



Tool

ExACT Goals

Within the GROW model of performance coaching, popularised by Carol Wilson and Sir John Whitmore, a critical first-step is to enable the coachee to generate a clear understanding of where they want to get to: a 'goal'. The ExACT acronym prompts us to consider the ingredients in effective goals:

Explicit – goals need to be short so you can remember them, snappy phrases are more effective than wordy statements

eXciting – capitalising on positive momentum; it's easier to move towards something exciting than away from something you don't want.

Assessable – being clear how you would measure success encourage you to be clearer about the direction of travel.

Challenging – research shows goals that we more likely to achieve goals which slightly challenging ('stretch goals').

Time-based – providing an end-point focusses the mind, ideally goals should be no more than 12 weeks ahead.

Setting a goal according to the above parameters provides energy and focus, and keeps us motivated to achieve what we may not have thought possible. An effective goal is helped by the brain's own pattern matching system. This function allows us to notice only what is relevant to us *at the current time*, while filtering out the rest. For instance, in a busy airport, you will ignore constant announcements unless your own name is mentioned and this, miraculously, you will hear. Similarly, if someone has identified a powerful goal, the pattern matching system will highlight opportunities they might otherwise have missed.

The SMART goal setting model is widely used by organisations, but there can be pitfall with SMART: the goal set could be a negative one, such as 'get out of the bottom league' instead of 'move up a league'. In the former the focus is on the bottom league, so that is what will sit in people's minds, prompting the brain's pattern matching system to pick up on external factors connected to the bottom league. Finally – 'assessable' encourages us to think about outcomes rather than process. The goal should describe a change rather than an activity – so if we try to assess 'improving my work/life balance', we might decide that means 'working a 40 hr week; taking my paid leave; being home by 6 etc'.



SOURCE: Carol Wilson's *Best Practice in Performance Coaching* (Kogan Page, 2007).