

Goal Setting in Coaching. . .



Getting people excited about what they can achieve

Setting goals in coaching conversations is vitally important. If done well it can release energy and motivate the coachee to generate new ideas and solutions to solve current problems. Coaching managers can support individuals in generating goals that excite and motivate them. By creating positive emotions around these goals, individuals are more likely to evoke new ideas and novel solutions. Such positive emotions can expand the individual's thought-action repertoire. When engaging in coaching conversations as managers, it is therefore important to consider how we go about getting people really excited about their goals.

What do we already know about goal setting?

As experienced managers you will all be aware of the research – but here are a few points to refresh your memory.

- There is a clear relationship between goal setting and performance. This was first proposed by Locke (1968) who showed that realistic, hard, specific goals produce better performance than easy goals or no goals at all.
- Goals affect performance in four ways. They help us:
 - Direct attention
 - Mobilise effort
 - Increase our persistence towards a task
 - Motivate us to find appropriate performance strategies

If we look closer at the literature several elements are important for effective goal setting. Let's take each of these in turn and look at what coaching managers can do to increase the power of each element. . .

1. Effort

When difficult goals are accepted by employees, they will use more effort toward reaching those goals than when the goals are easy. Why? Because we use more of our skills and knowledge when we are in situations which demand a lot of us than when we are in less demanding situations.

2. Goal difficulty

However, difficult goals lead to higher performance only when an individual is committed to them. Accepting a goal, and committing to it, is an important pre-cursor to acting on a goal. Once we have that commitment, we are more likely to use effort, persistence and direction to achieve the goal.

Coaching Tip

- Help the individual set a goal that is challenging for them. If it's too easy they'll get bored
- Help the individual define the goal in really specific terms
- Research suggests that writing down a goal seems to stimulate a more hopeful mindset, which generates more creative thinking and multiple solutions
- Spend time creating the goal, and use a language around the goal that is in itself engaging. Words are important here, so dream goal, future promise, legacy, best possible self, can all serve to generate positive energy in the individual

3. Goals Choice: Both internal and external factors influence our choice of goals

- **Internal Factors:** Do I see myself as capable of doing this? This is influenced by. . .
 - The level of past performance
 - Ability or skill
 - Whether the individual has succeeded or failed in reaching previous goals
 - Self efficacy
 - The individual's expectations of achieving the goal
- **External Factors:** Is the goal perceived as desirable? This is influenced by. . .
 - Group norms
 - Peer pressure
 - Encouragement
 - Role-modeling
 - Competition
 - Value of achievement
 - Incentives
 - Feedback
 - Dissatisfaction

Coaching Tip

Consider what internal and external factors will influence your coachee's commitment. Is it clear whether the goal has a personal meaning to them? If organisational goals have no meaning for the individual, then motivation slips. The two need to be skillfully aligned.

Tackling internal barriers to goal commitment. . .

- Help your coachee identify not just a personal benefit to achieving the goal, but help the coachee make a genuine connection to their goal
- Help your coachee identify the skills and knowledge they can apply from past experiences of success
- Listen out for the coachee's beliefs, their confidence and level of optimism about future success. Here you may recognise the self limiting assumptions and beliefs that can hold individuals back from feeling confident and fully committed to achieving their goals. As a manager coach it is important to uncover these and work with them to free the person to act and take on new challenges

Tackling External Factors to goal commitment. . .

- Does the organisational environment support the achievement of the goal?
- How will you acknowledge achievement?
- Are there incentives, or rewards?
- Does this fit with the group norms? If not, as a manager, how can you begin to create these norms within your team?
- How will you provide feedback?

4. Goal Strategy

Acceptance, commitment, effort and direction aren't enough to ensure successful goal attainment. We also need an appropriate strategy for achieving our goal. There is no value in expending lots of energy trying to achieve a goal if the strategy adopted doesn't work.

Coaching Tip

Make sure you work with your coachee to support them in developing a clear strategy. Test it out with them to make sure that it is robust and will lead to success.

5. Public Goal Commitment

Stating the goals publicly can increase commitment levels.

Coaching Tip

Help the coachee consider how they can make a public commitment to the goal. Doing this with you will be powerful; doing this in front of a team will be even more powerful.

6. Commitment to a goal

This can be improved if the individual participates in the goal-setting process. For many people goals set by others, especially authority figures, act as a real disincentive to commitment and can lead to individuals rejecting the goal. However, this isn't always the case, and goals can successfully be set by others as long as that person makes an effort to 'sell' the goals after they have been decided on.

Coaching Tip

- Encourage the individual as much as possible to set their own goals. This explains why the GROW model is so powerful
- Ensure they are committed to the goal, test this out, otherwise your coachee won't spend time and effort trying to achieve it
- Review progress. As a coaching manager it will be important to check out how the individual is progressing with a desired action