

Leveraging REAL Goals for Real Impact

*A practical framework
for turning goals into reality*



By David A. O'Brien

The Leadership Compass

“If you don’t know where you’re going, any road will get you there.” This memorable line from the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* offers many guideposts for leaders and teams today. On one level, it reminds us that absent clarity and purpose, the outcome of our efforts is left to chance. On another level, it calls us to be deliberate in the pursuit of our desired destination or outcome.

Leaders are measured by the outcomes they produce. Few meaningful outcomes in a leader’s day “just happen.” In the majority of cases, things happen only when the leader decides what they truly want and need to accomplish and then act in a deliberate way to turn their goals and the goals of their team into reality. Goals are a destination and strategy is the road that leads to your desired destination.

Despite good intentions, some leaders and teams fall short when it comes to setting goals that produce meaningful outcomes. Often, it arises from the absence of a clear framework that ensures that the goals are not only relevant but realistic too. Without a clear framework, daily or weekly goals get lost in the sea of busy work and distractions. Goal setting is not just about the work to commit to, it’s also about deciding what not to commit to. In the words of Jessica Jackley, the Co-Founder of Kiva, a global leader in micro loans, *“deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do”*.

While there are a variety of frameworks that can be helpful, I have come to believe that many of them put too much emphasis on complex and at times, unrealistic goals that are not clearly aligned with employee motivation and strengths, both of which create clarity and purpose. To be sure, if employees don’t see a direct correlation between the goals and their capacity to add value, goals seem arbitrary and often not feasible.

Helping employees to set and achieve meaningful goals does not have to be complex. Rather, by following a structure that fosters clarity and purpose, leaders can make great strides in not only producing meaningful outcomes for themselves, but for their teams too.

One structure that can help achieve this is what I have come to identify as the REAL goals framework. Specifically, the framework includes,

Rlevant
Energizing
Actionable
Linked

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The **Relevant** part of the model answers the question “What?” It ensures that the stated goal is not only clear, but also aligned with organizational or departmental strategy. It also helps to create a context for why the goal is important and how the attainment of the goal serves the greater good of all involved.

The **Energizing** part of the model answers the question “Why?” It ensures that the stated goal is aligned with the individual’s strengths, motivation and capacity to add value and be successful. It also ensures that the goal is attainable which in itself, is a prime motivating factor.

The **Actionable** part of the model answers the question “How?” It ensures that the stated goal has a clearly defined task path that fosters traction and progress toward the desired outcome. In addition to providing a context for meaningful action steps, the Actionable part of the model serves to help define the optimum sequencing of tasks which aids in prioritizing.

The **Linked** part of the model answers the question “When?” It ensures that the stated goal has its place in the shared objectives of the team and organization. It also serves to validate the task sequencing as well as to help define key milestones on the path to goal achievement.

With few exceptions, leaders today are multi-tasking at a level never seen before. Add to this the constant drive for greater productivity and it’s no wonder that some leaders and teams fall short on the road to goal attainment and desired destination. While this reality represents a universal challenge for leaders, it also represents a terrific opportunity for leaders to leverage REAL Goals to create real impact. When we’re deliberate about where it is we need to go and how we all get there, we not only create greater clarity and purpose for ourselves but for our teams too.

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7 More Things You Can Do Now:

1. Assess your team's track record of goal attainment and define factors that have supported or influenced positive outcomes. Also identify barriers that may have been present in any of the goal scenarios.
2. Initiate a conversation with your leadership peer group about what strategies they utilize to help their team set and achieve meaningful goals. Also engage the group to identify strategies for reducing or eliminating perceived barriers.
3. Initiate a conversation with your team to assess their perspective on goal setting and attainment and encourage group input on perceived barriers and related solutions. Challenge them to define their role in helping fellow team members to be successful.
4. Ask your team to identify one thing you can do *more of* and one thing you can do *less of* to help them set and achieve their key goals. Initiate a deeper conversation with them about what they can do *more of* and *less of* to achieve goal attainment.
5. Invest 10 minutes in every team meeting (at least for the first month or two) to explore what's working well and what could be improved upon in terms of goal attainment. Consider doing this once a month after some progress has occurred.
6. Encourage a continuous improvement mindset by making it safe for your team to offer constructive feedback without fear of negative consequences.
7. [Download the free, REAL Goals worksheet](#) from the Learning Resources/Leadership Assessments page of the WCS website and ask each member of your team to complete it for your review and feedback. Note, having them use what they think is their most important goal for this activity not only builds clarity for them but also offers you considerable insight into their understanding of your expectations.

About David A. O'Brien:

David is President of Connecticut based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training, coaching and consulting services founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, non-profit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass, 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* was released in 2016 and is also available wherever books are sold. To learn more about the scope of David's work in helping leaders and teams to be more effective or to arrange for David to speak at your next conference or other special event, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at: www.workchoicesolutions.com or call him directly at 860.242.1070

