

Goal-Setting Tips for Coaches

By Tony Stoltzfus

Want to get more effective at setting your coaching objectives? Below are five top goal-setting tips for coaches:

1. Focus on the Destination

It's easy to make setting a growth goal too complicated. *Just establish where you are going and don't worry yet about how you are going to get there.* Here's an analogy: a client is in Chicago and wants to take her family on vacation. When you are making the goal statement, all you have to establish is the deadline and the destination: whether she is going to New York or Los Angeles, and when she'll get there. You don't need to know whether she is driving or flying, how much the trip will cost, or how many pieces of luggage they need. Leave the action plan for later.

2. Major in Motivation.

The best goal is the one the client is most motivated to work on. The area where there is the largest gap between the client's aspirations and reality is usually where there is the most motivation to change. Discomfort or dissatisfaction are often reliable indicators of high motivation. Another thing to look for is a recent teachable moment. For instance, a person might ignore her health for years, but when a close friend the same age dies from a heart attack, suddenly the motivation to exercise skyrockets. A client with a great reason to change is a client who is ready to make great changes.

3. Start with One Goal

Sometimes a new client will be all fired up about working on three or four things at once. Unless the person has an unusual amount of time available, I request that we start with a single growth goal. Setting your expectations a little low and then increasing them is much better than placing the bar too high and starting off with a failure. The pattern you want to establish with your clients is that *every time we set a goal we meet it.*

4. Be Concise

Most of us ramble, especially when we are talking about things we haven't fully thought through before. The problem is, the best goal statements are concise and to the point—preferably a single sentence. Often the first time you ask a client to state his goal, you'll get something like this:

“Well, the thing that has been bothering me is that I just don't have that many years of work left. I'm 54, and until now I haven't really focused on getting ready for retirement. The clock is ticking, and the sound is starting to echo around inside my head. We've got some money saved up, and we've got the house, but we've starting getting the bills from two kids who are in college. We've promised to help them, but I don't know where the money is going to come from. So all of the sudden I'm thinking a lot more about our financial future...”

Your job as a coach is to help this person turn his jumbled thoughts into a clearly expressed goal. As the client talks, I jot down the main points he's focusing on. Once he's gotten everything out on the table, I'll list the key ideas and then ask him to state the goal in one sentence: "You mentioned that this year you want to work on developing a budget to account for college expenses, creating a long-term financial plan and saving for retirement. Can you roll those three things into a one-sentence goal statement?" I'm careful to let the client state the growth goal whenever possible. This ensures that it is truly his goal and that he fully owns it.

5. Change Horses in Midstream

In my experience, it is very common in the third or fourth or fifth appointment for a new client to want to change the original growth goal to something completely different. This pattern is deeply disturbing to beginning coaches. The knee-jerk reaction is to treat it as a betrayal: "But we agreed we were going to work on your prayer life! Let's go back to our original coaching covenant and review what you decided to focus on..."

However, in most cases this shouldn't be a blow: it's actually a confirmation that the coaching process is working. Probably one of two things is happening. It may be that your client was not quite ready to really open up to you at first. But now that you've gotten to know each other, the client feels safe enough to work on something much more important than what was first mentioned. That's a good sign! The second common scenario is that a God-initiated set of circumstances has really gotten your client's attention, and now he or she wants to use the coaching relationship as a primary place to respond to what God is doing. That's a positive development as well.

Remember, coaching is about believing in people. If your clients want to change growth goals, the default setting for a coach is to believe that those individuals know what they are doing and that this is a great choice. When changes like this upset us, it may indicate that our default setting is to suspect the motives of others and believe that they don't know how to follow through with their commitments. As Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Our instinctive responses reveal what we really believe about people!

*Adapted from the Book, [Leadership Coaching](#), by Tony Stoltzfus
Learn more at www.CoachingPastors.com*