



American Baptist Churches USA

Clergy and Leadership Development

Goals and Performance

Question: What kind of goals best lead to performance?

- A: “Goals that people can comfortably reach prove to be the most motivational.” {Comfortable goals have very little effect. A comfortable goal can reinforce the notion that the stars may have been working too hard.}
- B: “Goals that stretch people lead to better results.” {This is the best answer for this question. Goals that provide some dissonance between where the person is now and where they could be with some extra encouragement and resources usually work the best.}
- C: “Goals that no one initially thinks they can meet are the most effect as long as at least one person in the group believes it is possible.” {If only one person accepts the goal, it is likely that only one person will be motivated.}
- D: “There is no limit, the more aggressive the goal the better. Even if the group does not actually reach the goal, they will outperform other groups with lesser goals.” {Goals that are too aggressive will likely be scoffed at by individuals and have little chance of being accepted.}
- E: “Goals are overrated. Placing people in a team setting trumps the influence of goals.” {Goals are not overrated. Goals matter. While well-functioning teams can also enhance performance, goals can work for both individuals and groups.}

Further Research on Goals and Performance

Goals matter. O’Leary-Kelly, Martocchio, and Frink (Academy of Management, 1984) found that groups that set goals outperform other groups who do not by one standard deviation.

It seems that the key to goals is the acceptance factor. When a goal is accepted, it is personalized and becomes a part of the person’s inner motivation. Goals that are not accepted have very little if any effect on people.

“Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.” (Philippians 3:12-13, NRSV).