

Are we being SMART enough?

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For the past 3 months my weekends have been devoted to learning new skills. Skills that on the face of it are far removed from the world of marketing, communications and media that I inhabit Monday to Friday. I've been immersed in the world of health and fitness and have emerged a qualified Personal Trainer, with a new perspective on the day-to-day challenges we face.

What's been really interesting (and rather unexpected too) are the number of parallels I've discovered along the journey between the two worlds. To cite a few; the initial client consultation to understand their health, lifestyle, exercise history, current performance and goals etc. (briefing meetings, brand and market research). The agreement of short,

medium and long-term health and fitness goals (KPIs measured, outcome planning and objective setting). Navigating and motivating a client through, often challenging, behavioural changes (understanding consumer attitudes and beliefs, purchase journeys and behavioural economics).

One thought I want to expand upon here is goal setting. When thinking about a client embarking on a personal training programme, it's imperative that any goals set are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound). This can take longer and may require probing questions to identify what the client wants and how they plan to go about achieving it. You also need to establish some contingency plans and question how realistic the client's desired goals are, exploring 'what if' scenarios. However, it's an approach that increases the likelihood of a client achieving their goals.

OK, so the SMART approach is nothing new. But my challenge is, are we truly applying SMART to goal setting? My observation would be we conveniently lose one or more of these principals along the way – most often the 'A' and 'R'. I see quite specific goals attached to a set timeframe and a suite of measurements to enable us to identify if we get there. However, are those goals really achievable and realistic in the first place? If not, we are setting ourselves up to fail.

To mitigate this some open, honest and probing conversations are needed. Getting your hands dirty with data can help with this, revealing the true extent of the challenge, the source of growth and consequently the achievability of the goals. It would also be sensible to design objective setting with short, medium and long term goals in mind. Smaller, realistic steps towards achieving the ultimate business objectives. That's being SMART.

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