A Theoretically Based, Easy-to-Use Tool for Promoting Goal-Setting Behaviors in Youths

Abstract

Extension youth development professionals benefit from having theoretically based, easy-to-use tools for promoting goal-setting behaviors in youths. The Youth Goal-Setting Map provides practitioners with a mechanism for helping youth develop attributes that place them on a pathway to thriving. This article provides the Youth Goal-Setting Map tool, describes how to implement the tool, and suggests applications of the tool within Extension contexts.

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Youths need life skills to develop on a positive trajectory (National Research Council, 2012). One such life skill is an ability to set and achieve goals (Maass, Wilken, Jordan, Culen, & Place, 2006). Because building life skills through youth development programming is a major component of Extension (Fitzpatrick, Gagne, Jones, Lobley, & Phelps, 2005), it is critical to have tools available for practitioners to use with youths. Extension professionals benefit from having theoretically based, easy-to-use tools for promoting youth goal-setting behaviors. The Youth Goal-Setting Map (YGSM) is just such a tool.

Theoretical Rationale

Relational developmental systems theory argues that human development is regulated by interactions between the developing person and multiple levels of context (e.g., school, peers) (Overton, 2015), with such person–environment relational processes providing contexts whereby youths can build skills that advance their positive development. Relational developmental systems theory supports Extension's long practice of promoting leadership life skills to instantiate positive youth development (Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992). Of course, leadership life skills include goal setting. Goal-setting behaviors enact the "SOC" process of *selecting* a future goal, *optimizing* the chance of goal achievement (e.g., identifying resources), and *compensating* for barriers to goal completion. This third aspect of the SOC process further enhances development by bringing to bear additional skills youths need to successfully transition to adulthood (e.g., self-regulation) (Freund & Baltes, 2002). Thus, contexts supporting the promotion of goal-setting behaviors in youths increase the youths' chances of imminent and long-term success.

YGSM Overview and Implementation

The YGSM is an easy-to-use tool for promoting goal-setting behaviors in youths. The tool is a two-sided

(front/back) graphical map, with different versions that correspond to varying durations for achieving goals (see Appendixes A–C). With the three versions of the tool in the appendixes and the description and directions for implementation provided here, Extension professionals have everything they need to use the YGSM with youths in a variety of settings.

Front

The front includes a description of the tool and sections for choosing a purposeful category, identifying time-specific goals, and determining milestones.

Purposeful category. Damon (2009) found that youths categorize life purpose into 18 domains (e.g., family, lifework). Purpose provides direction and an intrinsically driven commitment to reach an outcome that can withstand resistance to goal achievement. Use this section to direct the youth to specify the domain in which his or her goal is located.

Time-specific goals. The tool comprises three identical versions, with varying sets of time-specific goals (e.g., 1-day/1-week/1-month goals). Use the version that best aligns with how far in the future goals are located and the developmental stage of the youth. The YGSM requires listing one or more goals for each time period and ensures goal alignment to support a systematic pathway to the furthest goal.

Milestones. The youth should note in this section small milestones on the pathway to goal achievement. Acknowledgment of milestones has been linked with increasing motivation for goal achievement (Dweck, 2006) and facilitating the process of self-regulated capacity.

Back

The back includes quadrants related to intermediate milestones, resources for reaching goals, barriers to reaching goals, and strategies for moving toward goal achievement.

Quadrant 1 (intermediate milestones). Praising efforts to reach milestones can motivate youths to reach their ultimate goal (Dweck, 2006). Take a measured approach by encouraging youths to visualize future milestones. Direct the youth to list anticipated milestones in quadrant 1.

Quadrant 2 (supports). Social support has been linked to goal achievement *and* self-regulatory abilities (Perry & Rahim, 2011) because it can provide the emotional energy and tangible support youths need for continued goal pursuit. Encourage the youth to list all possible supports in quadrant 2.

Quadrant 3 (barriers). Because it is unlikely that the pathway to goal achievement will be without barriers (Freund & Baltes, 2002), the youth should actively forecast potential obstacles by listing them in quadrant 3.

Quadrant 4 (compensation). After identifying barriers to goal achievement, it is important to formulate potential compensation strategies related to those forecasted barriers. Successfully adapting to barriers provides an opportunity for youths to develop confidence and proceed toward goal achievement. Have the youth list practical compensation strategies in quadrant 4.

Application of the YGSM in Extension

Extension provides youths with contexts (e.g., 4-H clubs) in which they can use the YGSM to develop the life skill

of goal setting. Practicing goal-setting behaviors with the assistance of caring adults provides an opportunity for the growth and development of attributes (e.g., competence, caring) needed to instantiate positive youth development (Fox, Schroeder, & Lodl, 2003). The YGSM can be used to promote the life skill of goal setting in individuals as needed or implemented in existing programming for groups (e.g., when club members are planning to present at the state fair).

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A
Youth Goal-Setting Map, Version A

Front

(Youth) Name: _____   Date: _____

Youth Goal-Setting Map

Goal-setting behaviors among youths link positively to higher achievement. One factor related to having good goal-setting behaviors is to develop a sense of purpose in life, particularly from one of 18 categories of purpose. Complete the "map" below to set, optimize, and compensate your future goals in one of the categories. Your day, week, and month goals should align together. Be sure to complete both sides of the map.

<u>Purposeful Category (circle one)</u>: family, country, personal growth, sports, academic achievement, good health, looking good, arts, making lots of money, lifework, general leadership, romance, political or social issues, happiness, religious faith or spirituality, community service, friends, and personal values.

- State your goal for today for the chosen category above:

- State your goal for this week for the chosen category above:

- State your goal for this month for the chosen category above:

Milestones   Milestones

1-day goals here   1-week goals here   1-month goals here

Back

Quadrant 1: List any possible milestones that can be reached prior to goal achievement	Quadrant 2: List any resources (e.g., people, groups, and things) that will help you reach your goals.
Quadrant 3: List any foreseeable barriers or obstacles to goal completion.	Quadrant 4: List possible strategies to help you navigate potential obstacles you might face as you move toward goal achievement.

Appendix B
Youth Goal-Setting Map, Version B

Front

(Youth) Name: _____   Date: _____

Youth Goal-Setting Map

Goal-setting behaviors among youths link positively to higher achievement. One factor related to having good goal-setting behaviors is to develop a sense of purpose in life, particularly from one of 18 categories of purpose. Complete the "map" below to set, optimize, and compensate your future goals in one of the categories. Your 3-month, 6-month, and 1-year goals should align together. Be sure to complete both sides of the map.

Purposeful Category (circle one): family, country, personal growth, sports, academic achievement, good health, looking good, arts, making lots of money, lifework, general leadership, romance, political or social issues, happiness, religious faith or spirituality, community service, friends, and personal values.

- State your 3-month goal(s) for the chosen category above:

- State your 6-month goal(s) for the chosen category above:

- State your 1-year goal(s) for the chosen category above:

Milestones   Milestones

| 3-month goals here | 6-month goals here | 1-year goals here |

Back

Quadrant 1: List any possible milestones that can be reached prior to goal achievement.

Quadrant 2: List any resources (e.g., people, groups, and things) that will help you reach your goals.

Quadrant 3: List any foreseeable barriers or obstacles to goal completion.

Quadrant 4: List possible strategies to help you navigate potential obstacles you might face as you move toward goal achievement.

Appendix C
Youth Goal-Setting Map, Version C

Front

(Youth) Name: _____   Date: _____

Youth Goal-Setting Map

Goal-setting behaviors among youths link positively to higher achievement. One factor related to having good goal-setting behaviors is to develop a sense of purpose in life, particularly from one of 18 categories of purpose. Complete the "map" below to set, optimize, and compensate your future goals in one of the categories. Your 1-year, 5-year, and 10-year goals should align together. Be sure to complete both sides of the map.

Purposeful Category (circle one): family, country, personal growth, sports, academic achievement, good health, looking good, arts, making lots of money, lifework, general leadership, romance, political or social issues, happiness, religious faith or spirituality, community service, friends, and personal values.

- State your 1-year goal(s) for the chosen category above:

- State your 5-year goal(s) for the chosen category above:

- State your 10-year goal(s) for the chosen category above:

Milestones   Milestones

| 1-year goals here | | 5-year goals here | | 10-year goals here |
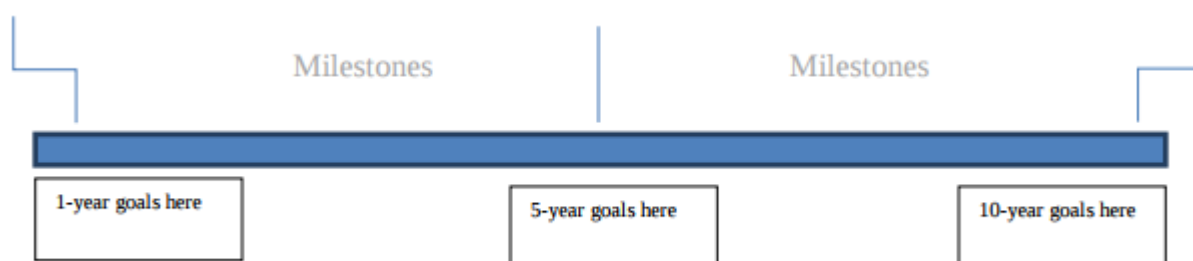
Back

Quadrant 1: List possible milestones that can be reached prior to goal achievement.	Quadrant 2: List any resources (e.g., people, groups, and things) that will help you reach your goals.
Quadrant 3: List any foreseeable barriers or obstacles to goal completion.	Quadrant 4: List possible strategies to help you navigate potential obstacles you might face as you move toward goal achievement.