

Build a Clearer Goal

What is this?	A way to help someone define their goal or objective more clearly.
What does it do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explores the motivation behind someone's goal. • Identifies situations or barriers that might stop them from reaching their goal. • Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increases their motivation towards their goal, or - helps them realize they might want something else instead. • Agrees immediate actions related to the goal.
When might I use it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During initial coaching sessions, when discussing what goals the coachee wants to work on. • Any time that someone seems to have a vague goal or 'wish', e.g. 'I wish I had a better job'. • Parts of it may also be used in isolation, e.g. some questions work well on their own in general conversation.

General guidance

The stages that follow deal with aspects of the goal that are useful to explore and discuss. These aspects can be covered in the order in which you find them here, or you can change that if you need to. It's more important to create a conversation that flows naturally. The best way to learn the parts of the conversation is to write a checklist, i.e. make a note of the headings, then tick each one when you've covered it. You'll soon remember them and be able to hold the conversation naturally without the checklist.

Some stages might be covered quickly, while others require further discussion. For example, someone might know exactly what they want, but need help understanding why they want it. The coaching questions are optional; simply use the questions that work for you and the situation you are discussing. Remain flexible, e.g. if the person changes their mind about what they want, go back a few steps to create a clear view of the revised goal.

1. State the goal in positive terms

State the goal stated in terms of what the individual wants, rather than what they don't want, for example:

- What they don't want: 'Stop losing my temper so often, don't be so stressed, not be so easily annoyed'
- What they *do* want: 'Keep calm and relaxed in difficult situations,' maintain an even temper, be more relaxed around work issues generally'



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Coaching questions – encourage positive terms

- 'What is it you actually do want?'
- 'What do you want?'
- 'What would you rather have or be true?'

If they do keep describing what they don't want, try:

- 'I can hear what you don't want, and I'm interested – what is it that you do want?'
- 'What do you want instead?'

2. Get specific! What, where, when, with whom?

To be super clear about their goal, we build detail. For example, 'I want more energy' is too vague.

We need to understand when, where and with whom, e.g. 'I want more energy to be able to play sports with my kids after work'. If there's a timescale involved, find out what that is, e.g. by the holidays.

Coaching questions – be specific

- 'When do you want more energy specifically?'
- 'What does having more energy mean to you?'
- 'When might you not need more energy?'

Occasionally you might want to gently challenge someone, either to improve their goal, or their level of commitment. Please use care and judge wisely; the person will normally know what constitutes a stretch for them. Sometimes a simple question will identify whether the goal is challenging enough, e.g. 'How much of a challenge is that for you?' Remember to focus on what *they* want and not what *you* think would be good, e.g. 'Wouldn't more energy help you to play sports with your kids at the weekend?'

3. Use their imagination to pull it closer

Using other senses, e.g. sight, sound, etc. helps the individual to create images or ways of representing the goal, to enable them to understand the goal more easily. It is even more powerful to ask these questions from a position of assuming they already have the goal.

Coaching questions – pull it closer

- 'How will you know when you have your dream job?'
- 'Imagine you have your dream job – what do you feel like?'
- 'How are things different now that you have your dream job?'
- 'How does this affect the way you look?'
- 'What are you saying to yourself now that you have this dream job?'
- 'So, imagine you wake up tomorrow and you have this dream job – describe to me, what is that like?'



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These previous questions can help you spot ‘something missing’, e.g. they don’t seem as thrilled as you expected. Their response might be a prompt for you to recheck that they do actually want what they say or seek to understand their hesitation.

4. Check their power to influence

A goal is more easily reached when it is within the natural influence of the individual who wants it. For example, I can’t get my boss or partner to stop acting stressed around me, but I can have the goal of responding in a relaxed, resourceful way to their behaviour. I can control my own actions – not those of others. I can’t have a goal for someone else. Also, when someone else has a goal for me, I need to want it as well in order to be really motivated to make it happen. So, we need to discuss the goal in a way which establishes a clear responsibility, or influence, over the goal.

Coaching questions – check influence

- ‘How much influence do you have over this?’
- ‘Are you responsible for making your goal happen?’
- ‘What can you do to achieve it?’
- ‘Is it within your power to influence this?’
- ‘Who else wants this for you?’

5. Check that the goal is in balance

We want to make sure that it’s okay for the individual to have this goal, in relation to the rest of their life. For example, if someone wants to travel more with their job and they have young children, they need to look at the effect of travel upon their home life. By exploring the impact of their goal on other situations, we work to maintain balance. We are also respecting other parts of their life, relationships and circumstances around them, by considering any knock-on effects elsewhere.

Coaching questions – check balance

- ‘What are the wider effects/consequences? of reaching this goal/making this happen?’
- ‘Are there any negative consequences of having this?’
- ‘How would having this affect your home life (or your family, or your friends)?’
- ‘How does this affect other people at work?’
- ‘How does this affect other things which are important to you?’

6. Increase motivation

Here we explore someone’s basic values and understand their goal in relation to those. For example, if variety and challenge are important to you, you may notice that it doesn’t ‘feel good’ to imagine doing exactly the same job for the next three years. However, if security and stability are more important, you might feel that three years as perfect. Here we also identify potential barriers, (internal or external), in order to shift those barriers.



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Coaching questions – increase motivation

- 'What would achieving this do for you?'
- 'What higher purpose does this fulfil?'
- 'If you have this, what sort of person will that make you?'
- 'What else will you get, if you have this?'
- 'What is stopping you from having this?'
- 'What might stop you from having this?'
- 'As you think about the journey towards this – what might stand in your way?'
- 'If you could have this right now – would you take it?'

That last question works with people's gut instinct. Ask someone who says they want to quit smoking, 'If I could make you a non-smoker right now – would you let me?' If they hesitate, that's often because they have doubt. Once you identify the doubt, you can explore the cause.

7. Identify action – do it now!

This check identifies someone's next logical action in relation achieving their goal. Here we move from understanding what the goal is and what that means, toward what someone needs to do to achieve it. For example, 'I want to study for my degree' becomes 'I'm going to call three colleges to get their current syllabus'. You may choose to support the individual further by gaining a more formal agreement to taking this action, e.g. which colleges, by when – and agree to check in later to hear how they've progressed.

Coaching questions – identify action

- 'What can you do to achieve this goal?'
- 'What is the next/first step for you now?'
- 'What's the next logical thing you would do to achieve this?'
- 'What one (or two, or three) thing(s) could you be doing right now which would have tremendous impact on your progress towards this goal?'

Summary

When you help someone consider different perspectives on their goals, you help them to feel clearer, optimistic and perhaps more determined or motivated as a result. When we strengthen their sense of relatedness to their goal, we increase the likelihood of them attaining it. Try the clarification process for yourself, to see if this is true for you.

Alternatively, they might have discarded the original goal completely, having realized that it wasn't something that they really wanted or would benefit from. In either instance, you now know more about the person's thinking and can support them more effectively.



Additional support & reading, by Julie Starr

- The Coaching Manual, The definitive guide to the process and principles of personal coaching, (Pearson Education)
- Brilliant Coaching, How to be a brilliant coach in your workplace, (Pearson Education)
- The Mentoring Manual, Your step by step guide to being a better mentor, (Pearson Education)

For additional information and free downloads, check out www.starrcoaching.co.uk

