

Power In Goals

Neuroscience increasingly provides fabulous insight into what the brain actually needs for our performance to improve. As a coach, I am aware of how individuals and teams can improve their capacities as they establish goals that engage the brain, and then they work to keep the brain engaged in pursuing their ambitions. By recognising goals as personal and/or team developmental opportunities and approaching them with the correct mind-set much power can be developed.

SMART goals have been written about endlessly, with more ways of applying words to the acronym than I have been able to keep up with. The version I have adopted is Specific, Measurable, Agreed to, Realistic, and Time Bound. It is a great formula, and is used with success in pursuing individual and team goals the world over. Projects use SMART goals to define high-level goals for the project, and the goals that define results needed from each phase, milestone and work package. In many respects, these goals can be considered Checklist Goals, short- to medium-term goals that must be satisfied for the project to be delivered, and achieving them signifies some degree of delivery has been realised. Checklist goals have a lot of clarity about HOW they will be achieved. The clarity of how to progress, and then the tangible, relatively short time frame for delivery really works well for our brains. They get the brain fired up and engaged in a pattern now recognised with staying focused and on task.

SMARTI goals are a special form of goal, the Stretch Goal. The 'I' for Inspiring, recognises that real change comes from doing something outstanding, something almost impossible. J. F. Kennedy provided a very clear SMARTI goal when he stated that Americans would land on the moon before the end of the decade (1960's). The power of his statement inspired the nation, indeed the world, and provided a fantastic aspiration that galvanised years of research, development, action and delivery. The inspirational component provided a common purpose and direction that aligned countless teams of people to make landing on the moon a reality. What really worked for the moon landing was the combination of inspirational element that clearly spelled out the aspiration, and the planning detail that

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Abstract

Our brains respond well to goals that are both inspirational and aspirational. Neuroscience-based coaching works with goals, performance and monitoring in a way that ensures the full engagement of the coachee.

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spelled out how to achieve the goal, as the how came clearer. An important aspect of sound planning is that it progressively elaborates on the detail and irons out the kinks in approach, addressing work to be done, risks to address, and who will do what when.



Engage your brain to achieve your goals

Performance against Stretch Goals is undermined by a lack of planning detail on 'how' to achieve the goal. Neuroscience has discovered that Stretch Goals do not fire the brain in the same way that a Checklist Goal does. The long-term nature of the Stretch Goal and the frequent lack of substance on how to achieve it means the brain does not engage as it does with the short-term goal. It is a contributing factor for why energy and focus drops for Stretch Goals and they get dropped after a while. Science is showing more clearly that Stretch Goals must be supported by ongoing attention on how to achieve them, effectively engaging the brain with some clarity on 'how', and with recognition that there will be obstacles to overcome for them to have lasting motivational power.

When I work with coachees on their goals I ensure that their stretch goals are aspirational, and that there is

sufficient detail developed on how to achieve the goal for the coachee to stay engaged, and performance can be monitored. Not only is it important to know how you will achieve something, it also matters that you recognise and acknowledge progress, or its lack, and regularly fine tune your behaviours to align with your purpose. Much of the power of coaching comes from a coachee owning their results and recognising what they are doing that is making the difference. Goals can be short-, medium-, or long-term in nature. It is the ownership and commitment to our goals, the responsibility we hold for their success, and the action we take to deliver them that strengthens our power, our 'ability to take meaningful action'.

Make goals work for you. Include an aspirational component that inspires you to action, and develop the detail so that you can stay engaged and monitor your performance.

For more information related to themes in this article, refer to chapter 11 (Purposeful Forward Movement) of: Harrison, S. G. (2012). [Appreciate the Fog: Embrace Change with Power and Purpose](#). Auckland, New Zealand: Xlibris Corporation.

Coaching can support you create the best outcome when working with areas covered by this article.

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