

Transform your goals

BECOME A LEADER WHO DELIVERS EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS



“I’m not sure why my company hired you,” said Jeff, a new coaching client. “I’m really good at setting goals, and I really don’t think I need any help.”

Jeff was partially correct. He regularly set goals for himself and for his team. Unfortunately, he seldom achieved them — a characteristic that had led his company to suspect he was not the leader it needed. Hiring me was a final attempt to help him.

As we continued our first coaching session, I asked Jeff to share the goals he had set for the coming year. He withdrew a binder from his briefcase and opened it on the table in front of us.

“This binder contains all of our goals as a team, broken down into four major categories,” Jeff said proudly.

Over the next few minutes, Jeff reviewed the four categories, each of which contained at least five goals. All told, he had set more than 20 separate goals for his team, all of which were classified as “high priority.”

When he finished, Jeff leaned back in his chair and said, “Now, do you still think I need help?”

With real compassion, I said, “Yes.”

Decide what’s important

The first difficulty Jeff faced is one that affects almost every leader — saying no to the relatively important in order to focus on the truly important.

Without question, this is easy to say, but it’s hard to do. It’s hard to say no to a

good idea, even in deference to a great one. It’s also hard to say no to an idea that’s politically correct to support, even if it’s not the right focus. Most of all, it’s hard to say no because limiting your goals increases your risk if you choose incorrectly.

But the more goals you set, the more you spread the focus of your team. Set enough goals, and the focus on each one will be so small that it is almost meaningless. Limiting the number of goals is the only way to ensure that enough time and talent will be applied to achieve exceptional results.

When I forced Jeff to identify the most important goals out of the 20 he had chosen, it was like a root canal without anesthetic, but he eventually narrowed his list to three.

Assess new behaviors

Jeff’s next assignment was the most often overlooked aspect of effective goal setting — identifying the new behaviors his team would need to adopt.

Jeff and I made a list of the changes that achieving the three goals would require of his team. The list contained existing activities that would now have to be performed at a higher level, requiring the team to identify best practices, document new standards and develop training. The list also contained entirely new activities for which even more change

was required. In the end, we identified more than 26 changes that would have to be fully adopted for the team to succeed.

Changing human behavior is hard, even in the best of circumstances. While it’s common for a leader to assess the staffing, technology and expense requirements of achieving a goal, it’s rare to see an assessment of the behavioral changes it will require. Identifying this critical aspect in advance allowed Jeff to understand the magnitude of the changes and to plan accordingly.

Prepare to follow through

Despite all we had done, the most difficult aspect of achieving Jeff’s goals still remained — following through.

In the next few weeks, we engaged his team in refining and solidifying our analysis, knowing that they would identify things we had missed. We also designed performance tracking that would enable Jeff to remain focused and detect early warning signs when progress was stalling as well as regular communication methods and personal accountabilities for each member of his team.

Jeff ultimately transformed his goals from a list of things he hoped he would do to a set of results he knew he would deliver. In the end, he became the leader both he and his company wanted him to be. <<

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