

Trainer Essentials: Goal Setting and Action Plans

Why is Goal Setting Important?

Think back to a time in your life when you achieved something you were very proud of. Long before reaching that point of success you most likely spent time setting a goal and creating a plan to help you reach it.

Researchers have consistently shown that goal setting is an effective way of motivating people to improve their performance. Locke and Latham (2002) reviewed many studies from 35 years of research on goal setting and motivation. They found that goal setting affects performance in four ways:



1. **Focus:** Goals help people focus their attention on activities that will help them succeed.
2. **Effort:** Goals “energize” people and cause them to invest more effort in their tasks. People with high goals tend to try harder to achieve success regardless of the type of task (for example, physical work, mental work, or learning and self-improvement).
3. **Persistence:** Goals encourage people to be more persistent and enable them to continue investing effort for a longer period of time.
4. **Skill development:** Goals help people use their knowledge and skills in new ways and/or develop and practice new skills. When people are faced with a goal, they will identify what they need to learn and how they can apply what they already know.

You can use goal setting to improve your performance as a trainer. As well, setting goals can help your participants plan realistic steps to take action on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) after attending a workshop. Below are some tips that you can use to support participants and yourself in setting effective goals.

Goal Commitment

It is easy to set goals, but it can be difficult to stay committed over the long-term. Goal commitment is very important for achieving success. Two factors affect how likely it is that someone will remain committed to a goal: (1) perceived importance and (2) self-efficacy (Locke and Latham, 2002).

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Factors Influencing Commitment to a Goal

Factor	What Does This Mean?	How Does This Relate to Your Role?
Perceived Importance	People need to believe that achieving the goal is important and that the results will be worthwhile. This encourages them to stay committed even when it seems difficult.	As a trainer, you can help your participants recognize the importance of their goals by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that their goals are meaningful to them. • Encouraging them to share their goals publically (for example, with the rest of the class). This makes the goal more important to them because they know they will be accountable to the group. • Encouraging them by communicating the value you see in the goals they are working towards.
Self-Efficacy	People need to believe that they are capable of achieving their goal. Without this belief, they are unlikely to remain committed.	As a trainer, you can help participants believe in their ability to meet goals by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing training so that they have the skills and knowledge to achieve success • Being a role model to show them that success is possible • Recommending resources (such as people, courses, books) that can support them in achieving their goal • Communicating your confidence in their ability to succeed • Following up with them and providing feedback and support

(Adapted from Locke and Latham, 2002)

Importance of Feedback

People need to understand how they are doing in relation to their goals; this allows them to adjust their strategies and identify what they still need to learn or accomplish (Locke & Latham, 2002). As trainers we can get feedback from other trainers and directly from participants. Peer coaching and support is a very important way to learn from each other and improve our skills (Avalos, 2011). You can also benefit from asking mentors for feedback on how you are doing and what you can continue to work on so that you can meet your own goals. The same applies to participants; they need feedback, both critical and positive, to ensure that they are on track.

Creating an Action Plan

Developing skills as a trainer is a lifelong process. Your professional development will be most effective when you have specific, achievable and challenging goals to work towards (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The same is true for your participants. They will be more likely to succeed in performing WASH activities and sharing messages if they have concrete, realistic goals and an action plan.

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When creating an action plan, it is helpful to focus on three specific goals. This will give you more than one area to focus on, while ensuring that you do not have so many goals that they become overwhelming.

Each goal should have three components:

1. **What you will do:** Create a specific goal for something you want to learn or a skill you would like to improve
2. **Why it is important:** Explain why this goal matters to you. Also describe how you or others will benefit when you achieve the goal. Defining the importance of a goal helps you to stay committed (Locke & Latham, 2002).
3. **How you are going to do it:** List the steps you will take to achieve the goal. Also consider the resources that you will need. Do you need to enroll in a course? Research a topic online? Find a mentor who can help you? Defining the steps and resources gives you direction for achieving your goal. It will also give you the confidence you need to succeed (Locke & Latham, 2002).

After you create your action plan, be sure to share it with other trainers so that you will be accountable to them. They can also help you by providing feedback. In the same way, ask your participants to share their action plans with you and with each other.

Goal setting is essential to professional development and to taking action on WASH. By supporting participants to select meaningful goals and providing positive reinforcement, you can increase the chances that they will take action in their communities. Similarly, you can improve your personal and professional performance by identifying specific goals, why they are important and what you need to achieve them.

References

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