Facilitating Mentee-Driven Goal Setting

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By skillfully assisting with the goal-setting process, mentors can help mentees set their own goals and take ownership of their career development.

CHECKLIST

Being SMART About SMART Goals

☐ Identify three things you can do or say to **support** your mentee in developing SMART goals.

☐ Define specific action strategies you can leverage to help **motivate** your mentee during the goal-setting process.

☐ Create criteria to determine if your mentee's goals are **aligned** with the direction and goals of the organization.

☐ Determine how you will help your mentee **reframe** and shape starter goals into SMART goals.

☐ Put a process in place to evaluate how (and if) you are on track and using your **time** well.

Setting SMART—specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and timely—learning goals is one of the most daunting challenges mentors and mentees face.

Although both mentor and mentee must play active roles in the goal-setting process, the responsibility for facilitating it lies with the mentor. The mentor's role is to ensure that the mentee's goals fit within the framework of workplace reality, as well as the mentee's capability and talent. Goal setting should be driven by the mentee.

Why it works

To achieve optimal results, mentors must be SMART in what they do and how they go about facilitating the process of formulating mentee-driven SMART goals. When the mentee sits back and waits for a mentor to drive the goal-setting process, the mentee develops little ownership of the goals, and even the energy for achieving them dissipates.

Thus, the mentor ends up providing the relationship's energy and momentum, and pushing the mentee uphill in the goal-setting process. Before long, the mentor's energy also is depleted.

The goal is to create a reciprocal learning relationship in which mentor and mentee work collaboratively to achieve the mentee's goals. The mentor doesn't drive the process but facilitates it. There is a huge difference in the behaviors required to do this effectively.

Guidelines

Mentors always can get quick results by employing familiar managerial behaviors: telling, giving information, being the expert, providing solutions, and generally showing how smart they are and demonstrating why they are in a senior position.

However, by drawing on a different set of facilitating behaviors, mentors can advance a mentee's growth and development in a way that leaves the ultimate responsibility for that growth and development where it belongs, with the mentee. There are five such behaviors.

Supporting. Listen for clues about what it is like to walk in the mentee's shoes so you can understand how the learning goal relates to her in her context. Affirm the mentee's strengths, contributions, and talents. Create a safe space for the mentee to identify areas of weakness, challenge, and vulnerability.

Facilitating questions:
- What is going on right now in your workplace setting?
- What are some of the problems and challenges you and your team are facing?
- What is your strongest attribute?
- Where do you see your challenges?
- What has been holding you back?

Motivating. Focus on the mentee's future possibilities by sharing your personal experiences and stories of successful people. Model the way; it will set a high standard for achievement. To build the mentee's confidence, express positive expectations. Offer a roadmap for the future.

Facilitating questions:
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What do believe you need to do or learn to get there?
- What skills and talents are you underusing?

Aligning. Help the mentee align learning goals with his personal values and the organizational direction. Make sure that the goal really matters to him by focusing more on the why than how. Leverage organizational goals with the work the mentee is doing in the present.

Facilitating questions:
- How can you make a bigger impact in our organization?
- Why is this goal important to your future development?
- How is this goal going to contribute to your development?

Reframing. Suggest alternative ways of looking at problems, possibilities, and situations. Ask thought-provoking, deep questions. Set up dichotomies. Sharpen the focus.

Facilitating questions:
- What would it be like to step out of your comfort zone?
- What else might you try?
- What is the most important goal you want to achieve this year?

Taking time to talk about time. Determine what goals can be accomplished within the timeframe of the relationship. Make sure the goal is a worthy investment of your time and your mentee's time.

Facilitating questions:
- Are we on the right path?

- Is this the goal we ought to be working on right now?
- Is the timeframe we've set realistic for accomplishing the goal?
- What process can we put in place that would help us stay on track?

Results

Mentors who are SMART about facilitating the goal-setting process move their mentee's thinking to a different, deeper place of insight and truly create a collaborative learning experience from beginning to end.

One mentor reports, "I focus on framing our discussion so that I am not giving her the answers, but I am getting her to reflect on her thinking, and asking her questions that drive insights."

The mentee reports, "You think and process ideas, and articulate them back to your mentor. By asking me questions, he provides a sounding board that helps me get it by myself. Even as I explain it to him, I hear the answer in my head."

Setting SMART goals is critical for mentoring to be successful. It is a collaborative process facilitated, in large part, by the mentor. When a mentor is SMART about SMART goals, a process unfolds that provides energy, direction, and momentum for completion. It promotes the mentee's ownership

RESOURCES

Lois Zachary, "Begin With the End in Mind: The Goal-Driven Relationship." *T+D,* January 2010.
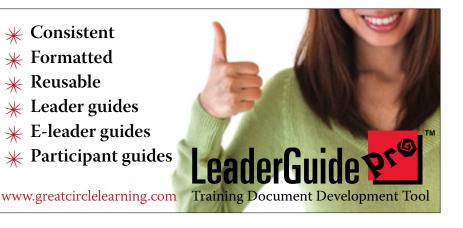
Lois Zachary, *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Mentoring Relationships,* 2nd edition. Jossey Bass, 2012.

Lois Zachary and Lory Fischler, *Strategies and Checklists for Mentors: Mentoring Excellence Toolkit #1.* Jossey Bass, 2012.

Lois Zachary and Lory Fischler, *Feedback and Facilitation for Mentors: Mentoring Excellence Toolkit #2.* Jossey Bass, 2012.

and investment in her growth and development. It doesn't get any better than that.

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