Setting goals in mentoring: career, developmental, enabling and emotional goals

© David Clutterbuck, 2014

Prof David Clutterbuck
Coaching and Mentoring International Ltd
Woodlands, Tollgate,
Maidenhead,
Berks, UK. SL6 4LJ

www.coachingandmentoringinternational.org
e-mail: info@coachingandmentoringinternational.org
Company registration number : 08158710

Setting Goals in mentoring: career, developmental, enabling and emotional goals

Having a sense of purpose for the mentoring relationship is essential for focusing the conversations and for maintaining momentum. However, having a very specific goal at the beginning is not necessarily helpful – indeed, it can be harmful! The reasons for this are:

- Mentees and coachees often bring goals, which are imposed on them, rather than their own
- Goals in coaching and mentoring evolve and change as the person gains greater understanding of themselves and their context
- People often use coaching and mentoring to work out what their goals really are (and then they may or may not need further help to manage these)

Focusing too early on a specific goal therefore distracts the mentee or coachee from what is really important for them and wastes a lot of time and energy. Worse, it may lead them to spend a lot of energy on something, to which they are not committed.

Instead of trying to pin the learner down immediately to a specific goal, to which he or she may or may not be committed, the effective coach/mentor exploration from a much wider horizon. Key areas of conversation may include:

Identity
- Who are you? (Not what do you do?)
- Who do you want to become?
- How does what you do now align with who you aspire to be?
- What prevents you from being the person you aspire to be?
- Who/what supports you in being the person you aspire to be?

Values
- What do you care about?
- Why is this important to you?
- What difference do you want to make and why?

Resources
- How well supported are you (at work and/or at home)?
- Who is in your developmental network?
- How does this affect your sense of the possible?
- What resources would enable you to be more effective in your work and non-work roles?

Purpose
- What do you want to contribute? (other-directed)
- What do you want to achieve for yourself? (self-directed)
- What's the point of these?

- What achievements would give you great satisfaction to look back on in 10 or 20 years?
- What's wrong with the status quo?

Where the coachee or mentee does come to the relationship with a pre-determined goal, it may be necessary to back-track and fill in the deeper level of understanding associated with the emergent process. In doing so, the coachee or mentee may find that the goals he or she has enunciated are more complex than previously thought, and have implications of which he or she was not consciously aware. They may also come to question the importance that they have attached to the goal.

This re-examination is fundamental to the reflective process and will ideally continue throughout the relationship. Testing the learner's current action and issues against their broader goals and sense of purpose helps to widen their attentiveness to factors, which help and hinder their goal achievement. At the same time, however, as learners acquire a greater understanding of themselves, their views on what they want to achieve and who they want to become, are likely to evolve. This evolution is especially likely if the coaching or mentoring process leads to a shift in the way they think i.e. if they take a further cognitive step in terms of personal maturity.

Useful questions to apply when the learner articulates a pre-determined goal include:

- Why *this* goal? (What need does it address for you?)
- Why now?
- Is this truly your goal or is it partly or mainly someone else's?
- Is the goal a sub-set of a larger goal? Or is it really a number of connected goals?
- What will achieving this goal replace? (i.e. what will you have to stop doing to achieve it or once you have achieved it?)