



Setting Mentoring Learning Goals

If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you get there?

Mentoring is a relationship that focuses on learning and personal growth. Because none of us will become "perfect and complete" this side of heaven, it can be tempting for mentors to build into people's lives without taking the time to set goals and measure progress toward achieving those goals. Research has shown, however, that mentoring relationships that are intentional and focused on achieving goals produce greater results (improved productivity, increased learning, and greater skills) than mentoring relationships that are unstructured.

Helping your mentee write out learning and growth goals for the next three, six, or twelve months will help you identify and prioritize the things that are most important. Specific and measurable goals will also help you measure growth in your mentee.

In order to begin to set goals with your mentee, spend some time talking about:

- **The Person**—What are the mentee's strengths and weaknesses? Where do they want to grow?
- **The Context**—What are the needs of the ministry? How might the mentee's gifts and abilities meet the needs in the ministry or community?
- **The Gaps**—Where are the gaps between the skills and abilities of the mentee and the needs of the ministry? How might you equip and train your mentee to be most effective in the context?

You may find that you come up with an extensive list of learning needs and goals for your mentee. Most people cannot work on more than five goals at a time. Try to start by focusing on the "low hanging fruit," i.e. the learning needs that are easiest to reach and will be most effective. It is a helpful way to begin the mentoring process by accomplishing some "easy wins."

Once you have tackled some of the easier things, you can move on to more challenging goals. By limiting the number of goals you take on at the beginning and starting with some "easy wins" you will build trust and confidence to work on more difficult or complex growth goals.

When you have identified three to five "easy wins," it is time to begin writing the goals out. Good goals are SMART:

- **Specific**—In other words, not "I will be a better leader for the youth group" but "I will develop a six-month ministry plan and contact members of the youth group once a week."
- **Measurable**—For example, "I will have a spiritually-focused conversation with three strangers each week."
- **Action Oriented**—Goals should focus on what the mentee does, not necessarily on the outcomes from his or her actions.
- **Reasonable**—While it is helpful to have goals that stretch and challenge the mentee, they also need to be reasonable given the mentee's skills, schedule, and context.
- **Timely**—Goals should always have a time frame attached to them, so that progress toward accomplishing the goals can be measured and quantified.

After you have written out growth goals with your mentee, be sure to review the goals at each mentoring meeting. If your mentee is having difficulty working toward the established goals, help your mentee identify the "roadblocks" that impede growth and develop a strategy to overcome these obstacles. Once your mentee makes good progress, be sure to encourage and celebrate the growth that is occurring.