

Process for Goal-Setting and the Goals Conversation

The following is adapted from *The Art of Coaching (2013)* section on *Ten Steps to Developing a Work Plan* (pp. 122-137) and focuses specifically on the development of goals and the initial goals conversation.

Whether you are a leader or coach, this process helps you and your client develop meaningful goals to support one's practice, and ultimately, allow people to reflect upon what will serve students at their best.

The most effective goals are those that focus on a *clear change in practice*. It's helpful to focus on an instructional or leadership practice that can be measured precisely.

Developing SMARTE Goals

In order for a goal to be an effective tool for someone's transformation, the goal needs to be a good goal—a "SMART" goal. Jan O'Neill and Anne Conzemius's (2006) book *The Power of SMART Goals*, is an essential resource for coaches and leaders. While the term SMART goal has been around for a long time, these authors define the term as STRATEGIC and SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ATTAINABLE, RESULTS-BASED, and TIME-BOUND. Some organizations have added an E to represent EQUITABLE, thus the SMARTE goal:

- **Strategic and Specific:** A **strategic** goal is aligned, when possible, to larger efforts (a school or district's goals). It's also one that, if reached, will make a significant difference to students. A **specific** goal is focused, narrow, and targeted. The more specific, the better (e.g. I will teach students how to summarize nonfiction texts; I will visit my direct reports' classrooms twice a semester and offer feedback using our school's classroom observation protocol). It is essential that the goal be articulated as a *change in teacher or administrator practice*—not as an improvement in student learning.
- **Measurable:** A measurable goal is critical. When writing a measurable goal, be sure not to use any adjectives or adverbs as descriptors—those words create judgment-and-opinion-based goals, and fact-based goals will be much more helpful.
- **Attainable:** Goals need to motivate and make us stretch, but they also need to be attainable. Coaches and supervisors need to ascertain their client's zone of proximal development. It's also important for the coach or supervisor to understand the dimensions of the gap between where the client is in a strategic area of practice and where they want to get to.
- **Results-Based:** A results-based goal compels us to explore the impact the goal could have. This is where we think about the results of meeting the goal. A results-based goal means something to children, it can't be accomplished without teacher learning, and it is motivating.
- **Time-Bound:** A time-bound goal is framed within a specific time period. A time frame builds accountability and commitment. It helps us determine exactly what we need to do in order to be successful.
- **Equitable:** An equitable goal is one that addresses the needs of students who are not succeeding, whose needs are not being met, or who traditionally have been outside the sphere of success. The purpose of including this element in the goal is to bring focus and awareness to students who need additional support.

Preparation for the Conversation

Creating goals is done in collaboration with the client. Like all coaching conversations, it is also an opportunity to coach and continue building trust, and it helps to prepare beforehand:

- **For you:** The [Coaching Session Planning Tool](#) allows you to anticipate potential needs, outcomes, coaching stances, and how you want to show up to the conversation.
- **For the client:** provide your client with an overview of SMARTER goals and ask them to think about two goals that feel most pressing and that will lead to a change in practice. These goals will be further honed and refined in the conversation

The Goals Conversation

- Allow the client to lead with potential goals and share why/how they landed on these goals. As you engage the conversation, you'll want to keep your focus on how these goals lead to a change in practice. It's most important that your client be at the center of the conversation and take ownership of their goals. The following goals-focused questions will help guide the conversation:
 - How does your goal align with your district or school's larger goals?
 - How will you measure this goal? What structures will you put in place?
 - What skills or knowledge do you need to develop to attain this goal?
 - How does your goal have an impact on students and their learning? What will achieving this goal look like for you and your students/team?
 - Within what timeframe will you work on this goal? What benchmarks will you include throughout the process to determine your progress towards this goal?
 - How does your goal ensure that every student gets what they need to thrive, every day? How does your goal promote equity in your classroom and/or at your site?
- Throughout the conversation it also will be helpful to have the [coaching sentence stems](#) to support the direction a conversation takes.
 - Sometimes emotions surface in these conversations, as the goals may be areas a teacher/leader has struggled with. It's important to address emotions as they arise. Cathartic and supportive stems can allow you to hold space as your client experiences emotions.
 - Oftentimes, too, underlying beliefs have an impact on the goals a person may set, particularly in relation to disrupting inequities. Using confrontational stems will help your client explore underlying beliefs and assumptions so they can get to a place to support all learners.
 - Sometimes, particularly for new teachers and leaders, you may need to use more directive or informative stems to offer up additional resources as a person works toward their goals.

Closing the Conversation.

You will want to close the conversation by asking your client to reflect on how they feel about these goals and the kinds of actions they will need to take to achieve their goals. You'll also want to schedule a follow-up conversation to brainstorm the kinds of high-leverage activities to support a change in practice. More information on this conversation and additional steps can be found in *The Art of Coaching*.