Chapter 8: Vision, Planning, and Goals
Chapter 8

Vision, Planning, and Goals

“Goals are dreams with deadlines.”
— Diana Scharf Hunt

Chapter Contributors: Margaret Moore, Bob Tschannen-Moran, Pam Schmid, Gloria Silverio, Erika Jackson, and Walter Thompson

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Discuss health, fitness, and wellness planning as an important life skill
- Discuss why we set goals
- Describe the power of accountability and goals
- Define SMART goals
- Proficiently set three month and weekly behavioral goals
- Identify how to track and measure client progress
- Discuss and follow goal guidelines
Introduction to Health, Fitness, and Wellness Planning

There are few human endeavors that succeed without investing the time and effort to develop realistic and inspiring plans. In the workplace, planning is the basis for forward progress, change, and transformation. Accordingly, “Planning and Goal Setting” are among the ICF Core Coaching Competencies (see Chapter 2).

Realistic and inspiring plans also provide the framework for people to improve their health, fitness, and wellness. Wellcoaches has designed and refined a visioning, planning, and goal setting process for coaches to use with clients. This process is well suited to the journey toward mastery of health and well-being. Not only does it assist clients to establish new life habits and make behavior changes that last, clients also learn life skills which enable change. Coaches assist clients in developing well-conceived plans through the development of a compelling vision— one that beckons strongly three-month goals designed to lead to that vision, and weekly behavioral goals which generate steady yet incremental progress. Each will be considered in turn.

The Importance of a Compelling Vision

After coaches and clients have a good sense of each other (see Chapter 7), and have developed trust and rapport (see Chapter 2), it’s time for coaches to assist clients to articulate and develop a compelling vision of their desired future self. That is the foundation for planning. It provides the energy that moves clients forward in the stages of change (see Chapter 3). It is the key that unlocks the

Through goal setting, we turn visions and intentions into actions and reality.
door to self-efficacy and self-esteem when it comes to health, fitness, and wellness.

We have already written extensively about the use of Appreciative Inquiry in the development of such visions (see Chapter 4). By connecting clients with their best experiences, core values, and generative conditions it becomes easier for clients to see their way forward to a target that beckons. At their best, such visions are:

- Grounded (Building on Current Success),
- Bold (Stretching the Status Quo),
- Desired (What People Truly Want),
- Palpable (As If they were Already True), and
- Participatory (Involving Many Stakeholders)

A compelling vision identifies what people want, rather than what they don’t want. It’s hard to see and feel the absence of something; in contrast, it’s hard to ignore and resist the presence of something. This holds true for wellness and every other area of life. Wellness is not the absence of disease or the opposite of illness; wellness is rather the presence of well-being and the culmination of life and health-giving practices. Consider, for example, building on the following descriptions of wellness from the *Complete Idiot’s Guide to Wellness* (Smith, P.B., MacFarlane, M., & Kalnitsky E., 2002):

- Wellness is the quality or state of being in good health or one’s best possible health, especially as an actively sought goal.
- Wellness is the condition of good physical and mental health, especially when maintained by proper diet, exercise, and life habits.
Wellness is the mastery of one’s wellbeing – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual – through regular practice of healthful behaviors.

An effective wellness program should encompass dietary, exercise, stress management, and health maintenance/disease prevention strategies.

Such descriptions excite people, especially when they become personalized descriptions of what people believe they can do and be in the longer term (six months, one year, two years, five years, etc.). Successful coaching programs begin at this place, discovering through appreciative inquiries and reflections the longer-term values, outcomes, behaviors, motivators, strengths, and structures that clients want to realize through coaching. Each represents an essential part of a wellness vision:

- Values (Who do I want to be?)
- Outcomes (What results do I want to achieve?)
- Behaviors (What activities do I want to do consistently?)
- Motivators (Why does this matter a lot to me, right now?)
- Strengths (What strengths, talents, and abilities will I draw upon?)
- Challenges (What challenges will I overcome?)
- Supports (What support team and structures will I put in place?)

As we have learned from appreciative inquiry (Chapter 4) and Positive Psychology (Chapters 6 and 12), avoid analyzing the causes of obstacles, barriers, setbacks, and challenges as though they were deficits to be fixed or problems to be solved. This can generate a downward spiral of increasing discouragement and resistance. It is better to assist clients to generate new possibilities for meeting and overcoming challenges by staying positive, appreciating strengths, brainstorming alternatives, and mobilizing resources (Table 8.1, Page 7). It is empowering for clients when coaches communicate confidence in their ability to move forward.
In the early stages of change, where challenges loom large and may appear overwhelming, it’s especially important to express empathy for client feelings and needs (Chapter 5) as well as certainty that they have what it takes to succeed (Chapter 6). This will both validate clients and reconnect them with their capacity for change and growth; it will shift the conversation in a positive direction. In the later stages of change, after clients already have a measure of self-efficacy, clients will need to brainstorm and plan action strategies, including approaches to tackle emerging challenges which will be easier to handle given the higher level of self-efficacy. At any point in the stages of change, challenges approached with a “can-do” attitude and an appreciative eye can be effectively outgrown or masterfully faced as clients learn to “sense and connect with a future possibility that is seeking to emerge” (Scharmer, 2007, p. 8).

Examples of Visions

Visions are best written in the present tense, as if they are already happening, and in the client’s voice. A complete Wellness Vision statement might sound something like this:

“I am strong, lean, and 20 pounds lighter, shopping for cute, attractive new clothes for my attractive body. I am happy, with lots of energy to do whatever I feel like doing. My health is better and I am open, more patient, and social. My motivators are feeling and looking great with bountiful energy. I also want to be around a long time for my parents, nieces, and nephews. When I face challenges, such as getting too busy, discouraged, overwhelmed, or stressed out, I pause, collect myself, and take doable steps to get back on track. Healthy eating, exercise, and handling stress well are important to me and within my grasp. Through ongoing, intentional, realistic planning I achieve my goals and realize my wellness vision.”
### TABLE 8.1 – Steps to Assist Clients in Developing a Compelling Vision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe a Vision</strong></td>
<td>A vision is a compelling statement of who you are and what health-promoting, life-giving behaviors you want to do consistently. Tell me what your vision looks like. Paint me a picture. What would you look and feel like at your ideal level of wellness? What kind of person do you want to be when it comes to your health, fitness, or wellness? (Clarify until it’s reasonably succinct.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Picture</strong></td>
<td>What are the most important elements in your vision? If you keep these in mind, will they power you forward and help you stay on track?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Elements</strong></td>
<td>What have been your best experiences to date with the key elements of your vision, times when you felt alive and fully engaged? Tell one or two stories, in detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Experiences</strong></td>
<td>Without being modest, what do you value most about your life? What values does your wellness vision support?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Core Values</strong></td>
<td>What makes this vision really important to you? Why do you really want to reach this vision? What good will come from your doing so? (Give examples of powerful motivators.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivators</strong></td>
<td>How large is the gap between where you are today and your wellness vision? Clarify Point A (starting point) and B (client’s dream) for vision. On a scale of 0-10, with 10 being really confident and 0 being no confidence, how confident are you that you can close this gap and realize your vision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gap</strong></td>
<td>What significant events do you anticipate having to deal with on the way to reaching your vision? (Generate multiple possibilities and express empathy.) What concerns you most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidence</strong></td>
<td>What strengths can you draw on to help you realize your vision and meet your challenges? How can the lessons from your successes in life carry over to your current challenges?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
<td>What strategies may be effective to help you realize your vision and meet your challenges? (Brainstorm and clarify multiple possibilities before focusing.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td>So, I’m hearing that your vision includes … (Summarize values, outcomes, motivators, strengths, supports, and strategies). Is that correct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supports</strong></td>
<td>Sounds as though you’ve come up with a vision which will work for you. How ready, confident, and committed are you to take the first steps toward your vision?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**wellcoaches**
Other examples of vision statements:

- **My wellness vision** is that I have healthy eating habits and set a good example for my children.
- **My health vision** in the next year is to improve my health, in particular I have lower total cholesterol and a lower risk of heart disease.
- **My fitness vision** in the next six months is that I exercise regularly so that I am delaying aging and preserving my ability to function well in my older years.
- **My wellness vision** in the next six months is that I have reversed my trend of steady weight gain and I look better, feel younger, and wear stylish clothes.
- **My fitness vision** is that I am ten pounds lighter and I feel youthful, attractive, and will look good in a bathing suit when I'm 40.
- **My fitness vision** is that I have plenty of strength and stamina so that I play energetically with my grandchildren.
- **My wellness vision** is that I am in charge of my health and feel greater wellbeing and contentment.
- **My health vision** is that I am a non-smoker (for good and enjoy life to the fullest.

The more clients connect with their values and motivators, the more successful they will be in casting a compelling vision. Some examples include:

- Feeling more energetic and alert
- Improving mental focus and productivity
- Feeling more confident
- Improving self-image and self-esteem
• Having peace of mind
• Being more balanced
• Feeling in control
• Feeling more relaxed or less anxious/stressed
• Looking more attractive to my significant other
• Looking better in my clothes
• Being healthier so that I can prevent disease
• Being healthier so that I can manage disease
• Delaying aging
• Setting a good example for my children
• Setting a good example for my significant other
• Being stronger so that I can play with my children with less risk of injury
• Having more stamina so that I can cope with my busy life
• Increasing my strength so that I can improve my golf game (tennis, bicycling, etc.)
• Improving my balance and coordination
• Sleeping better so that I have more energy
• Improving my mood and/or reduce depression
• Decreasing my risk of injury
• Preparing for a big event such as a marathon, triathlon, or bike ride
• Decreasing my risk or reoccurrence of:
  o high cholesterol
  o heart disease and heart attacks
  o overweight or obesity
  o brittle bones (osteoporosis)
  o high blood pressure
  o stroke
  o early death
A key factor in assisting clients to change their behaviors is to set behavioral goals.

- depression
- diabetes
- injuries
- low back pain
- cancer
- tobacco use
- substance abuse
- poor functionality in old age

Behavioral Goals Make Visions Real

The field of goal setting has been thoroughly researched by Locke and Latham. To summarize a small section of their opus, *Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goal Setting and Task Motivation: A 35-Year Odyssey* (Locke & Lathan, 2002): Goals affect performance through four mechanisms. First, goals serve a directive function; they direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities. Second, goals have an energizing function. High level goals lead to greater effort than low level goals. Third, goals affect persistence. When participants are allowed to control the time they spend on a task, hard goals prolong effort (LaPorte & Nath, 1976). Fourth, goals affect action indirectly by leading to the arousal, discovery, and/or use of task-relevant knowledge and strategies (Wood & Locke, 1990).

As we have seen, compelling visions incorporate the outcomes and behaviors that clients desire to achieve. When clients first start coaching, they usually know more about what they want (the outcomes) than about how they are going to get there (the behaviors).
behaviors). For example, they may say their goals are to lose weight, improve stress management, lower blood pressure, or experience more life satisfaction. These are outcome goals and they have their place, primarily in the context of the vision statements. They reflect feelings, needs, values, and desires that can motivate and sustain behavior change. In and of themselves, however, outcome goals do not lead to behavior change.

Motivation alone, without a clear fitness, health, or wellness plan, does not propel clients into action and often withers in the face of adversity. With a clear plan, however, clients know what to do in order to achieve their desired outcomes and to make their vision a reality. Such plans include behavioral goals which:

- Enable clients to think about and identify the specific actions and behaviors they want to do next in working towards their vision, answering the question, “Now what?”
- Enable clients to measure progress against their initial baseline behaviors, which are often forgotten (see Tracking and Measuring Outcomes Progress and Setting Outcomes Baselines later in this chapter).
- Enable clients to measure the overall success of their coaching program.
- Enable coaches to measure success. Having evidence-based data is critical for establishing efficacy as well as credibility, not only in one’s coaching practice, but also in the consumer and healthcare communities.

Effective, behavioral goals:

- Are Specific, Measurable, Action-based, Realistic, and Time-lined (or SMART – see below).
• Break down large goals into incremental goals that are scaled appropriately to a person’s stage of change (see Chapter 3).
• Include only one measurable behavior per goal.
• Have intrinsic value and are not imposed from the outside.
• Address environmental factors, including one’s support team and other systems that impact their successful implementation.
• Evolve as the reality of the client’s experience unfolds and each week progresses. Trial and correction, not trial and error, represents the coaching framework for action planning.

IMPORTANT: As indicated in the Transtheoretical Model (see Chapter 3), behavioral goals must be scaled appropriately to a person’s stage of change. Moving too quickly into action planning, particularly with clients in the early stages of change, will ultimately prove counterproductive. Until clients are ready, willing, and able to take action, it is important for coaches to stay in listening mode and to assist clients to develop “thinking about,” “feeling about,” or “learning about” goals that will increase their readiness to change in a particular area. Examples of such goals, drawn from the Transtheoretical Model (TTM), Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Motivational Interviewing (MI) (Chapters 3-5), include:

• Remembering the best experiences one has had with health, fitness, and wellness.
• Identifying the core values that govern one’s life.
• Noticing one’s energy in different environments.
• Thinking about and writing down the components of a wellness vision.
• Learning about the things that improve health, fitness, and wellness.
• Weighing the pros and cons of change vs. staying the same.
• Thinking about the importance of making a change.
• Imagining what it would feel like to be in perfect health.
It is important and valuable to track outcomes over time (e.g., blood pressure, weight, stress levels, increase in bone density, quantitative ratings of stress coping, positive self-talk, peace of mind, etc.) to demonstrate, as well as to document, that the behavioral goals are making a difference in helping clients achieve the desired results. If clients have not achieved their goals satisfactorily, new behavioral goals may need to be set.

Three-Month Behavioral Goals

Assisting clients to develop a set of three-month behavioral goals is an excellent first step. Goals with a three-month timeframe are medium-term goals during which time clients can start, learn, and hopefully maintain a new set of behaviors. A three-month timeframe is short enough to provide a sense of urgency for weekly goal setting, allowing clients to mobilize their motivation around realistic and meaningful actions and outcomes.

When working with clients to define their three-month goals, make sure to ask them what they want to be doing consistently three months from now in each of the physical or mental wellness areas they included in their vision. Specific, manageable, behavioral goals should be linked directly to a client’s vision. For example, if clients want to lose weight, ask what behaviors they want to be doing consistently that will enable them to achieve the outcome of weight loss.

It is appropriate and helpful to check progress toward three-month goals on a regular basis (at least monthly). This will enable the coaching conversation to consider modifying the three-month goals and/or renegotiating the start date if the goals are not challenging enough, are too difficult at this stage, or if a major disruption has emerged.
Examples of three-month behavioral goals that support desired outcomes:

- **Behavioral Goal**: I will do three 30-minute sessions of walking each week, at 60-70% of my maximal heart rate, with my friend Jane.  
  **Desired Outcome**: increase cardiovascular health so that I don’t die prematurely.

- **Behavioral Goal**: I will purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at least weekly and I will eat at least 3 vegetables and 2 fruits every day.  
  **Desired Outcome**: lose weight so that I have more energy and feel more youthful

- **Behavioral Goal**: I will do two 20-minute strength-training sessions per week at the gym.  
  **Desired Outcome**: increase bone density so that I reduce my risk of osteoporosis

- **Behavioral Goal**: I will write in my journal each evening three things that happened that day for which I am grateful and share them with my wife.  
  **Desired Outcome**: increase my peace of mind so that I reduce my blood pressure

**IMPORTANT**: New Year’s resolutions are examples of “outcome” goals (e.g., “I want to lose 10 pounds or get fit.”). Without the “behavioral” piece, including the necessary action steps, clients are not likely to be successful. Indeed, studies indicate that 60% of all people who make New Year’s resolutions do not achieve them on their first attempt. Clients who have been disappointed in this way may be hesitant to set goals at all. Teaching clients to break down their “outcome” goals into specific, manageable, “behavioral” steps makes success more likely. It
is important for clients to understand that it is harder to climb the whole mountain on the first attempt than to climb to a visible way station on the way to reaching the summit.

**Weekly Behavioral Goals**

Weekly goals enable clients to take small, manageable steps toward their three-month goals. Achieving these stepping stones is often a breakthrough in building a client’s confidence.

It is typically valuable to set between three and five goals per week. It is also effective for clients to have goals in 2-3 areas (including fitness, nutrition, weight, stress / mental game, life, and health risks) so that they are working on several new behaviors that complement each other and support their vision.

**IMPORTANT:** It is important that clients stretch slightly beyond their comfort zone each week to experience the increased sense of self-efficacy that comes from successfully going beyond their perceived limits. Keep in mind that each client is different. Your job as coach is to learn how much each client is capable of doing – and then to challenge him or her accordingly. Work with clients to set goals that can be reached at least 60% of the time. If goal achievement is less than 60%, the goals may be too ambitious. Similarly, if goal achievement is consistently more than 80%, the goals may not be sufficiently ambitious. Use your intuition and sense of things to dance with clients in setting appropriate goals that will move them into flow.

Clients experience flow (see Chapter 6) when their goals dynamically balance both challenge and skill. That’s the zone we want clients to enter, as often as
possible, while working on their goals. The zone is that place which is neither too hard nor too easy, but rather perfectly suited for client learning, growth, and success. Since client potential is often more than they recognize, don’t be afraid to consider goals to which clients exclaim, “No way!” Clients appreciate being called to go beyond what they’re imagining.

To assist clients to move into this zone more frequently, encourage them to not use the words “try”, “may”, or “maybe.” It’s better to get clients to speak confidently of what they will do, even to the point of framing behavioral goals in the present tense, as if they were already fully true. This can positively shape client self-image and goal accomplishment.

Be sure clients understand that they may turn away from any challenge or goal. It is always their choice. If they seem intrigued by a behavioral goal, but intimidated by the challenge, encourage them to make a counterproposal that is more comfortable. Your job as the coach is to find the balance between challenging clients to do more than they think they can do, while encouraging a scaling back of goals that are out of reach. Perceptive listening is a great strategy to use in this situation and with goal setting in general, (see Chapter 2). It will often promote pro-change talk, explore ambivalence, and set the groundwork to obtain a commitment (see Chapter 5).

**Behavioral Goals are SMART Goals**

As indicated earlier, behavioral goals should be SMART goals:

A SMART goal is one that the client is fully in charge of accomplishing through specific steps.
Assisting clients to be **specific** about the actions and behaviors they will engage in to reach their vision will increase their level of success. Being specific about the details of *how and when* is crucial because it gives clients a **timeline** in which to accomplish the goal. (It is like the difference between putting something on your schedule now versus “getting around to it” when there is time.) Creating **measurable** goals identifies when success is attained.

Break down the vision into **actions** or **behaviors** that clients want to be doing on a consistent basis in 3 months. Each week, co-construct with clients new incremental steps that will assist them to move closer and closer to their 3-month goals. Remind clients early and often that gradual change leads to permanent change.

**Realistic** goal setting is essential to client success. If the goal is realistic, success will follow. Quick wins and victories are important. Being successful at achieving one goal helps clients to move forward with other goals. Success builds self-efficacy and self-esteem (see Chapter 6). Nothing hinders the change process more than setting unrealistic, unachievable goals.

Examples of SMART weekly goals include:
• I will substitute applesauce for butter on my toast or bagel for breakfast 5 times next week.

• I will increase my water intake from two glasses to four glasses a day by drinking a glass of water mid-morning and mid-afternoon.

• I will eat dessert one time this week on Saturday night and savor it slowly. Comments: I want to reduce the number of desserts I eat.

• I will listen to music for 45 minutes on Friday night to relax.

• I will do a strength-training routine of 5 exercises (listed on my personal website) on Tuesday at 6:30 am and Saturday at 10 am. Comments: I will use 8-pound dumbbells, and do 12 reps with a 15 second rest between each exercise.

• I will lose one pound this week by meeting my exercise and nutrition goals above. (Outcome goals – like losing weight – can be included as long as they are clearly tied to enabling SMART exercise and nutrition goals.)

SMART goals can also be cognitive (thinking) affective (feeling):

• I will define and list 3 of my top motivators for my priority goals for next week.

• I will make a list of the pros and cons for losing weight on Tuesday night before I go to bed.

• I will log my thoughts and emotions when I eat 2 days (Tuesday and Thursday) this week.

Examples of SMART three-month goals with a first week’s goal:

• Three-month goal: I will walk 3 times a week for 30 minutes.

  First week: I will walk 15 minutes on Monday and Friday this week.
- **Three-month goal**: I will eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables 5 days a week. Comment: I am eating an average of one serving now.

  **First week**: I will eat an apple with my lunch 3 days (M-W-F) this week.

Examples of poorly designed goals that are missing key SMART goal guidelines:

- I am going to increase my water intake this week. (Increase it to what? How often? When?)
- I am going to eat fewer desserts. (What is the behavior s/he will be doing? How many desserts will s/he eat this week and when?)
- I am going to relax more on the weekend. (What does more mean? What are the behaviors or actions s/he will be doing to relax?)
- I am going to lose 5 pounds this week. (What are the behaviors needed to get there? This is an outcome goal without the supporting behavioral goals.)

Table 8.2 illustrates how poorly written goals can be turned into SMART goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poorly Written Weekly Goals</th>
<th>Well Written Weekly SMART Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do more cardiovascular exercise at the gym.</td>
<td>Walk on treadmill for 20 minutes at a minimum heart rate of 70%, 3 days this week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Susan will walk 4 times per week, lift 2 times per week, and have her shake once per day. Susan and I will keep in contact with one another to make sure she stays on track with her goals. | 1. I will walk 4 times per week for 30 minutes at 6:30 pm.  
  2. I will strength train on Monday and Wednesday, after work, for 40 minutes.  
  3. I will email my coach on Friday to provide an update on my progress. |
| Food shopping to prepare healthier snacks.                      | Make a grocery list and shop on Saturday morning for two healthy snacks per work day. Comments: Healthy snacks will be fruit, yogurt, or energy bar |
| Keep water at work desk and remember to drink it. Consume more water with meals. | Drink 4 glasses of water at work each day. (Under comments, put reminder notes / ideas for prompting, or other ideas.) |
| Cut back on diet sodas. | I will drink 8 glasses of water each day. Comments: This will help me reduce my intake of soda from 8 per day to 1 per day. |
| Get to the gym whether I feel like it or not. | I will go to the gym on Monday at 6:30pm. Comments: If I feel resistant, I will say my Wellness Vision out loud 3 times. |
| Be more aware of how much sugar I eat. | One day this week, I will write down and track each dessert or sweet I eat. |
| Cut back on white bread. | Four days this week I will eat whole wheat toast for breakfast. |
| Eat more protein. | I will note in my journal the servings of protein I eat two days this week. Comment: My coach will send me an article on portion sizes. |
| I will be less stressed. | Each workday at 3:00 P.M., I will take an afternoon tea break. |
| Increase cardiovascular exercise. | Walk 5 days a week, for 30 minutes a day. |
| Follow a good diet so that I’ll feel better. | Eat 2 fruits and 3 vegetables, 5 days per week. |
| Eat fast food less often. | Bring lunch to work 5 days a week. |
| I want to drink more water. | Drink 8 glasses of water, 5 days a week. |
| I want to develop a strength routine to be strong and healthy. | Complete a strength-training routine using 10-20 exercises, targeting all my major muscle groups, for 20 minutes at least two days each week. |
| Continue to notice when I am getting stressed. | Reduce my overall level of stress 9/10 to a 6/10 by doing 15 minutes of relaxation 5 days a week. Comments: Listen to music or stretch. |
| Lose 20 pounds. | Lose 10-12 pounds by exercising four days per week by following my nutrition and exercise goals above. (Note: Here the outcome goal – weight loss – is tied to behavioral goals that have reasonable potential to enable the outcome.) |
The Role of Brainstorming in Goal Setting

Brainstorming, the rapid generation of possibilities, is an essential coaching skill and a fundamental part of Generative Moments in coaching (see Chapter 9). It is a time for coaches and clients to co-generate a wide variety of possible goals for consideration. For brainstorming sessions to be most effective, it’s important to:

- Clarify the topic
- Clarify the output (what’s being generated)
- Defer judgment
- Encourage bold, even wild ideas
- Build on what others say
- Be visual and specific
- Go for quantity
- Do it fast

Although brainstorming can be used at any point during coaching sessions, it becomes particularly important in the goal-setting process. Brainstorming enables clients to develop creative approaches and their best plans before implementation. After multiple possibilities are generated (a good number is 6-10) clients can explore each one in order to determine which are the most inspirational and feasible.

IMPORTANT: Setting goals without brainstorming can cut short opportunities for both client motivation and success.
The Importance of Motivation in Goal Setting

As clients explore the most inspirational and feasible behavioral goals, it’s important to tie those goals back to the client’s reasons for change, which underlie their health, fitness, or wellness visions.

Understanding the reasons behind the goals helps clients stay on track. For example, if a client wants to lose 10 pounds, ask how it’s connected to the vision of his or her best self. (e.g. “You want to lose 10 pounds because...?”) Once the reasons are pinned down, explore whether the motivator is strong enough to keep him or her on track, (e.g. “Is this enough to get you to the finish line? Will this reason keep you on track to make the necessary changes?”)

It is important to help the client identify reasons which are strongly positive motivators. We all have different motivators and certain prompts can bring that motivator to mind. For some, the motivator might be: “wanting to play with my grandchildren.” In this case, posting a photo of the grandchildren on the refrigerator may help. For many, an eating log may motivate them to make conscious choices, instead of eating mindlessly or in reaction to emotions.

Others may identify a fear motivator, such as meeting someone who lost her eyesight from diabetes, or having relatives who died of heart disease. Keeping a picture of full health in mind can be a powerful motivator. Clients can breathe life into the motivator by creating a picture that they can summon later.

IMPORTANT: Listen attentively for the use of words like obstacles, barriers, setbacks, risks, or challenges. Explore what they mean by those words and what will enable them to move forward in order to achieve their goals, not just
immediately, but also long term. Stay focused on solution and possibility.

You can assist clients in meeting their goals by asking questions such as:

- Why do you want to accomplish this goal? What is important to you about this goal? What results are you looking for?
- What have been your best experiences in accomplishing goals like this in the past?
- What values would be represented by your accomplishing this goal?
- For whom do you want to make this change? (Be sure it’s for themselves and not someone else.)
- What structures and supports could assist you to be successful with this goal?
- Do you think this goal is scaled appropriately, with just the right amount of challenge?

**Measuring Client Confidence**

It is important to assess a client’s confidence in his or her ability to meet a goal. A good method to use is a confidence scale: What is your confidence level on a scale of 0 to 10 for achieving this goal? (see Chapter 5). Explore why they did not pick a lower number or what it would take to generate a higher number.

A good rule of thumb is that if clients pick 6 or lower on the confidence scale, they likely are not confident enough to succeed. In that case, you may need to re-evaluate the goal and make changes, and design strategies so that clients will feel confident in their ability to achieve it.
Measuring Goal Importance

To assess if clients are ready, willing, and able to change it is essential to determine how important a goal is to them, Ask: *How would you rate the importance of this goal on a scale of 0 to 10?* Explore why they did not pick a lower number and what it would take to generate a higher number (see Chapter 5).

If clients are not ready for change, express empathy and acceptance, and explore the conditions which would generate readiness so that they recognize them when they arrive.

The Power of Accountability in Goal Setting

Accountability means monitoring and giving an account of what was done, what happened, what worked, what didn’t work, and what one wants to do differently in the future. When such accountability comes into the coaching conversation, discussing what has been accomplished in objective rather than judgmental terms, clients often become empowered to reach their goals more consistently and effectively.

When it comes to health, fitness, and wellness, people are generally accountable only to themselves – and that often isn’t enough especially in the early stages of change. With such isolation and anonymity, it’s easy for motivation, diligence, and follow-through to slip. Building in accountability helps ensure that clients remain on track.
IMPORTANT: Accountability is not the same as pestering or nagging. It is rather a welcome conversation that includes reviewing a client’s best experiences with goal accomplishment and designing new behavioral goals for the future. In the complete absence of judgment, accountability is an empowering conversation that provides structure, measurement, and support, without being an unhappy experience for the client. The key is to keep it light without failing to raise important topics.

To be effective, it’s important for coaches not to get attached to an outcome. We are not the client’s boss or parent. We are also not responsible for the results, which belong solely to and are evaluated by the client. The client not only finds most of the answers, but also owns the goals. If clients detect any hint that their coach is prescribing the goal, they may feel as though their coach is “checking up” on them. Resistance will then inevitably result (see Chapter 5). At its best, accountability feels like a positive process, stimulating motivation and generating action.

Assessment of Behavioral Goal Achievement

Assessment of three-month and weekly behavioral goal achievement is central to the coaching process. It is important to explore both how clients feel about their progress, as well as the progress itself.

When reviewing goals each week, it’s best to start by asking about the things that went well and the lessons that were learned. Clients should always be asked to concentrate on what they accomplished (rather than what they did not accomplish). Encourage reframing in positive terms, even when progress has seemingly not been made. For example, “Unfortunately, I put butter on my toast or bagel for breakfast four times this week.” can be reframed as: “20% of the time I successfully achieved my goal of substituting applesauce for butter on my toast.”
or bagel for breakfast 5 times this week.” By reframing goal accomplishment in positive terms and by asking positive questions, coaches empower clients to move forward (see Chapter 4). Examples of such questions include:

- What was your best experience with your goals in the past week?
- What percentage of achievement did you reach for this goal – e.g. 100%, 75%, 50%, or 10%?
  - What contributed to this level of success?
  - What kept it from being lower?
  - What could have made it higher?
- What do you like about this goal?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- What challenges did you face along the way?
- Do you think this goal is too ambitious, too cautious, or just right?
- When you think about this goal, what feelings does it stimulate and what needs does it meet?
- If you were to set a new, more ambitious goal, what would it be?
- On a scale of 0-10, how confident are you in your ability to sustain this behavior for the foreseeable future? (Explore why they did not pick a lower number and what it would take to generate a higher number.)

**Tracking and Measuring Outcomes Progress**

It is important not only to elicit qualitative feedback regarding client progress, but also to track outcomes delivered by establishing new behaviors in objective, measurable terms. The establishment of a variety of baseline measurements is an invaluable tool that can be used to:
- Assist clients in tracking progress over time on selected outcomes (e.g., reduced weight or inches lost, improved life balance, better peace of mind, or increased fitness)
- Motivate clients towards achieving their goals
- Provide important group outcome data for your practice or for the field of coaching as a whole.

It is important that your clients use a variety of baseline measurements and tracking techniques. A combination of several tracking approaches is best because, in a given period, one measure may change while another may not. Your clients will be more motivated if they see positive changes in at least one type of measurement.

Over time, it is important to monitor which combination of tracking techniques will best assist your client in achieving success. During their initial sessions, ask your clients which approaches they would prefer and discuss which measurements they would like to track. It is best to start out agreeing upon a few effective measurements and adjust measurements over time, as motivation increases.

The following summarizes a range of baseline measurements and tracking techniques for each major health, fitness, and wellness topic.

**Setting Outcomes Baselines**

To determine baselines and tracking approaches, it’s important to take into account:
• Type of program the client wants to pursue
• Current physical condition of client (e.g. sedentary, mildly-active, athlete)
• Client’s age
• Client’s health history

Weight-Management

To monitor weight management, clients may choose among weekly scale weighing, biweekly recording of body measurements, biweekly noting of clothing fit (as belts get tightened a notch or jeans fit more loosely), and monthly BMI or waist/hip ratio calculations.

Scale weighing is popular because most clients want to see the pounds go down, even though a scale is not an accurate measurement of body fat and body composition changes. Be sure clients understand that the scale weight will not always directly correspond to their efforts, and that fluctuations can be caused by water retention and other factors.

If clients want an accurate body-fat percentage assessment, they can visit a reputable health club and use the method the club prefers. They can also purchase scales that measure body fat through electrical impedance. Either way, clients should use the same method consistently over time.

Another way to monitor success is to record those lifestyle habits and behaviors that assist people to maintain a healthy weight over time. For example, eating 5 fruits and vegetables per day, eating breakfast, exercising 5 days a week, and taking 10,000 steps per day have been associated with sustained weight loss.
Measuring baseline activity levels with a pedometer within the first few weeks of a program can help determine what realistic 3 month goal is appropriate in reaching towards the recommended 10,000 steps each day. Recording those steps in a daily log can give clients a sense of progress and forward movement even in weeks when their weight does not go down.

Fitness

To establish fitness baselines and monitor fitness progress, clients may want to work with a certified personal trainer or health club to assess their fitness levels and/or prescribe an exercise program from that assessment. Physical activity guidelines from the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association can also be found at www.acsm.org. Clients can learn about these recommended minimum standards and guidelines for physical activity as well as tips for meeting them. Establishing a realistic plan for success based on current fitness levels or behaviors can then be designed.

Of course, everyone is encouraged to get approval from their physicians before beginning an exercise program and coaches should only work within their scope of practice. Whether clients choose to get their physician’s approval or not, knowing and sharing the ACSM guidelines, as well as the risk factors requiring a medical release before exercise (see chapter 7 on Client Assessment), are critical in setting goals in this area with clients.

The following materials can be helpful resources for fitness professionals and can also be purchased at the ACSM web site:

- ACSM’s Exercise Management for Persons with Chronic Diseases and Disabilities
The following materials can be helpful resources for clients and professionals and can also be purchased at the ACSM web site:

- ACSM's Action Plan for Arthritis
- ACSM's Action Plan for Diabetes
- ACSM's Action Plan for Menopause
- ACSM's Action Plan for Osteoporosis
- ACSM Fitness Book, Third Edition

**Nutrition**

Simply knowing the recommended guidelines for healthy eating can assist clients to determine a realistic plan and changes to current baseline behaviors to meet these guidelines. The USDA’s web site [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) is a great resource that allows clients to determine caloric and nutritional needs based on their height and weight with ideas for smart choices within all food groups. These recommendations come from the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, released by the US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services in January 2005 (see resources).
Examples of baseline and follow-up measurements are:

- Recording specific foods in his/her diet (high fat, high calorie)
- Recording the numbers of servings of fruits and vegetables or servings from any one of the other food groups each day
- Tracking daily water intake levels
- Completing periodic food logs

Referrals to a registered and licensed dietitian can be helpful for clients desiring specific menus or for establishing dietary needs in special populations. Coaches can then assist clients in following the recommendations by helping them develop an inspired behavioral plan that works for them.

**Stress-Management**

Stress-management is an important issue for many clients. Finding the right technique to track and demonstrate progress over time will help clients achieve success in this area. Baseline stress measurements must be as objective as possible. Examples include:

- Recording in a log high-stress activities or stressful situations encountered throughout the day.
- Recording the antecedents (triggers) that appear to accompany high-stress situations, as well as the consequences, such as loss of sleep, anger, etc.
- Adopting a simple and effective way of tracking stress levels (daily or hourly), such as using a scale of 0-10 (low stress to high stress).
**Health Risks**

Ask clients to obtain and record baseline measurements related to their health issues (e.g. diabetes, hypertension, and high blood cholesterol). Encourage clients to log changes over time. Examples include:

- Changes in blood pressure readings at the same time each week
- Changes in blood cholesterol readings every 2-3 months
- Resting Heart Rate at the same time each week (count the number of beats for 60 seconds before rising in the morning)
- Changes in blood sugar level readings at recommended intervals

**Subjective Self-Reporting on Life Goals**

During the first session, discuss with clients which life goals they wish to track. Connect the life goals to the client’s vision. Develop a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being highest) for tracking progress. Take a baseline assessment in the first session regarding:

- Peace of mind
- Energy levels
- Self-esteem
- Enjoyment of life
- Productivity
- Sleep patterns
- Confidence or feeling in control
Example of baseline and tracking approaches for a 3 month life goal:

*I will plan and participate in three activities each week that have a “fun quotient” of at least 8. Comments: “Fun quotient” is on a scale of 0-10 with 10 being the most fun.*

**Putting it All Together**

To summarize, the purpose of setting goals is to help clients translate health, fitness, and wellness visions into realistic behavioral action steps to improve self-efficacy, increase potential for success, and learn the life skill of developing and implementing health, fitness, and wellness plans (Table 8.3)
Table 8.3 – Goals Guidelines

1. Three-month goals are the new behaviors clients wish to be doing consistently in three months that help them progress closer to their vision. Setting weekly goals enables clients to make small, manageable steps toward three-month goals. Determining and achieving these stepping stones often leads to a breakthrough in building a client’s confidence.

2. Brainstorm possibilities before settling on the goals clients want to work on.

3. Sometimes brainstorming will generate something that isn’t connected to a three-month goal. If clients are not ready to commit to a three-month goal in a new area, encourage them to experiment with learning a new skill or trying out a new direction within their current goals.

4. Make sure the client has identified the motivational factors, importance, confidence, and strategies for each goal.

5. Deal with challenges as they arise in the moment; explore strengths-based strategies and brainstorm new possibilities that build self-efficacy and self-esteem. Stay focused on solution and possibility.

6. Cognitive goals need to be tied to an action or behavior. (“List the pros and cons of……” rather than “Think about the pros and cons of……”)

7. Connect outcome goals (such as weight loss, improve stress coping) to behavioral goals that will lead to the achievement of the desired outcome.

8. Identify goals that will yield quick “wins” to reinforce the desire to change.

9. Keep just one measurable behavior per goal.

10. Write goals in the client’s voice, reflecting that clients set goals for themselves (coaches don’t prescribe goals).

11. Keep goals concise while making sure to include each component of the SMART acronym to insure success.

12. Assist clients to use committed, specific, language while avoiding general, vague, redundant, or tentative language such as “I may… I’ll try… most of the time.”
Important points to remember when reviewing goals during coaching sessions:

1. Help clients set goals that are neither too challenging nor too easy on a week to week basis. If goal achievement is consistently less than 60%, the goals may be too ambitious. If consistently greater than 80% achievement, the goals may not be sufficiently ambitious to be engaging. Play with this to help clients into the flow zone.

2. When reviewing weekly goals, start by asking clients about their best experiences with their goals.

3. Encourage the client to quantify the percent of goal achievement, rather than the percent of goal failure.

4. Ask for details about what worked to make the goal successful (e.g. what they liked, how they felt, etc.)

5. Ask what they learned in striving toward the goal.

6. When things didn’t go as planned, ask clients what they could have done differently or if the goal is still important. This might lead to a Generative Moment (see Chapter 9).

7. Check on progress toward three-month goals and revisit the health, fitness, and wellness vision at least once per month.

8. If the client’s circumstances change significantly, revisit and revise the three-month and weekly goals to fit with the new circumstances. (You may even need to revisit and revise the vision).
Sample Vision, Three-Month Goals, & First Weekly Goals

*My Vision*

My vision is that I am energetic and relaxed, and I model a healthy way of life for my family. Ten pounds lighter, exercising regularly, and managing stress better.

My primary motivator is to feel more in control and to be done with the struggle of the past few years.

My strengths are my determination and persistence which I use consistently for work, and less consistently for self-care.

My main current pattern is that in periods of higher stress I tend to eat sugary snacks and lose my motivation to stay on track with my plan to lose weight.

My strategy to outgrow this pattern is to decrease mindless eating by taking a break from what I am doing, and either go for a short walk or take a few minutes for meditation.
**Three-Month Goals**

Month Started: August 2008

**Fitness**
**Goal:** I will do a cardio workout 3 days per week for 30-45 minutes.
**Comments:** Walk outside, on treadmill, elliptical, or classes.
Complete: 0%

**Nutrition**
**Goal:** I will eat 3-4 fruits five days each week.
**Comments:** Fruit will replace sugary snacks.
Complete: 0%

**Stress**
**Goal:** I will practice meditation for 20 minutes, 3 days each week.
**Comments:** Reduce my average daily stress rating (at the end of the workday when I feel most stressed) from 6.5-7 out of 10 to less than 5 and will use the Jon Kabat-Zinn meditation program.
Complete: 0%

**Weight**
**Goal:** I will lose 5-10 pounds by following my nutrition and fitness goals above.
**Comments:** Weigh in weekly to chart progress and work with coach to adjust plan if needed.
Complete: 0%
This Week's Goals
Week #1 Starting August 25

Fitness
Goal: Walk 1-mile loop around the local lake on M/W morning.
Comments: Take note of time it takes to walk mile to establish a baseline.
Complete: 0%

Nutrition
Goal: Review list of fruits my coach will send and check off those I would want to eat as a snack.
Comments: May purchase a few on weekly visit to store
Complete: 0%

Weight
Goal: Weigh self next Tuesday before coaching session and write weight in log.
Comments:
Complete: 0%

Stress
Goal: Do Jon Kabat-Zinn's "Ten Minute Lying Down" meditation on Sunday morning.
Comments:
Complete: 0%
Review and Discussion Questions

1. What are the essential elements of a vision?

2. Explain the difference between analyzing the causes of problems and appreciating what problems have to teach us. Give examples of how that might be done with clients.

3. Until clients are ready, willing, and able to take action, what should the coach do to help increase their readiness to change?

4. Explain the difference between behaviors and outcomes. Give examples of some behaviors and outcomes that might be part of a client’s health, fitness, and wellness plan.

5. Why is it important and valuable to track outcomes over time?

6. How is holding clients accountable in coaching different from their being held accountable in the workplace and at home?

7. Why do we ask clients to set three-month goals?

8. When setting weekly goals, you should help your clients set goals designed to reach what percentages of success?

9. What does the acronym SMART stand for? List three behavioral and three cognitive weekly SMART goals.
10. Why is it important to discuss client strengths and motivators when setting goals with clients?

11. When is it appropriate to talk with clients about challenges and the strategies they may want to use for dealing with them?

12. When reviewing goals each week, what is the best way to quantify a client’s goal achievement?


References


**Suggested Readings**


