

# Tools and techniques for mentors

## Setting goals



Goals are statements of WHAT needs to be achieved, and the time frame in which they need to be achieved; they do not say HOW to achieve them.

Mentoring can help your mentee clarify their personal goals or you may need to clarify the goals for the mentoring process itself. This may be a good place to start the mentoring process together.

Think about the following questions:

1. What are your mentee's goals for the mentoring process?
2. What is your timescale?
3. How will you know when you have achieved them?

## Setting SMARTER goals



Before people can be expected to achieve goals, they need to know specifically what needs to be achieved and when it needs to be achieved. Most people are more motivated when they know what they must do to succeed. Therefore a key to effective performance is to set clearly defined goals. For example: 'Get a relevant promotion' is not a clearly defined goal, it is vague.

What exactly does 'relevant' mean? By when does this promotion need to be completed?

A more clearly defined goal would be: 'Get a promotion to senior manager within the next 18 months'. This goal clearly states what must be achieved.

Try asking yourself the following question for each goal that you and your mentee set:

'If this was my goal, would I be able to clearly demonstrate that I had achieved it?'

If you are in any doubt about how it could be demonstrated that you had achieved it, the goal is probably not clear enough. Clearly defined goals should meet five criteria. They should be SMART goals:

Using these guidelines leads to fair, clear and equitable goals.

**Specific** The goal should be very specific about what needs to be achieved. Vagueness can cause problems later when measuring performance. For example, how would you measure success with the following goal:

Improve my time management

Not only that, but if it was your goal, would you know exactly what is required of you? Generally, if goals are measurable, time-bound, within influence, and realistic, they are also understandable. However, it's important to check for understanding when setting goals so there will be no question later about what's to be achieved.

## Measurable

For goals to be measurable, it is usually necessary to assign numbers or other criteria to them.

**Compare:** Respond to 100% of IT support calls.

**To:** Return IT support calls.

In the first example there's no question about what is expected. That's not the case with the second. It is open to interpretation and doesn't really define the goal.

Because vague goals are confusing, they are less likely to be met. Individual goals are usually measured in terms of quality, quantity, cost and timeliness. Here are some examples of how these measurements can be applied to individual goals:

- Achieve distinction in professional qualification. (Quality)
- Write 3 job applications per week. (Quantity)
- Stay within 10 % of my budget. (Cost)
- Secure 1 job interview per month. (Timeliness)

## Achievable

If your mentee doesn't think they can reach their goals, they might become frustrated and discouraged. Whilst most people value challenge and will stretch to meet high expectations others might develop a 'why bother?' attitude and actually achieve less.

In a similar way, expectations shouldn't be set so low that your mentee experiences little challenge. When challenge is lacking, people often lose motivation, and the job doesn't get done. For these reasons it is essential that you and your mentee communicate openly and honestly and that you play a role in helping your mentee set their goals.

This approach increases the likelihood that challenging yet reasonable goals will be identified. Goals should be based on acceptable levels of performance for your mentee's ability. A high achiever can be motivated, challenged, and provided opportunities to perform at a higher-than-acceptable level. For a lower achiever the focus needs to be on goals that will help to strengthen weak areas.

## Realistic

It is reasonable to expect your mentee to set goals only in areas in which they have some influence and not ones that can be derailed completely by factors beyond their control.

### **Time-Bound**

A goal should always include a time frame. Time frames can be stated in terms such as “per minute” or “per year,” or they can be deadlines, such as “by December 1st”. For example, “Respond to 100% of IT support enquiries within 24 hours of receipt”.

*Think about the following questions:*

1. *How SMART are your mentee's goals for the mentoring process?*
2. *Do they need to be more specific?*

## Are you an active or a passive listener?

### **Active listening**

A process that requires use of energy - it's an active process, not a passive one. It requires mental and physical effort.

Mentally, active listening involves processing the information that you receive so that you give the most appropriate response.

Physically, active listening involves showing the other person that you are listening.

This definition points us to two dominant components of active listening:

1. The external component - the verbal and non-verbal behaviours that illustrate active listening
2. The internal component - the mental side of active listening; what's going on inside your head!

The external component of active listening refers to our behaviours. These behaviours will be either:

- things that we do, our actions (our non-verbal behaviour), or
- things that we say and the way that we say them (our verbal behaviour)

A key purpose of these behaviours is to demonstrate to the speaker that we are listening.

Think of a time when you could see that someone had absolutely no interest in what was being said. Can you remember the body language and verbal clues that you observed?

Conversely, can you remember a time when someone was giving you his/her complete attention, hanging on your every word? Again, can you remember the verbal and non-verbal signs that you observed?

Non-verbal clues that are important include:

- eye contact
- **appropriate facial expression**
- posture (open, facing the speaker and leaning forward)
- **nodding of head**
- tilt of head
- **possibly ready to make notes**
- possibly mirroring/matching the body language of the speaker

Verbal clues that are important include:

- use of silence and pause before responding

- **no interrupting**
- questions to expand, to clarify or confirm understanding
- **acknowledging/reacting words and noises**
- accurate and appropriate information in the response
- **summarising or paraphrasing what has been said**

Now let's consider the second major component of active listening - the internal component - the mind. There is a massive difference between hearing and listening - hearing requires use of your ears; listening requires that you use your mind.

Active listening demands that we process the information that comes our way - and that we do not merely let the words enter our head.

Consequently, when we are actively listening, we are listening to more than just words. We are also receiving a range of information about the content and the speaker and we should be trying to evaluate this continuously.

What extra information does the speaker's non-verbal and verbal delivery communicate to us?

- feelings and emotions
- **intentions**
- the thought process of the speaker
- **personality and attitude**
- the true meaning of the speech, rather than the literal meaning - is he/she telling the truth
- **what is not said may be revealing**

So listening is to hear and then to process the information - it is a complex process involving interpretation and understanding.

This means that, instead of following the normal pattern of "listen, then respond" adopted by many people, we should be working with a different pattern - one with the following four steps of active listening:

1. Listen
2. Process
3. Understand
4. Respond

This illustrates our dominant priority when actively listening - we listen first to understand, not to respond.

*Think about the following questions:*

- 1. Are you an active listener?*
- 2. How you can you become a more active listener?*

## SWOT analysis

This is a useful technique for understanding strengths and weaknesses and identifying opportunities and threats. This framework is often used in business, but can be a useful tool for your mentee to use to analyse themselves.

### Strengths

- What are your mentee's strengths? For example, educational qualifications, professional certification/affiliation, work experience, technical knowledge of your field, personal characteristics, specific transferable skills.
- What advantages does your mentee have over other job applicants?
- What does your mentee do better than anyone else?

### Weaknesses

- What are your mentee's weaknesses? For example, poor interview skills, weak job hunting skills, lack of work experience.
- What could your mentee improve?

### Opportunities

- What good opportunities can your mentee spot?
- What interesting trends is your mentee aware of? (changes in technology, markets, government policy, social patterns, population profiles and lifestyle changes)

### Threats

- What obstacles do your mentee face?
- What are other job applicants doing?

- Could any of your mentee's weaknesses seriously threaten their career?

A SWOT analysis can form the the basis for a discussion in your mentoring session.

*Think about the following questions:*

1. *What are your mentee's Strengths?*
2. *What are your mentee's Weaknesses?*
3. *Where are your mentee's Opportunities?*
4. *Where are your mentee's Threats?*

## The G-STAR model

This is a particularly useful technique in mentoring. Use it to explore a particular issue with your mentee – it can often be a fast track to the real answers you are looking for.

### **What are your mentee's GOALS?**

- What are your mentee's goals for today's discussion?
- What will give your mentee the most value from today's session?
- Do they have control over this issue?
- When do they need to achieve this goal by?

### **What SITUATION is your mentee facing?**

- How do they feel about the situation?
- How can they describe the situation?
- What do they know about the current situation?
- What do they not know about the current situation?

### **What is your mentee's THINKING at this time?**

- What options have they considered about the situation?
- What underlying assumptions are they making?
- Think how others would solve this problem.

- Think about how your mentee will measure their success.

What **ACTIONS** are they considering?

- What do they need to do first?
- By when do they need to have this done?
- In what sequence will they do these tasks?
- Can you think of anything that may disrupt their actions?

What **RESULTS** do you expect your mentee to achieve?

- Are the results realistic?
- Have they considered other outcomes?
- What contingencies can they put in place?
- What are the consequences of not achieving these results?

*Think about the following questions:*

1. *What are your mentee's goals?*
2. *What situation is your mentee facing?*
3. *What is your mentee's thinking at this time?*
4. *What actions are your mentee considering?*
5. *What results do you expect your mentee to achieve?*

## Ending the mentoring relationship



There will come a time when the mentoring relationship will begin to draw to an end. At this point you must both 'let go' so that you can maintain your independence. It will then become your responsibility to put what you have learned into practice. Although the two of you will probably continue to have some form of interaction, it should be on a more casual basis, where you consider each other as equals.

Here are some tips to help you end your mentoring relationship successfully:

- **Fix a date for your final discussion.** Have a chat with your mentee and decide on a date. Remind each other of the date of the final session in your penultimate discussion so that you can prepare for it. You might like to look at ways you can continue your learning.
- **Celebrate Your Success.** Have a look at the goals you set when you first met. You can pat yourselves on the back when you see how far you have come.
- **Say Goodbye.** Think of how you can end the session on a positive note so it's not awkward. You could talk about the thing you most enjoyed, what you'll remember most or the most important things you've both learned.

What have you learnt about tools and techniques for mentoring?

To complete this course, please ask yourself:

What have I learnt?

How can I apply it?

What do I need to do next?