

From process to progress: The real goal of writing goals.

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Short Abstract

Setting goals is integral to successful outcomes, but only a small part of the process. A meaningful goal presumes a clear understanding of the starting point and the destination. In education and healthcare, goals are considered necessary for effective practice, accountability and funding. However, goals can fall short of producing meaningful outcomes if they lack critical considerations.

Meaningful, person-centred outcomes require more than a goal. It is essential that key stakeholders implementing the strategies understand the ‘why’ behind goals and are invested in outcomes. There is a need for a shared understanding of changes that will lead to achievement of these goals, how to provide opportunities for learning and strategies that meet individual needs, preferences, and motivations. Communication partners should also know how to adjust those strategies if needed or as learning progresses, then evaluate them for effectiveness. Even well-informed strategies do not always achieve desired outcomes. Tracking change allows data-driven decisions and an opportunity to celebrate success that boosts motivation.

This presentation will discuss a process of where the ROCC (Roadmap of Communicative Competence) assessment is used to establish a shared understanding of an individual’s communication followed by a goal-setting process tailored to their personality and motivations. By involving key stakeholders in discussions about the purpose and mechanisms for change, we can build buy-in, clarity and a sense of agency to implement the strategies. While requiring extra time upfront, this collaborative planning process builds capacity for informed decision-making and problem-solving, ensuring time and resources are utilised effectively and sustainably.

Long Abstract

Setting goals is widely acknowledged as a fundamental step towards achieving successful outcomes, but it’s crucial to recognise that writing a goal is only one small part of the process toward meaningful outcomes. In various contexts, such as education and healthcare, goals are often treated as the gold standard for effective practice and are required for funding or accountability. However, goals that are written and rewritten year after year, or selected from generic goal banks, while well-intentioned, frequently fall short of achieving meaningful outcomes if they lack critical considerations.

A focus on writing goals as the mechanism for success, presupposes that we have a clear understanding where you (or the person) are starting from and where you (or the person) want

to go. The complexity of goal setting also increases significantly when writing goals that relate to others, especially within the frameworks of allied health and education where communication goals relate to a unique individual, and often a range of communication partners, not just the person writing the goal. Accountability is crucial, but it's equally important to avoid getting *lost in the weeds* of administrative requirements and ensure that our goals and subsequent actions have a purpose. Effective goal setting involves not only crafting appropriate goals that are person-centred, but also to:

- understand what our clients or students need to learn or understand in order to achieve these goals and the opportunities and strategies that can help them learn this,
- differentiate the strategies to uniquely suit their needs, personal preferences, personality and motivations, and
- evaluate the effectiveness of our actions as well as progress toward the goals in a timely manner.

Another key measure of success is that those who are most responsible for the implementation of these strategies have a strong understanding of the 'why' behind the goal. This then informs an understanding of:

- how and when to provide opportunities for learning,
- the strategies that enable learning, and
- what communication partners might observe that suggests
- when or if adjustments are needed, or as evidence of learning.

Though we can save time by using goals written by skilled individuals or goal banks, they risk becoming mere administrative tasks if they do not involve collaborative input from the individual and/or key communication partners to inspire internal motivation and engagement toward meaningful targets. Of course, the role of the skilled person is to guide and build capacity, but it can be a complicated process to balance professional and administrative requirements with an unwavering focus on meaningful outcomes.

In addition, the effectiveness of strategies should be continuously reviewed. Even well-chosen strategies may not always lead to desired outcomes, or they may be implemented for longer than needed to reach a tipping point where scaffolds can be faded as the individual progresses. In our high-stakes environment where time is one of our most valuable resources, data-driven decisions are essential, but this data must be meaningful. It should provide insights into why certain strategies work or fail and help celebrate successes that further drives motivation and agency for the individual and their key people.

This presentation will discuss a process where the ROCC (Roadmap of Communicative Competence) assessment is first used to create a shared understanding of an individual's current communication, and this informs a process for goal setting that focuses on the individual's personality and motivations along with an understanding of what they need to learn to achieve meaningful communication outcomes. The underlying aim is that key stakeholders understand the 'why' behind goals and strategies, and the process of using data-driven insights to motivate and refine the way an individual is provided with opportunities and accommodations for learning. This process can take extra time upfront for collaboration and planning but if key stakeholders have the involvement in discussion of the purpose and mechanisms for change it can create a shared understanding and consistent approach that drives real and meaningful outcomes. This process can also build the capacity of others to make decisions, share with

others, and problem solve in real time. The process and capacity for effective goal setting discussions will be unique to each individual, setting or organisation, however it's important that educators and service providers utilise their time and funding effectively and understand the impact of informed decision making in the lives of individuals in our class or on our caseload.