

Mentoring Wisdom

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”
Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1944)

Writing down goal and objectives provides an immediate step toward making them happen. Goals are the bigger things you want to achieve over the next several years. Objectives are the smaller steps, taken tomorrow, next week, next month, which you need to reach a larger goal.

Writing Goals

Some goal categories to consider include:

- Housing
- Finances
- Employment
- Relations
- Community Connections and Involvement
- Spirituality
- Transportation
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Education
- Parenting
- Recreation and Sports
- Art, Music, Drama

Example:

In two years from today, I will be:

- In an associate degree program, pursuing an early childhood education degree
- Volunteering in my child’s Head Start program
- Taking art classes at the Community Center
- In contact again with my family
- Living in an apartment with my child on my own
- Pursuing back child support

Writing Objectives

Objectives are the detailed steps you take toward a goal. Objectives answer the question “What will change, by how much, by when?” In general, objectives should fall within a few months to a year to timeframe for the best results. Realistic objectives are the more difficult when they are several years out.

Example:

Goal: *To volunteer in my Head Start program*

Objectives:

- Talk to my child’s teacher about volunteer opportunities
- Go to the library and look at the Head Start website for volunteer ideas
- Talk to the members of the Parent Committee about their involvement
- Look for flyers and newsletters from Head Start for special events that may need volunteers
- Volunteer once in the next three months

Tips for Writing Objectives

Are the objectives *SMART*? Ask these questions.

Specific – Do I know precisely what has to happen to meet this goal?

Measurable – How will I know if I’ve achieved this objective?

Attainable – Is it realistic? Do-able?

Result-oriented – Will it move toward my end goal?

Time-oriented – Does it have a due date?

HINTS FOR DEALING WITH THE FRUSTRATING TIMES IN YOUR MATCH

Remember your matches are dealing with forces-generational family history, culture, and lifestyle – which are far bigger, than either of you. The goal of your relationship is NOT to turn your match's life around; rather it is to be present and provide consistent support during a transitional time in their lives. Your match's goals are more often than not simply SURVIVAL and SAFETY. Supporting them in making choices that will bring and keep survival and safety in their lives is a good place to focus your relationship.

Remember that people whose lives are in constant chaos (as is the case with several of your matches) often have a fear of normalcy and need to create more chaos. That's all they've known and they've gotten pretty skillful at both creating and surviving through it. Focus on their great survival strengths and when your match is in a crisis, ask, "What are we going to do next?" How did you take care of that in the past?" How did it look when things were working?" What would it look if things were working?" This helps you both focus on positive, forward-moving steps rather than on the problem/crisis. Maybe, in time, you will be able to support your match in making more preventative, proactive, up-front, choices that will put off the crisis.

Don't be too helpful or even say to your match, "I'm here to help you." Help feels controlling; and when someone feels controlled, he or she will back off. What you wear can also be/feel controlling to your match. Try to dress in a way that will build rapport, not separate you.

Don't fall into the trap of doing for, or even identifying goals and next steps for your matches. WE is a powerful word to use here. Ask, "What are we going to do next?" "How can we accomplish that step/goal?"

RESPECT is HUGE. Let your match know (and really believe) that you respect her/him.

Don't work harder than your match. You need to remember that it is your match's job to make choices and changes in their lives, not your. Don't make promises of what you will do for them. Instead, focus on empowering your match to identify for herself each successive, small step that need to be taken to move herself and her family to the next place of safety and survival. Then, be there for her as she takes those steps – even if they are not the ones you have chosen.

Remember even though you inevitably will at first; do not take your match's behavior personally.

When your match starts to retreat from your relationship, try giving him/her space, instead of pushing harder. Your might say, "I care about you, but maybe this relationship isn't working for you. How do you want to use me? Can you think about three other choices that might work well than what's happening now? Why don't you think about it for a week." This puts the ball in his/her court instead of yours.

Consider whether substances may be playing a role. Alcohol and/or drugs are often the self-medicating choices for people in crisis/chaos. Not only will they be in denial about their use, but you may be as well. If you suspect your match is self-medicating with alcohol or drugs, express concern about their safety and offer support (even accompanying them to meetings) for their desire to change this behavior. Have respect for individuals struggling with substance abuse. It is a mighty struggle.

ACTIVE & REFLECTIVE LISTENING (Including Using “I” Messages)

Good, positive communication involves REALLY listening to what the other person is saying and then letting that person know what you have heard his or her feeling and meanings.

Active listening involves:

- Establishing eye contact (when appropriate) and a posture that clearly indicates you are listening.
- Giving clues through your body language that you are hearing what is being said.
- Not interrupting.
- Not planning what you are going to say while the other person is still talking.

Reflective listening involves:

- Accepting what the other person is saying and feeling without premature judgment.
- Responding back to the person so that they feel understood (“This may be hard for you.”)
- Providing a mirror for the other person to see him or herself more clearly.
- Resisting the impulse to nag, criticize, moralize, lecture, analyze, or impose your solutions.
- Communicating with “I” messages and accepting responsibility for your own feelings – both positive and negative – without blaming or degrading the other person. (“I feel annoyed when our scheduled time together is always changing because it makes it hard for me to plan other activities in my life.”)
- Staying with the conversation no matter how tough and being open to sharing your own struggles and stories about similar situation in your own life.

Qualities of Successful Mentors

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- **Personal commitment to be involved with another person for an expended period of time.**

Mentors have a genuine desire to be part of other people's lives, to help them with tough decisions, to see them become the best they can be. They have to be invested in the mentoring relationship over the long haul, to be there long enough to make a difference.

- **Respect for individuals for their abilities and their right to make their own choices in life.**

Mentors can't come with the attitude that their own ways are better or that participants need to be "Rescued". Mentors who convey a sense of respect and equal dignity in the relationship win the trust of their partners, and the privilege of being advisors to them.

- **Ability to listen and to accept different points of view.**

Most people can find someone who will give advice or express opinions. It's much harder to find someone who will suspend his or her own judgment and really listen. Mentors often help simply by listening, asking thoughtful questions, and giving participants an opportunity to explore their own thoughts with a minimum of interference. When people feel accepted, they are more likely to ask for and respond to good ideas.

- **Ability to empathize with another person's struggles.**

Good mentors can feel with people without feeling pity for them. Even without having had the same life experiences, they can empathize with their partners' feelings and personal problems.

- **Ability to see solutions and opportunities as well as barriers.**

Good mentors balance a realistic respect for the real and serious problems faced by their partners with optimism about finding equally realistic solutions. They are able to make sense of a seeming jumble of issues and point out sensible alternatives.

- **Flexibility and openness.**

Good mentors recognize that relationships take time to develop and that communication is a two-way street.

THE LANGUAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Words that Encourage:

- “knowing you, I’m sure you’ll do fine”
- “you’re the kind who can make it”
- “you’ll make it”
- “I have faith in you”
- “thanks that helped a lot”
- “you’re doing better”
- “I appreciate what you did”
- “it looks like you really worked hard on that”
- “I like the way you tackle a problem”
- “I like the way you did that”
- “I’m glad you enjoy learning”
- “look at the progress you’ve made”
- “hope you’ll figure it out”
- “it looks like you enjoyed doing that”
- “I’m sure you’ll do fine”
- “thanks a lot; I really appreciate...”
- “I like you (smile, dress, shirt, etc.)”
- “it looks like you really thought that out”
- “it looks like you did some planning on that”
- “that’s a rough one, but I’m sure you’ll try to work it out”
- “I really enjoyed today, thanks” (to a group)

Mentoring is....

- Mentoring is giving ear.
- Mentoring is giving a safe space for mentee to have new thoughts and take risks.
- Mentoring is supporting. not teaching or preaching.
- Mentoring is being **with** the person being mentored, not doing **for** or **to**.



Good mentors are:

Tenacious. They have the courage to keep on trying...even if they do not receive encouragement or thanks.

Overt. They keep their mentoring activities out in the open, never missing an opportunity to tell others...and are proud of it.

Unselfish. Their motives are to help others; their personal needs are secondary. They don't expect mutual "pay-off" but are pleased if they occur naturally through the relationship.

Compassionate. They demonstrate genuine understanding and empathy...and know that insincerity and manipulative tactics will show through a facade of caring.

Humble. They know they don't have to have all the answers...nor do they continually have to prove themselves to be "smarter" or "more wordy" than their mentees.

Family Senior Homeless Initiative Mentoring Partners

The Mentee Partner

DEFINE MENTEE:

One who is open to sharing her/his experience with another and to leaning new ways to meet the goals.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MENTEE:

- Express earnest interest in developing a mentor relationship.
- Perceives a mentoring relationship as different from counseling or therapy though they may be receiving counseling or therapy from other sources.
- Is able to follow through with commitment to have contact with a mentor weekly (by phone or in person) for a period of six months.
- Commits to attend a training/orientation.
- Desires to set goals and be accountable to their mentor on progress toward their goals.
- Is approaching employment or educational transition and desires guidance and support for a successful transition.