

Further Information

Unfortunately, the term "goal setting" has been used as a buzzword and websites on goal setting tend to be sensationalist or vague. As such, it is difficult to recommend any one website but a search for "*Goal setting and Motivation*" in any search engine, will yield thousands of possible resources. The tips given in this overview will appear in some form on both the creditable and less creditable sites. However, they are based on a chapter in Alderman (reference below) and informed by evidence and practical experience in classroom settings. If you are interested in finding out more, the Alderman chapter is recommended.

The techniques for goal setting are relatively simple and this paper tries to bring together the main concepts in a way that means you don't have to go away and read about the techniques in detail. These basic techniques should help you motivate your learners, but remember that goal setting may not be useful for everyone. In other words, you should think of goal setting as just one tool you can choose to use.

Reference

Alderman, M. K. (2004). *Motivation for Achievement, 2nd Edition*, LEA, London. pp. 105-129.

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Motivating Learners

There are many factors that may influence learners' motivation. For example, simply being around other learners can encourage learners to persist in their learning activities, especially when those other learners are of the same ability. However, there are also ways you can help to motivate your learners. One increasingly popular way is by identifying and setting goals and this paper aims to offer some ideas of how you can use goal setting to help the learners who visit a learning centre.



The main reasons goal setting is useful is that goals:

- can be determined by learners
- help learners direct their attention and action, ie, give learners *focus*
- help learners self-regulate and monitor their own learning
- help you assess how well your learner is progressing
- help both learner and tutor identify where there may be a problem with learning, eg, tasks are too easy or hard or unrealistic

Goal Identification

Goals can be short-term (proximal) or long-term (distal). A long-term goal may be something like "to get a qualification" and the short-term may be "to pass this unit". Most of the time, your learners will have a clear idea of their goals but sometimes these will be vague and/or unrealistic. To help them with this clarification:

- ask learners what they are trying to achieve at your learning centre
- identify which are short and which are long-term goals
- if your learners state their long-term goal, ask them how they would go about achieving this
- if your learners' goals are vague, eg, "I just want to learn", ask them what their interests are, what types of things they are interested in learning
- if your learners' goals are unrealistic, eg, they have low-level reading skills and want to pass a unit in a few weeks, suggest ways in which these goals can be achieved over a longer period
- remember that goals belong to the learner and should be negotiated with the learner

... simply being around other learners can encourage learners to persist in their learning activities



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Goal Setting I: breaking tasks down into manageable units

A goal can be seen as a high-order target and sub-goals or sub-tasks are the tasks that need to be completed to reach that goal. For example, writing an essay is made up of many sub-goals, eg, reading the right material, making notes, organising those notes. Key points to remember include:

- sub-goals can be broken down into further sub-goals - for example, "make notes" can be shortened to "make notes on chapter one"
- learners should be clear on the goal they are trying to achieve
- goals should be manageable
- set challenging tasks, not easy ones
- don't impose deadlines; negotiate them with your learners - for example, ask your learners if they would like a deadline or target date to complete a sub-task
- set up a Learning Log - this is a diary/exercise book in which your learners note the goals they are trying to achieve and the tasks they are doing to achieve those goals

Goal Setting II: monitoring progress

Once goals have been set, it is important that they are monitored. Learners need to know how well they are doing and, unsurprisingly, feedback is crucial in maintaining motivation. Positive feedback has been found to be particularly motivating, especially for learners who have had negative experiences in school.

However, you can't be there to give your learner feedback all the time and so goals help learners to monitor their own progress. The ability autonomously to monitor progress is called self-regulation. Self-regulated learners are those who are able to monitor their progress, diagnose why they have made mistakes and set new goals when they have achieved the goals they have set themselves. Self-regulated learners persist longer in the face of failure.

Learners should be clear on the goal they are trying to achieve

The following strategies may be useful in monitoring the progress of your learners:

- whenever your learners fail to meet a deadline, find out why and re-negotiate a new deadline
- you may also need to reassess the task they have set themselves
- emphasise that sometimes failing to meet a deadline is just useful information that enables you and the learner to set better/more realistic goals
- keep the Learning Log up to date by recording dates of when tasks were set and when they were done - as learners meet deadlines, this will give them positive feedback
- ask learners to note down anything important they think they learned, eg, "in Chapter 1, I learned that intrinsic motivation is most likely to occur when people feel they are under no external pressure to complete a task"
- it may be useful to set a series of goals that follow on from each other, eg, "if you can solve question 5, try question 6 and if you finish that, try question 7; or a variety of goals, eg, make notes from chapter 1 or read chapter 2"

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