

LEARN THE SEVEN SIGNALS

ARE YOUR MENTEE'S GOALS IN JEOPARDY?

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Following their initial conversations, Mike's mentor asked him to identify his mentoring goals. After several stalled attempts, she suggested he examine his strengths and weaknesses to help him focus on his professional development. He resisted her gentle prodding and continued to remain focused on day-to-day issues and work challenges.

Sound familiar? Well, it should! Goal setting is one of the most daunting challenges mentors and mentees face. And, that is one of the reasons why mentors need to be alert to seven signals that indicate the goal setting process may be in jeopardy.

Keeping the win-win action steps and conversation starters in mind will help you be ready to respond to these signals.

1. LOW HANGING FRUIT

The mentee selects an easy goal that can be achieved too quickly without much work and effort. Growth and development comes from an investment in energy.

Win-Win Action Step: Review the criteria for SMART goals—specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic and timely. If your organization has identified a set of leadership competencies, discuss how the mentee's goal aligns with them.

Conversation Starters: “Will this goal require time and energy from you? Will you need to stretch to achieve it?” “How will this goal contribute to your growth and development as a leader?”

2. MENTEE DEFENSIVENESS

The mentee is defensive and postures in order to look good in front of you. As a result, she is unlikely to select goals that will make a significant difference in her growth as a leader. Authentic goals with big impact require a mentee to be open and honest about her needs, challenges and opportunities for development.

Win-Win Action Step: Talk about your own mentoring experiences, and how being open and vulnerable contributed to your learning. Offer your observation that your mentee is holding back and seems unwilling to be open about his or her needs and challenges. Ask your mentee what you can do to help make him or her feel more comfortable.

Conversation Starters: “I think one of the things that will help us move forward is you sharing what you think is holding you back. Are you comfortable talking about that?” “When I think about my best mentoring experience, it was when I was willing to be open with my mentor. I hope you will feel you can do that with me.”

3. TOO OLD TO CHANGE

An older employee/mentee might find it difficult to acknowledge that she needs to find new ways to grow and learn in her role. She is more focused on the homestretch of her career rather than raising her performance in her current role.

Win-Win Action Step: Talk about the power of feeling engaged and energized at work, even when there are only two or three years left in your mentee's career. Connect their growth to the impact and value on the organization and the people who they work with. Reiterate that development is a lifelong process.

Conversation Starters: "Do you remember, earlier in your career, when you felt fully engaged and committed? What was going on then that made you feel that way?" "What would it take now to tap into those feelings?"

4. TELL ME WHAT TO DO

The mentee wants her mentor to identify goals for her. She might believe that because you have a solid track record as leader, you have a better handle on what it takes to be successful. She might also lack sufficient feedback from her supervisor to know what she needs to work on.

Win-Win Action Step: Talk about mentee ownership for her own growth and development and the importance of having her drive the relationship.

Conversation Starters: "Imagine it is five years from now, and you are in your ideal job, doing what you love. What does that look like?"

"What skills, knowledge or thinking do you need to help you get there?"

5. TIME IS NOT ON OUR SIDE

The mentee selects a goal that is beyond scope of the relationship (either in its dimension or time frame), which makes it difficult to achieve tangible results. It is hard to stay energized and focused when goals are so grandiose that you might not see any clear progress during your relationship.

Win-Win Action Step: Talk about SMART goals and the importance of realistic and timely goals. Work with your mentee to help him break his goal down into manageable steps you can begin to accomplish together.

Conversation Starters: "If you were to chop your goal into a number of small bites, what are the one or two things you would start with?" "What is it that you and I can do right away that would make us feel like we've accomplished something?"

6. MORE ORGANIZATIONAL THAN DEVELOPMENTAL

The mentee focuses on organizational changes (that address departmental fixes) rather than personal development issues. When this



"It's being here now that's important. There's no past and there's no future. Time is a very misleading thing. All there is ever, is the now. We can gain experience from the past, but we can't relive it; and we can hope for the future, but we don't know if there is one."

~ George Harrison (1943-2001) ~
British singer, songwriter, poet, musician, author and father
Mentored by Ravi Shankar Mentor to Gary Wright

[Biography](#)

happens, your mentee's focus needs to shift from making changes in the company to making changes in himself.

Win-Win Action Step: Discuss personal and professional growth and development as an outcome of mentoring, rather than organizational changes. Remind your mentee that mentoring focuses on self-development, growing themselves into the person who is competent and has the capability to achieve his goals.

Conversation Starters: "What leadership qualities are required to institute that level of change?" "If you were leading the organizational change, what is one leadership quality or skill you would need that you currently lack?"

7. YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND

The mentee really enjoys the relationship but isn't motivated by learning. He prefers conversation to working on his own development. While conversation is important throughout a mentoring relationship, it is a means and not an end to achieving one's goals.

Win-Win Action Step: Discuss the purpose of mentoring, and stress the balance between relationship and learning. Reinforce the need for specific goals to focus your conversations. Making sure your mentee understands that you need to see progress if you are to stay invested in their success.

Conversation Starters: "You seem reluctant to focus on tangible goals. How can we get ourselves focused in that direction?" "I would like us to talk about areas you see as strengths and areas that pose a challenge for you. From that conversation, we might be able to identify some goals to focus on. How does that sound?"

Confucius once said, "When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached; don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps." Like most people, you may not even be aware that your relationship is at risk until it is too late. If you think that goal setting is in jeopardy, try these action strategies and conversation starters to help you and your mentee get back on track.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Advisory Board and Lory Fischler, senior associate with [Leadership Development Services](#), are co-authors of *Starting Strong: A Mentoring Fable* ([Amazon.com](#), [Amazon.ca](#), [Amazon.co.uk](#)). Their

book weaves a compelling tale about a mentee and mentor who had to work through significant goal setting challenges. In *Starting Strong*, readers soon discover just how important the first 90 days are to laying the groundwork for a productive and successful mentoring relationship, and what they can do to prepare themselves so that their mentoring relationship starts out and stays strong.

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