
The image features a solid blue background. In the upper left corner, a white stick with a red flag is positioned. The rest of the page is filled with a complex white maze. The maze consists of many interconnected paths, some of which are solid lines, while others are dashed lines. The paths are irregular and winding, creating a sense of complexity and challenge.

Setting SMART mentoring goals ensures a successful learning experience for mentors and mentees.



BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

The Goal-Driven Mentoring Relationship

By Lois J. Zachary and Lory A. Fischler



Clarifying and articulating learning goals is indispensable to the success of a mentoring relationship. While some mentees come to a mentoring relationship with well-defined goals, it is more the exception than the rule. Most mentees come with a general idea about what they want to learn. That idea becomes the starting point for a mentor's assistance in the goal-setting process. >>

Moving from starter to SMARTer

"Starter goals" are the initial goals a mentee brings into a mentoring relationship. They are usually not fully developed at this point and need work to turn them into SMART mentoring goals. If they are too broad, neither the mentor nor mentee will be satisfied with the learning process, the learning outcome, or the mentoring relationship. If they are not mutually agreed upon, the mentor and mentee may be working at cross purposes to try to achieve them.



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As the mentee and mentor work together to articulate and prioritize SMART goals, the focus of the work together becomes clearer. During their second mentoring meeting, CJ asked her mentee, Roberta, what she saw as the biggest challenges facing her at work.

Roberta was caught off guard by CJ's question. She was feeling overwhelmed and frustrated by just about everything at work. It was hard to differentiate the biggest challenges from among the many she faced:

"I work at facilitating and motivating change in my department because I think it is vital to our success in achieving customer service excellence. However, many of my employees are lukewarm when it comes to change, and it is hard to feel like I am making any real progress. Our organization's culture is not as customer-focused as it should be, and there is a long history of resistance to change. I really get impatient with these folks and have had a difficult time getting people on board, especially accepting the new policies and practices that need to be implemented. Right now, no one but me seems committed to launching the effort. Part of my problem is in handling difficult people, which has always been a challenge for me. I often feel intimidated when an abrasive person confronts me. I don't seem to be able to find the right thing to say, and I don't speak up when I know I should. I am on overload and stressed. And to make matter worse, I don't get out of the office until after 7 p.m. most evenings."

CJ was more than a little curious about the issues underlying Roberta's situation. CJ knew her work was cut out for her. In reflecting in his mentoring journal after their session, CJ wrote:

"It is easy to see that Roberta's goals are all over the map. They meander and lack coherence, and there are

SMART Goal Success

When successfully articulated, a SMART goal should help you answer each of the questions below affirmatively. If you can't, it means more work is required to articulate your SMART goal.

- **Is the goal clearly future-oriented?** Dealing with the here and now leads to "to-do" lists and easily implementable tasks. Goals that are based in work over time inherently capture the optimism of future results. In Roberta's case, her two goals involve creating a plan over time.
- **Is the goal realistic?** Working toward a goal that can't be accomplished or is beyond the scope of the mentee's talent, skills, or time only leads to frustration and disengagement. Roberta should be able to accomplish both her goals, and they should fuel energy for the work ahead.
- **Will the goal be challenging for the mentee?** It is tempting to select goals that lead to quick success so that both the mentor and mentee will feel positive about their results together. The challenge is to find the balance between a challenging yet attainable goal. In Roberta's case, she has work to do to achieve her goals, and the payoff from completing them will motivate her to stay focused and committed.
- **Is this a goal concrete and specific?** When goals are too vague they are hard to turn into strategies and impossible to measure. The conversation about her initial goal of "being a better time manager" led Roberta to talk about problems with delegation and establishing a management system, which in turn helped her set concrete goals.
- **Will this goal require your mentee to make a personal investment of time, energy, and effort?** Mentors won't stay committed to the relationship if they don't see an investment of energy and effort from their mentee. SMART goals drive the work. Roberta is enthusiastic about getting started on her goals and that energizes CJ to support her.
- **Will this goal contribute to your mentee's growth and development?** If the work doesn't make an impact on the success of the mentee, then the effort from both parties will feel like a waste of time. Roberta will become a better manager by succeeding in both goals.
- **Does this goal require constructive feedback and candid conversation?** Growth goals are likely to require candid feedback and reflection. Mentors need to be frank and caring in facilitating mentee self-assessments of strengths and weaknesses. If Roberta has blind spots about her leadership skills, CJ is going to need to surface these with her in order for her to be successful.
- **Is this goal achievable within the timeframe of this relationship?** Goals that can't be achieved within a year or two can lose momentum. Select goals that can be accomplished within the agreed upon time of the commitment. In Roberta and CJ's case, the organizational commitment was a year. Both partners agreed that their two goals could be accomplished within that timeframe.
- **Will your mentee feel a sense of pride and satisfaction in accomplishing this goal?** Nothing motivates more than a sense of personal pride and satisfaction in accomplishing something. The goals that mentoring partners mutually set should bring satisfaction and pride to both. CJ and Roberta agreed they would enjoy working on and see these two goals accomplished.
- **Is this goal in your mentee's best professional and personal interest and the best interests of her organization?** If the mentor pushes for goals that the organization wants but aren't important to the mentee, the mentee will remain unmotivated. To warrant the energy and investment of the mentor as well as the mentee, goals need to be in the best interest of both mentoring partners. In Roberta's case, the organization and Roberta both benefit. Roberta will grow both professionally and personally in the accomplishment of her two goals.



many different possible goal pathways. Some seem to focus on the culture of the organization. Some focus on her inability to motivate and inspire. Still others focus around conflict aversion and skills managing difficult people. It doesn't surprise me that like many other new managers, she is doing too much herself. It doesn't appear to me that she is delegating sufficiently. And, she is certainly overwhelmed and out of balance. There is a lot for us to tackle together. It is probably going to take another conversation to get to the root cause of these issues before we can identify goals."

After their next session, they agreed to identify two goals: one that would achieve quick results so as to build Roberta's confidence, and one that would make a significant impact on her success, even if it would take more time to achieve.

The goal-setting conversation

SMART goals are specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely. Even though many variations on the exact words used for this acronym have emerged over time, they define the focus of the learning, eliminate ambiguity, and establish measures of success and a timeframe for completion.

The conversation between mentoring partners that leads to formulating a SMART goal is critical to ensuring positive results. It is essential to understand the context (the bigger picture) in which goals are set.

Working on the right goals is essential. It may take several meetings to turn a starter goal into a SMART mentoring goal. The conversation usually begins with a discussion of fairly broad statements of intent, such as Roberta's starter goals, and moves from the general to the more specific.

Roberta's SMART goals

We encourage mentors to explore two kinds of goals with their mentees: "do goals" and "be goals." "Do goals" are short term, measurable, and observable. They focus on knowledge, skills,

job functions, and performance. "Be goals," on the other hand, are often invisible, intangible, and harder to measure because they involve things such as character, internal capacity, and personal development.

Arriving at Roberta's two goals took several conversations. Roberta suggested that her first goal might be to read a book on leadership and management. Although CJ encouraged her to do that, he reminded her that reading a book wasn't a goal; it was a strategy, a means to an end.

Instead, CJ worked with Roberta to write down a summary statement of each of the key issues that surfaced in their previous meeting:

- low customer satisfaction
- employee resistance to change
- motivation and inspiration of employees
- management of difficult people
- conflict aversion
- time management
- delegation
- stress management.

CJ facilitated a reflective conversation with Roberta about each issue's impact on the organization and her role. Together, Roberta and CJ worked on turning them into SMART goals:

- Initiate and implement a highly visible customer service excellence initiative by the end of the second quarter FY 2011.
- Develop a system for managing time and people better that would get her home by 6 p.m. at least three nights a week.

How many SMART goals should a mentee have?

We recommend no more than two to three goals at a time. As mentors and mentees work together, other goals often emerge. Sometimes even though the goal is a SMART one, circumstances may have changed. You don't want to be in the position where you are working for the goal but the goal is not working for your mentee.

As Roberta began to launch the customer excellence initiative, she was

SMART Goals

- should accelerate and enhance the professional or personal development of the mentee
- can be stated in one sentence or formatted as multiple statements. Substance is more important than form. However ultimately worded, the goal should be clear, concise, specific, and comprehensive enough to capture the five requirements of a SMART goal—specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely.
- represent a challenge or a stretch for the mentee
- focus on the future development of the mentee
- are concrete and clear
- seek a quantitative or qualitative improvement that can be demonstrated or measured
- are directly linked to the question, "Why?" "Why is this goal important to your development and success?"
- require more than one strategy to achieve them.

stymied by the lack of energy and motivation of her direct reports. She and CJ agreed that she would benefit from working on inspiring and motivating her team before attempting to launch the initiative.

The bottom line is this: Begin with the end in mind. When mentees lack well-defined goals, goal setting must be the first priority, and the mentor's immediate task is to assist the mentee in clarifying and defining goals. This must be completed before the work of the relationship begins in earnest. The second priority is to keep the momentum going and to use the goals to benchmark progress and stay on track.

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