rates, as self-reported, are likely overestimated. This is not a flaw in this study's design, but a limitation in goal achievement studies as a whole.

### **Conclusions**

Academic library employees are no different from other populations, in that some, but not all, set and work toward achieving New Year's resolutions. Data collected from reflections on previous years' aligns with the national averages from the adult population as a whole. Academic library employees describe their top goals as health- and wellness-focused followed by goals related to professional and workplace development. The fact that outside of the work environment, academic library employees reveal their decision to do something related to professional and workplace development, and then set goals to achieve them demonstrate that many of them view their work as an important aspect of their lives. Academic library administration could use this study's findings to encourage personal goal setting by employees. As noted here, working toward personal goals, such as those set as a New Year's resolution, might ultimately benefit the individuals within the workplace as well as create healthier, more professionally fulfilled employees.



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## Appendix A

### New Year's Resolutions Survey Questions

Are you 21 years old or older?

- Yes
- No

Did you set any new year's resolutions for 2015?

- Yes
- No

Did you accomplish all of your 2015 new year's resolutions?

- Yes
- No, but I tried quite hard
- No, but I kind of tried )
- No, I gave up quite quickly

Did you set any new year's resolutions for 2016?

- Yes
- No

As of today, are you still intended to pursue achieving your top goal for 2016?

- Yes, definitely
- I am not sure
- No, I have given up already

As of today, have you changed your top goal for 2016?

- Yes
- Kind of
- No

If you have made more than one goal, how would you categorize your top goal for 2016?

- Emotional (such as being more optimistic, being aware of your feelings, etc.)
- Intellectual (such as stretching and challenging your minds with intellectual and creative pursuits, etc.)
- Occupational (such as developing professional skills, utilizing your talents in your career, etc.)
- Physical (such as being physically fit, eating healthy, etc.)
- Social (such as contributing to the common welfare of your community, living in harmony with others, etc.)

- Spiritual (such as living each day in a way that is consistent with your values and beliefs, etc.)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Is your top goal a part of a bigger, and/or more difficult, and/or a longer term goal?

- Yes
- Kind of
- No

Did you write down/type up your top goal for 2016?

- Yes
- No

Did you share your top goal with anyone?

- Yes
- No

Do you have a plan to achieve your top goal?

- Yes
- Kind of
- No

Did you make any changes in your daily routine in order to accomplish your top goal?

- Yes, I made some big changes
- Yes, I made some small changes
- No

How likely do you think you will achieve your top goal for 2016?

- Very Unlikely
- Somewhat Unlikely
- Undecided
- Somewhat Likely
- Very Likely

How difficult do you feel your top goal for 2016 is?

- Very Difficult
- Somewhat Difficult
- Neither Easy nor Difficult
- Somewhat Easy
- Very Easy

How important is achieving your top goal for 2016

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Moderately Important
- Slightly Important
- Not at all Important

How high is achieving your top goal for 2016 on your priority?

- Essential
- High priority
- Medium priority
- Low priority
- Not a priority

Display This Question:

If Did you set any new year's resolutions for 2016? = No

I did not set any new year's resolutions for 2016 because: (please select the top reason)

- I did not think goal setting is important
- I was afraid that I would not be able to achieve it
- I did not know how to set goals
- I did not think I would have time for new goals
- The thought did not occur to me
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a habit of writing down your goals?

- Yes
- Kind of
- No

Display This Question:

If Do you have a habit of writing down your goals? = Yes

Or Do you have a habit of writing down your goals? = Kind of

What percentage of your written goals do you usually achieve?

- 0 - 10%
- 11- 25%
- 26 - 50%
- 51 - 75%

- 76% - 90%
- 91 - 100%
- Not sure

How would you characterize your sense of purpose in life?

- Very clear
- Somewhat clear
- Neither clear nor unclear
- Somewhat unclear
- Very unclear

Which of the following statement best describe you?

- Very competitive
- Somewhat competitive
- Neither competitive nor uncompetitive
- Somewhat uncompetitive
- Very uncompetitive

Which of the following best describe your career outlook?

- Very ambitious
- Somewhat ambitious
- Neither ambitious nor unambitious
- Somewhat unambitious
- Very unambitious

How would you characterize your outlook in life?

- Very Optimistic
- Somewhat Optimistic
- Neither Optimistic nor Pessimistic
- Somewhat Pessimistic
- Very Pessimistic

Would you be interested in participating in a follow up study during 2016, including another survey at the end of the year?

- Yes
- No

If you are interested in participating in a follow up study during 2016, please enter your email here for the researchers to contact you.



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What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

What is your age?

- 21-25
- 26-40
- 41-55
- 56-65
- 66 or above

What is the highest level education you completed?

- Did not complete High School
- High School/GED
- Some College
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree

Do you have more than one graduate degree?

- Yes
- No

What is your race/ethnicity?

- Native American
- Asian
- Black or African American
- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Multi-racial
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the follow best describe your current job position

- Para-professional staff
- Professional staff
- Professional librarian

- Middle management (department head, unit head, etc)
- Senior Administration (dean/director, assistant/associate dean/director)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes the type of library you work for?

- Academic Library
- Public Library
- School Library
- Special Library
- Other \_\_\_\_\_