



## SPECIFYing Your Outcomes

How to get clarity in your goal setting?

The late Sir Edmund Hillary once said, *“You don’t have to be a fantastic hero to do certain things – you can be just an ordinary chap, sufficiently motivated.”* And when I am working with clients in either a coaching or training context, I think a similar thing of my clients. Most (if not all) of them would consider themselves ordinary people who I think do extra-ordinary things. Simply put though, they have specific outcomes to reach, and this requires them to set goals in the process.

### What are goals?

Goals imply that something is wanted or needed, time is involved and some form of planning is required. They are a desired end or result from someone’s ambition or effort regardless of the size.



In the self-help industry I often hear people saying, “Oh I don’t do goals, or I’m never good at them, or they never seem to work out etc.” Whether we consciously set goals or not, they exist in our lives always. For example going to work, eating food, grocery shopping, snow boarding, teaching your kids values, and driving to a destination are all forms of goals. Most people achieve many of the items they set out to do – daily! We’ve just got use to attaching a certain size and complexity to them in order to consider them ‘real’ goals – but simply put, a goal is a goal regardless of its scope or extent.

### Only 30% of goals started

During my working career, I’ve grown up largely in the corporate working environment, where I’ve been fairly accustomed to more standard formats of goal setting and planning which usually entails a strategy, a purpose, objectives, tasks, timeframes, responsibilities etc. All of them are good data focused methods which can have a time of usefulness in the grand scheme of goal setting/planning.

Late 2006 I was managing a team with a significant work load (which many can relate to). We were using some of these traditional forms of goal setting, but starting about 30% of what we had planned to do. We were constantly busy and out of time. And, I thought there must be something better than experiencing this type of outcome, and certainly action and thinking to apply that was better than this! What I later found out was that were regularly doing one of two things - over planning and creating overwhelm, or under planning

so we had too much flexibility to continually move our decisions around which contributes to lack of direction.

So I attended this 18-day course on Neuro Linguistic Programming (a fancy name for learning a whole bunch of ideas and tools for setting ones life up for success) in hope of finding better ways of doing things. And of course, I found exactly what I was looking for – and specifically in the area we needed it most – goal setting.

### The vision for Bogota

Recently, I’ve been inspired by the story of Jaime Castro, Antanas Mockus and Enrique Penalosa who were Mayors in succession of one another of the city of Bogota, Colombia from 1992 onwards. Bogota is almost twice the land size of Auckland, New Zealand and has over 7.5 million citizens. And at the beginning of this run of mayors it was considered to be, *“One of the most violent cities in the world.”* Well known for organized crime, drug cartels, extreme poverty, violence, high homicides rates, general corruption and nepotism.

From a young age, individually but ultimately together the latter two mayors visualized a much better Bogota. There was a whole different look to the city they imagined, a place where people felt different about one another, where they interacted and talked with each other in a better way and where the sounds of injustice and crime were no longer around.

Penalosa stated that he wanted, *“A city of equality, social justice, and happiness for people.”*

A city where people gained a sense of morality and a caring civic duty, where crime would be reported and disintegrated, where integrity could be gained and peoples lives prioritized, where children and people could go to libraries, schools, and ride bikes in safety, be educated. Where dangerous traffic conditions and attitudes would vanish, and crime greatly reduced if not gone altogether.

A city where people had more choices to have healthy lifestyles, safety to go places, opportunities for education and ultimately have a better life quality for the rich and poor.

They knew big steps would need to be initiated by themselves and to take personal responsibility for what needed to be done. Mockus had said, *“I had an anger problem, and in order to lead others onto being peaceful citizens, then I would need to change my own behaviours”.*

Penalosa knew that he wasn’t going to be a corrupt politician and got his votes without the backing of any financial group, he worked independently for his votes by walking the streets and spending a great deal of



time meeting and spending time with the citizens of the city.

They all pulled on every resource they had, strength, knowledge and ideas, humour, emotional power, friends and allies they could to reach their goals.

So how did Castro, Mockus and Penelosa achieve such a difference? What was going on within the talent they had for achieving such amazing results? In fact, what are some of the keys that successful goal setters use to give themselves that advantage? Well back in 2006 I was introduced to SPECIFY, a model that will highlight key steps that can be taken in setting well formed outcomes in your lives.

### What is SPECIFY?

SPECIFY is a goal setting model that was developed in 1992 by Dr. Richard Bolstad (a New Zealander, psychotherapist, registered nurse, author, and respected expert in the field of Neuro Linguistic Programming), and has been taught both nationally and internationally since then. It was designed as a way to help people plan well-formed outcomes for the goals they want to achieve. It is a model that is widely used in many fields, and since my introduction to this model, I have now taught it to over 500+ people. SPECIFY is an acronym for the stages that need considering in this particular process – which are:



- ♦ Sensory specific and timed
- ♦ Positive wording
- ♦ Ecological
- ♦ Choice increasing
- ♦ Initiated by self
- ♦ First steps identified
- ♦ Your resources

### Sensory specific and timed

What is required here is to use visual imagery to consider what it would be like having achieved the goal, by drawing an image in our minds-eye about what we would be doing as we work towards achieving the goal. This step is for creating the outcome in our mind first and then following through in reality, and making these objectives as tangible as possible. We use our senses (what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell – amongst a few others), to get specific and clear about what we might experience through our senses as we achieve our outcomes. The key senses used in this process would be to consider:

- ♦ *What would I see occurring, and what would I be doing? What would I hear, and what internal dialogue would I be saying to myself? How would it feel? Do I notice any associated tastes or smells throughout?*

I am regularly asked, whether timeframes are required in goal setting. And, of course it is. Timeframes indicate when a goal should be achieved by so you know how much needs to be done and by when, and it presupposes a sense of commitment to meet the goal.

- ♦ *Select a time and date (including year) that you intend to have this outcome by?*

### Positively stating the outcome

It is useful when having a goal to be focused on what is wanted, rather than what is not wanted. If the focus is on the positive, then we can begin to search for what is being done right and enhancing that. Opposed to focusing on something negative, if we do this then we must think about what is being done wrong. And we know from research that this is not always the most effective producing thinking.

According to an article written by Richard Bolstad (Research on SPECIFYing Goals and The Secret.2009), in 2002, Dr Denise Beike and Deirdre Slavik at the University of Arkansas conducted a study of what they called "counterfactual" thoughts. In short they committed to a study with two groups of students and what happens with "counterfactual" thoughts. The result of the study showed that, counterfactual thoughts in everyday life cause us to feel "*we should have done better or more*", and while initially "*motivating us to change our behaviour*", the longer term impact was that, "*no self-perceived change in behaviour actually occurs.*" Essentially, people who feel bad about themselves, feel they have less control over their lives. What does work is 'credit taking thoughts' in which people reflected on success and were able to congratulate themselves. It serves to reinforce appropriate behaviours and helps people to feel more in control of themselves and their circumstances.

Examples of positively stating a goal is, "I use effective prioritizing tools and have systems in order" opposed to "I will stop being stressed and disorganized at work", or "My finances are credit, and I have (x) money saved in the bank" opposed to 'I want to be debt free, and have no loans to pay'.

- ♦ *Consider the goal you have, and ask yourself how would you positively state or word your goal?*

### Ecological

When the term ecology is used it is to check for possible future change as a result of goal action. For example when a pebble is thrown into calm water, there is a ripple effect that occurs. This represents that when action is taken, change or impact has an effect elsewhere. When a goal is in process of being achieved it is the same. Here we take opportunity to



identify in our goal setting, that in achieving our goals we can check for gains and other potential outcomes such as obstacles that can arise or losses that could occur, and check are we okay with those changes, and how would we deal with them?

- ♦ *What are the key gains? What obstacles could get in the way of this happening, and how would you overcome those? Are there potential losses here? Are you okay with that? If not, what could be done to change that from happening?*

Research done by Gabrielle Oettingen from the University of Pennsylvania shows that most successful goal setters while checking the benefits of their goals, will also spend time considering the obstacles as well and how to overcome those.

### Choice increasing

Having outcomes that increase our choices provide us more flexibility, motivation and happiness opposed to limitations or sense of having things taken away from us. In this phase we check if the goal increases the choices available to the goal setters. It is also part of recognizing the possible change that can occur as a result of having the desired outcome.

Richard Wiseman Ph.D. and author, researched over 5000 goal setters and found that successful ones ensured their progress was bringing them rewards rather than limiting their choices and creating work.

- ♦ *How is this goal going to increase your choices? What are some of those choices?*

### Initiated by self

In achieving our outcomes we need to review what personally needs doing in order to achieve the goal. So you may be thinking, isn't the goal something I am personally doing?



And you'd be right, though in every outcome we want, there are certain things we need to take personal responsibility for putting into action and shaping. Taking time to set them up and maximize the potential for success.

For example in 2009 I did some work with a manager who was struggling with his team's performance. The manager felt the team never brought into what he wanted, communication in the team and between ranks was fairly strained and getting worse. He decided their performance had to change and so did their communication. So he held a meeting with his team and told them emphatically that he had a goal for the team's communication to improve, and ensure performance in productivity was to increase! And, then he left them to it.

In telling me this after the fact I asked him how that approach went, and as you can imagine...it didn't. You

see, what he needed to do in this instance was personally invest time in bringing the team on board with the goal so it became theirs also. He also needed to personally initiate a change in the way he communicated to them and model what was wanted. You see, people are not so good at following others who don't lead by example and walk the talk.

### First steps

Many ideas and outcomes can be accomplished when the task is broken down into small enough chunks or sub goals. So they're a manageable size for the individual or system. Often in goal setting, the long term vision of the goal can bear significant weight and seem so hard, fear, overwhelm, anxiety can set in and the motivation that may have been there disappears. In this phase identify the first achievable step to be taken towards the overall goal. Whether you are a planner or not, the main focus should be on what can be done today.



- ♦ *What is your first achievable step to take? What small task can be actioned today towards the goal?*

### Resources

The last step of the SPECIFY model is in identifying the resources required to help achieve them. In this phase we explore what resources are needed in two ways; 1-External resources, and 2 – Internal resources.



External resources are typically referred to as those external ones that aid us in getting the goal done i.e. the computer, the internet, books, another person, a course, material of some type etc.

Internal resources are those inner skills and talents we have, the ones we use a lot along with the ones we use less often. Inner resources can be skills such as organizing, networking, planning, determination, desire, creativity, focus, being resourceful, positive, confident etc. People will often say they're not very good at something. So it's important to bring to their attention that at some point in their life they have probably used the skill and to notice that.

- ♦ *What external resources are needed to achieve this goal? How will you obtain them? What internal resources do you have to achieve this outcome? How will these help your goal?*

### What to be mindful of in goal setting.

As with any objective, there are key insights to be aware of with regards to thinking, human behaviour and the tasks at hand. Be mindful of:



- ♦ *Solutions!* Not focusing on problems.
- ♦ *Taking action!* Less fantasizing and dreaming about the outcomes. Have action points and check progress.
- ♦ *Ensure realistic advantage!* Understand goal gains and be aware of obstacles and threats.
- ♦ *Focus on now!* Continually critiquing the past, and sitting out in the future reduces the chances of completing tasks and sub goals today.
- ♦ *Acknowledge progress!* No matter how small or big the effort – as humans, we simply like to know we are doing well, so acknowledge progress.
- ♦ *Apply appropriateness!* Extreme over thinking and planning can lead to overwhelm and anxiety; and subsequently under planning leads people in circles and to frustration.
- ♦ *Choose direction!* Swimming in indecision eventually leads to exhaustion and danger.

### The flexibility with SPECIFY

The great flexibility with this model is its ability to adapt to any type of goal, and whether used with individuals, couples, teams, in training environments, or used as a conversational piece in helping clients through the consultative process get clear about what they want. It can be used as a model all of its own, or combined with traditional long term planning goals.

On returning to my team at the end of the NLP course, in 2007 I introduced this model to my team. Over the next few years we consistently used this model on its own and as part of other planning processes, and went from starting 35% of our goals to achieving in excess of 87% of them.

### The outcome in Bogota

Jaime Castro the first of the mayors named earlier reformed the city's financial structure which had been poorly mismanaged for decades, thus building the financial infrastructure upon which the following mayors were able to follow through their visions. Antanas Mockus created a new civic culture of respected behaviours amongst people, and Enrique Penalosa changed the face of the city through urban design and reprioritization of concerns back to the people of the city.

The city of Bogota, Colombia went on to reduce its crime rate by over 70%. It became a model city of peace and civic duty. The behaviours of over 7.5 million people altered in just over 10 years. It is now referred to as the Athens of South America. And it all started with the idea of reaching a new outcome for its people.

### What you can do now

The people we work with get to If you want to live and experience their goals. If you want to realize your

outcomes and bring them into fruition we're able to help you in several ways - from guiding you individually, as a team or group. We can help you get clarity on a single idea to working with you in accomplishing your dream. The outcomes of working towards your goals often outweigh the goal itself! We can help you navigate your way via coaching, training, people engagement or learning packages.

Call us at the office directly for a no-obligation discussion, or check us out at the website for more information or contact us via the web forms.

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May 2010.

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