



Effective goal setting in coaching

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By setting goals, we focus our aims. By setting milestones and documenting the steps taken, we maintain our motivation while recognising what we have achieved along the way.

Why goals are important

To survive in life we all develop goal-oriented habits, but for some of us setting goals is easier than for others. In a coaching context, in order for the coach to help a client move forward, the client needs to have an idea of what they want *to be*, *to have* or *to do*.

Each coaching situation is based around the goal of helping the client get from where they are now to where they want to be in the future – in simple terms, *what* they want and *how* they will achieve it.

Another key aspect of goal achievement is the *why*. Without a sufficiently compelling need to achieve something, it is easy to excuse ourselves for not achieving it. Goals are fundamentally linked to our values in life, and it is part

of the coach's role to help the client to identify the motivations behind their particular goals in life, and to work on the steps they need to take.

The benefits of goal setting

One key benefit of setting goals is how we feel as we achieve them. As a coach, I encourage clients to reward themselves as they make progress towards the major goals that they have set themselves. Documenting these goals also provides a record so that we can actually see what we have achieved.

In coaching terms, documenting both end goals and performance goals at the start of a coaching process has another benefit. It helps both client and coach to

know when progress is being made and what adjustments might be helpful to the process.

Key learning points

- ◆ Goal setting is part of a broader coaching process and therefore should not be approached in isolation.
- ◆ It is important to understand the impact of language on goals.
- ◆ We are all motivated in different ways, so the coach needs to work with the client to help them develop helpful motivational strategies.
- ◆ It is important to help clients to enjoy their journey towards their end goal.
- ◆ Any model for goal setting should focus on the process as well as on the result.

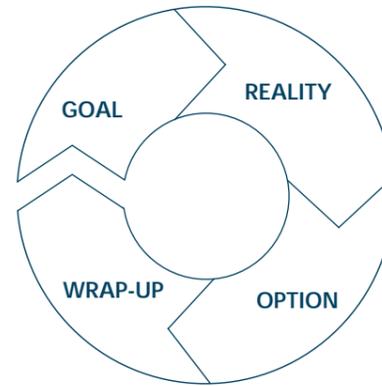


Fig. 2: The GROW model

In this model the coach is encouraged to review the whole process with the client, not just the goal in isolation.

Goal

- Agree topic for discussion.
- Agree specific objective of session.
- Set long-term aim, if appropriate.

Reality

- Invite self-assessment.
- Offer specific examples of feedback.
- Avoid or check assumptions.
- Discard irrelevant history.

Options

- Cover the full range of options.
- Invite suggestions from the client.
- Offer suggestions carefully.
- Ensure choices are made.

Wrap-up

- Commit to action.
- Identify possible obstacles.
- Make steps specific and define timing.
- Agree support.

Tips for using the model

- Use 'ask' rather than 'tell'. Elicit ideas; don't try to prove you are smart. This is about them and not about you.
- Think creatively, not just systematically, particularly in the last two stages.
- Illustrate and check understanding by using specific examples from your experiences.
- If you have a follow-up session, you can lengthen or shorten each of the four steps as needed.

I have found it useful in coaching situations to test the degree of commitment to action on a scale of 0 to 10. If the commitment level is less than 10, that provides the opportunity to explore what else would need to happen to raise the commitment a point higher on the scale.

Well formed outcome

This is a term borrowed from Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), and once again it encourages us to look at our goals in a broader context.

The well formed outcome takes the client through the following steps:

- 1 State the goal or outcome positively – What do you want, specifically?

- 2 Create a sensory representation of that goal – How will you know when you have it?
- 3 Start the process – What needs to happen to start and keep it going?
- 4 Collaborate – What do significant others want and how can they help you?
- 5 Put your goal in context – When, where, with whom?
- 6 Positive by-products – What will you lose if you achieve your goal? What is the benefit of staying just as you are?
- 7 Resources – What physical, emotional and financial resources do you need?
- 8 Ecology – What are the consequences for you and others, and are those consequences worth it?
- 9 Action – What is the first step you will take?

Both the GROW model and the well formed outcome have themes in common with EPP. This serves to demonstrate that there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Whether you are an experienced coach or a novice, I would encourage you to explore the different approaches to goal setting, so that you have greater flexibility to support your clients in the ways that best suit them.

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Work with the client to help them develop motivational strategies

The dangers of goal setting

Whilst it has to be said that goals are extremely helpful, it is important to recognise that there is a danger in setting them: we may totally focus on our goals, miss opportunities along the way, and become hugely dissatisfied if we don't achieve our goals.

There is a lovely analogy I came across several years ago when first introduced to coaching. This is based on climbing a mountain. It describes three different approaches to doing this.

1 The Climber

The path may not be direct, but the Climber enjoys each step.

The goal is enough reason to get to the top. The act of climbing the mountain motivates the Climber.

Climbing is not about getting to the top, it's about enjoying the journey and making it more interesting.

2 The Goal-seeker

The Goal-seeker takes two steps forward and one step back.

Climbing mountains gives no pleasure; getting goals is important. The Goal-seeker hates climbing mountains. All their attention is focused on the top, so they miss the views and flowers along the way. Once at the top, they are dissatisfied.

Too much is dependent on the goal – all the satisfaction is invested in arriving at the top of the mountain.

3 The Slammer

For the Slammer, the goal has to be achieved now. It's a matter of slam – bloody nose – blame the mountain.

The Slammer is constantly hitting a brick wall. Their need to be right is greater than their need to achieve, perform and be successful.

When working with clients as a coach, it is useful to understand which approach they are taking to get to their goals. The coach should support and encourage their client to climb the mountain (in other words, to keep their end goal in mind) and also help them to set milestones along the way (their performance goals). Those will help them to stay motivated and to know that they are getting there.

Over my 15 years in coaching, I have developed this as the EPP model. Figure 1 illustrates the model.

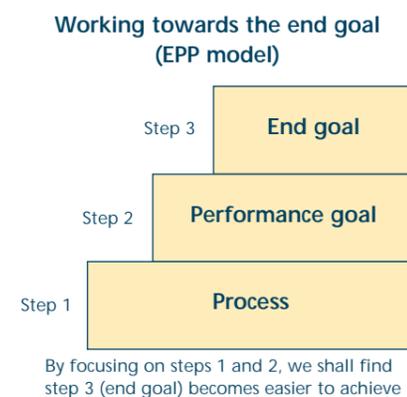


Fig. 1: The EPP model

Let's talk about the difference between end goals and performance goals for a moment. An end goal is what we want to achieve as a major objective or outcome. In most cases, there are milestones along the way that will help us achieve our ultimate objective, and we might approach the task in a particular way – the process. For example, a friend of mine has the

objective to complete a trek at the end of this year – the end goal. In order to do this, there are certain milestones she has set herself. These include regular weekend walks, dance and aerobics classes to improve her stamina. She needs to have booked the trek by the end of the summer and to have purchased certain items of clothing and so on. These are the performance goals.

The process she uses is something that works for her, and that keeps her motivated to reach each milestone and ultimately achieve her end goal. She identifies friends to walk with, she researches the best products to buy, and she talks to others who have done similar treks. All these activities help to

ensure that the journey to her destination is a rich, sensory and enjoyable experience.

As a coach, you will be invaluable to your client if you can help them to work out the milestones and encourage them to enjoy the process of achieving their goals.

Understanding language and motivation

At times we all dream about things that we might like to do. The world of fantasy is wonderful, but if we really want to achieve, we need to think about the language we use for goal setting.

As a coach you may hear clients say things like 'I wish', 'I should', 'I must' and 'I ought'. Words like these are loaded with negativity

and serve to reinforce any limiting beliefs that the client may have. They are cues for the coach to challenge in order to help the client to identify what they really do want.

It may be useful at this point to explore motivation to achieve goals. Some people are motivated towards a particular outcome, whilst others are motivated away from it. This is often described as being in pursuit of pleasure or avoiding pain. Listen to the language of people around you for a short while and you will pick up on their motivation strategy. If you hear a lot of 'I don't want', then the emphasis is away from motivation. If you hear a lot of 'I want', then the emphasis is towards motivation. Most people have a mix of the two. It is important to recognise that, to be more effective at obtaining that desired outcome, we do need to know what, specifically, it is.

Another important feature of the language we use in goal setting is the use of the present tense. Encourage clients to imagine they have already achieved their goal and ask them to describe, in the present tense, what it looks, sounds and feels like. That is a great way to reinforce their motivation to achieve it. Creating a simple anchor for this scenario will mean that they can access it at any time.

I have my own goals written down as if I had achieved them. I have posted them on the wall next to my computer. This way, if I lose focus or motivation I can simply read them in the present tense to remind myself what achieving these goals feels like to me.

There are a whole range of techniques and methods that coaches can use to help their clients to be more effective at goal setting. A few of the ones I use are listed in

Tips for effective goal setting

- 1 Document them.
- 2 Attach dates to your goals and review regularly.
- 3 Create milestones along the way – **performance goals** – and reward yourself when you achieve them.
- 4 Identify how you will know when you have achieved your goals.
- 5 Visualise yourself achieving the goal in all its sensory glory – what will it look sound, feel, smell, taste like?
- 6 Write them in the present tense – a form of affirmation.
- 7 Find people to support you along the way.
- 8 Identify the first step and take it.

the box above. You will probably have several others of your own to add to the list.

Coaching models and frameworks

In our discussion about goal setting so far, it has become clear that setting a goal is not an isolated activity. It is part of a process. Without the process, the chances of achieving the goal are reduced.

I have described the EPP model for goal setting, but there are several other frameworks that assist coaches when working with clients.

The GROW model

The GROW model, which was developed by Graham Alexander, is probably one of the most well known and used models in coaching. It is represented in a cyclical format in the model below, but in reality when coaching the process is not so rigid. We may find ourselves moving backwards and forwards across the four areas. In my opinion, GROW is a great framework for coaching. Each stage can be adapted and enhanced to meet the specific needs of the client situation.