How Do We Set Achievable Goals?

Mentoring is an investment that should be expected to produce a return for all concerned. When people have clear goals their efforts are more likely to produce desired results. This section provides some suggestions for setting and achieving goals.

TYPES OF MENTORING GOALS
Early discussions should focus on what the mentee wants from the mentoring process.

Broad goals may include:
- finding a role model in a particular capacity
- getting the “big picture”, strategic thinking
- expanding networks and broaden horizons
- raising their profile
- getting feedback on performance and skills
- developing new skills
- setting career goals and strategies for achieving them
- advice on career paths/options
- developing better work/life balance

Setting goals is relatively easy, achieving them requires effort. Australian research (Burns, 1997) suggests that even when people have the necessary resources and have self-selected learning objectives, over 80% do not achieve their goal.

BARRIERS TO GOAL ACHIEVEMENT
Common barriers to goal achievement include:
- Having too many goals
- Setting the wrong goal
- Lack of persistence, giving up
- Lack of commitment, not wanting it enough
- Habits or resistance to change
- Fear of failure (or success) therefore never beginning
- Inability to move out of the comfort zone
- Lack of strategies, don’t know how to do it
- Don’t believe it is possible for them

ACHIEVABLE GOALS
Setting goals that will not be achieved not only sets a person up for disappointment; it can build a self-image of failure and worthlessness.

Plan for goal accomplishment using this model:
- Action/outcome
- Clarity
- Help
- Implementation Plan
- Environment
- Values
- Evidence

ACTION/OUTCOME
It is useful to make a distinction between actions and outcomes. Actions are what you do, outcomes are what you get as a result. You need to set goals in terms of both the outcome desired and the actions necessary to produce the result.

CLARITY
Getting clear about the gap between what is desired and the current reality is essential so that ways of making a change can be explored. Mentors help the mentee get clear about their goals.

In some circumstances, particularly in times of heightened stress, perspectives can narrow, people become ‘stuck’, resulting in mental and emotional tunnel vision. An effective mentor draws the mentee back to the broader perspective and focuses on why the goal is important.

HELP
The mentor may assist the mentee in achieving their goals by linking them to appropriate networks or resources. It is important to build high levels of trust within the mentoring relationship to ensure that the mentee feels confident in asking for help when required.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
Having decided upon a specific goal/s, the mentor uses a range of techniques and questioning styles to stimulate the mentee to generate options and alternative pathways towards the desired goal. They provide space and time to think creatively and ensure that the mentee ‘owns’ the options generated.

The mentee is encouraged to develop a detailed action plan in writing. Good mentors are very rigorous and gain commitment from the mentee for action with concrete time lines. A process for monitoring progress and ensuring commitment to the action plan should be incorporated.
ENVIRONMENT

Here the mentor assists the mentee to consider factors in their work, personal life or the general environment which may support or inhibit the achievement of this goal.

For example, if the mentee seeks promotion, their performance track record may be a supporting factor but a lack of promotional opportunities may be an inhibitor. The mentee may want to list supporting and inhibiting factors so that strategies for building on the positives and minimising the negatives can be pursued.

VALUES

Since values are the major source of personal motivation, the goal should be consistent with the mentee’s sense of what is important in life and work.

It should also be pointed out that support might not be forthcoming from the organisation or other people whose values may conflict with the mentee’s.

EVIDENCE

Here the mentor and mentee agree on how success will be measured and reviewed.

Ensuring that the mentee takes ownership for reviewing progress and actions taken throughout the mentoring process helps avoid dependency and enables both parties to know when to end the partnership.

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