

Module 5 - Getting S.M.A.R.T. about Goals

Sometime ago I was talking to a teenager and asked, “What goals do you have for your life?”

She told me, “I have lots of goals for my life.”

“Okay, let’s clarify that: a goal is something that you’re actually taking steps to accomplish. A dream is a great idea for your life, but no progress has been made towards it to realize it.”

She said, “Oh, in that case, I don’t have any goals. I just have dreams.”

Setting a goal is making a choice to actually putting effort and determined steps towards realizing that dream. It is the end of all the steps you are taking.

In the coaching relationship, the client sets the goals. As soon as the client sets a goal, the wheels go in motion. Effort and even pain begins to have a purpose. Options get narrowed as sacrifices are made and steps are taken.

For goals to be reached there must be clarity and specific steps taken. One of the most well-known models of goal setting is called S.M.A.R.T.

As we go through the process of defining S.M.A.R.T. Goals, we’ll use some examples of what is a practical goal and what is impractical.

S – Specific

A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. Often you can just ask the 6 “W” questions to get the response nailed down to be more specific:

1. Who: Who is involved?
2. What: What do I want to accomplish?
3. Where: Identify a location.
4. When: Establish a time frame.
5. Which: Identify requirements and constraints.
6. Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal.

Let’s take a look at an example:

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“I would like to lose weight and get in shape.”

The problem with this goal is that it is vague and may actually be the combination of two goals.

“I would like to lose 15 lbs.”

This is much more specific.

“I would like to lose 15 lbs between now and my cousin’s wedding on July 15.”

This has even greater specificity. We have the exact weight and we have a date by when we would like it completed.

M – Measurable

Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set.

When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued effort required to reach your goal.

The biggest thing that this is going to provide is another “M” word – Motivation. As dates are being set and marks are being met, progress is going to create motivation. And while we’re at it, one more “M” word – Momentum.

“It is 4 months until my cousin’s wedding. I plan to lose 4 lbs each month for the first 3 months and 3 more lbs the final month before my cousin’s wedding.”

A - Attainable

When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. You begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals.

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Let's switch from the weight loss goal since it does seem attainable to something a little different.

"I want to reconcile my relationship with my estranged wife."

That may not be attainable depending on what's going on in the situation. There are a number of factors involved in this.

"I want to reconcile my attitude and actions towards my estranged wife whether we are ever together again or not."

We need to be more specific on this one, but it is attainable because it is the husband's goal, and he can absolutely choose the way he relates to her.

Some other "A" characteristics:

- agreed upon
- achievable
- acceptable
- action-oriented

R – Realistic

To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing *and* able to work. A goal can be both high and realistic; you are the only one who can decide just how high your goal should be. But be sure that every goal represents substantial progress.

A high goal is frequently easier to reach than a low one because a low goal exerts low motivational force. Some of the hardest jobs you ever accomplished actually seem easy simply because they were a labor of love.

"I would like to turn my business into a multi-million dollar company in 12 months." It's specific, but it may not be realistic depending on a number of factors.

T - Time-Specific

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A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it there's no sense of urgency. "Someday" won't work. But if you anchor it within a timeframe, "by May 1st", then you've begun putting things into motion to begin working on the goal.

Your goal is probably realistic if you truly *believe* that it can be accomplished. Additional ways to know if your goal is realistic is to determine if you have accomplished anything similar in the past or ask yourself what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this goal.

With every goal, we ask: "Is there enough time to achieve this goal?"