

MEETING YOUR CLIENTS WHERE THEY ARE— HOW TO NEST YOUR GOALS WITH THEIRS

SHANE JENNE, CSCS, NSCA-CPT, TSAC-F

INTRODUCTION

It is imperative that both the client and the personal trainer use a common operating language when working together towards the goal. The SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based) goal format states that a goal must be time-bound in order to be effective (5). It is also important to set standards and conditions in order to better understand not only what needs to be done but how long it may take to do so. To achieve some level of motivation, the goal must be difficult to accomplish (4). It is the personal trainer's job to understand the client's desire and emotion and link it to their goals (6). This article will provide some conditions and standards with specific tools personal trainers may consider using in their initial interview with potential clients.

"Standards" can be defined as something established by authority, custom, or general consent as a model or example. It is important to note that this "authority" is the personal trainer. Ideal working standards do not create themselves. The personal trainer has to breed the environment for themselves and the client.

Conditions are "a restricting or modifying factor." Conditions help guide actions to fulfill the standards already in place. For example, the progress photo standard is to submit new pictures at the end of each training block. A condition is that the client must wear the same outfit each time they take these photos. Examples of the relationship between standards and conditions can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

THE INITIAL INTERVIEW

When sitting down with a potential client, many things are considered, but ultimately the personal trainer should ensure that the working relationship between themselves and the potential client will be effective. After building rapport, the personal trainer may find a window of opportunity where the personal trainer can ask more effective questions. The personal trainer wants the client to be as open as possible when it comes to what they want and why they want that specific goal. Participation in the goal-setting process tends to enhance goal commitment (6). Once the personal trainer understands what their client wants, it is the personal trainer's responsibility to give them an appropriate timeline.

When in this phase of creating SMART goals, the personal trainer may consider creating a calendar with the potential client. This provides a common operating picture, visually, of how long it may take the client to reach their goals. This calendar serves as a visual aid and the client may be able to shed light on personal celebrations that serve as friction points in reaching their goals, such as birthdays, vacations, and holidays. Setting this condition during the initial interview process allows the personal trainer to identify science-backed timelines to the client.

For example, if a client wants to lose 10 lb in two weeks, the personal trainer can use this opportunity, with the calendar, to explain that what the client may want instead is to consider a steadier rate of loss in order to sustainably lose and keep the weight off. Aiming to lose 5 – 10% of initial body weight within the first six months is a realistic approach (2). Rapid weight loss with aggressive nutrition restrictions may leave the client less motivated because the goal was too difficult (4).

When using this condition, it is important to set standards as well. The personal trainer, and client, will work with multiple checks and balances along the way. During the client's journey, their progress will go through the rigors of being observable, measurable and repeatable.

OBSERVABLE

The personal trainer may find that the goal of losing 10 lb is often a surface-level goal. The client usually has an underlying reason of why they want to lose the 10 lb and it is the personal trainer's role to draw that out of them. Goals have been shown to be most effective when they are important to the individual and when the individual can see their progress (7). The personal trainer may emplace a condition that the client update before and after progression photos on a regular basis. Although this is a great goal for side to side progression, the personal trainer can offer more of a service.

The personal trainer can suggest that the client weigh themselves daily with a checklist of standards (shown in Table 1). When the client has a clear standard to follow and the conditions are met, the testing becomes more reliable. Once weighed, the client can input their data into an app, which will produce a chart. The personal trainer and client can then use that chart to show progression.

The personal trainer may also find benefit in observing the client's energy levels and attitude, especially if the client's goal is weight loss. A negative change in energy and attitude may illuminate the realization that the personal trainer's methods are too aggressive at a specific time. The more specific the personal trainer is with their conditions, the more consistent the client will be in their efforts.

MEASURABLE

Peter Drucker made famous the quote, "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it." Although some have argued this point, it serves to spark a conversation. Where appearance is measured by progress photos and weight by the chart provided by inputting their data into an app, the personal trainer and client may find it beneficial to track steps, sleep, successes, and failures of the week. Using wearable technology and a training app can streamline tracking for the client. For example, collecting points, tracking

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF GOOD STANDARDS AND CONDITIONS

STANDARDS	CONDITIONS
The client will submit a progress photo at the end of each training block to Google Drive no later than Monday morning at 9:00 am	Wear the same clothes
	Use the same camera
	Stand unflexed
	Keep the same distance away from the camera
	Use the same lighting
The client will weigh themselves daily	Unfed
	After using the restroom
	Unclothed
	Make sure the scale is in the same spot every day
The client will submit their weekly nutrition logs on Friday no later than 9:00 pm	Include pictures of MyFitnessPal© weekly macro breakdown
	Include by-item summary of each meal
	Must give written summary of challenges and successes they faced throughout the week

TABLE 2. EXAMPLES OF BAD STANDARDS AND CONDITIONS

STANDARDS	CONDITIONS
The client will take progress pictures once a week	Be relaxed in your picture
The client will weigh themselves daily	Step on a scale once a day
The client will log food	Use MyFitnessPal©

leaderboard ranking systems, awarding badges, and providing progress bars can motivate the client to continue to work hard to unlock more content (1).

Looking at the weight loss example, an increase in step volume and increasing non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT) may lead to a positive change in the client's body weight. Tracking movement with wearable technology provides another progress bar that would be used as a tool for the client's success.

REPEATABLE

The creation of clear standards and conditions made readily available to both the personal trainer and client may help to steer the forward progression in a positive direction. The personal trainer and client must have a clear operating picture in order to effectively progress.

After stating the standards and conditions for the training block, the personal trainer must provide a list of priorities. When done correctly, this gives the client an action list. This action list will

enable the client to decisively focus their attention on a small list of tasks to complete for each given block referencing the personal trainer's standards and conditions. After the client completes each prioritized task to standard, the personal trainer will have more reliable metrics to use to make various alternations to further progress.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Once the client understands the personal trainer's programming system, they are ready to be introduced to the rest of your community. Many positive outcomes result from effective socialization (e.g., self-efficacy, performance, retention, perceived fit, satisfaction) (3). The common operating language and habits will be expressed further by others in the group. This reinforcement provides an environment for each client to share their successes and challenges they face and enables them to share their own tips and tricks they have found in order to curb failures and boost their successes. Together, as a group, the personal trainer and clients progress.

CONCLUSION

It is an essential task that the personal trainer set conditions and standards early in the personal trainer-client rapport building process. This provides a clear operating picture for all clients enrolled in the program. The personal trainer and client must ensure each goal is time-bound and follows science-backed tactics and strategies. The personal trainer and client must have the ability to check progress with observable, measurable, and repeatable conditions at multiple checkpoints in multiple different ways within each training block.

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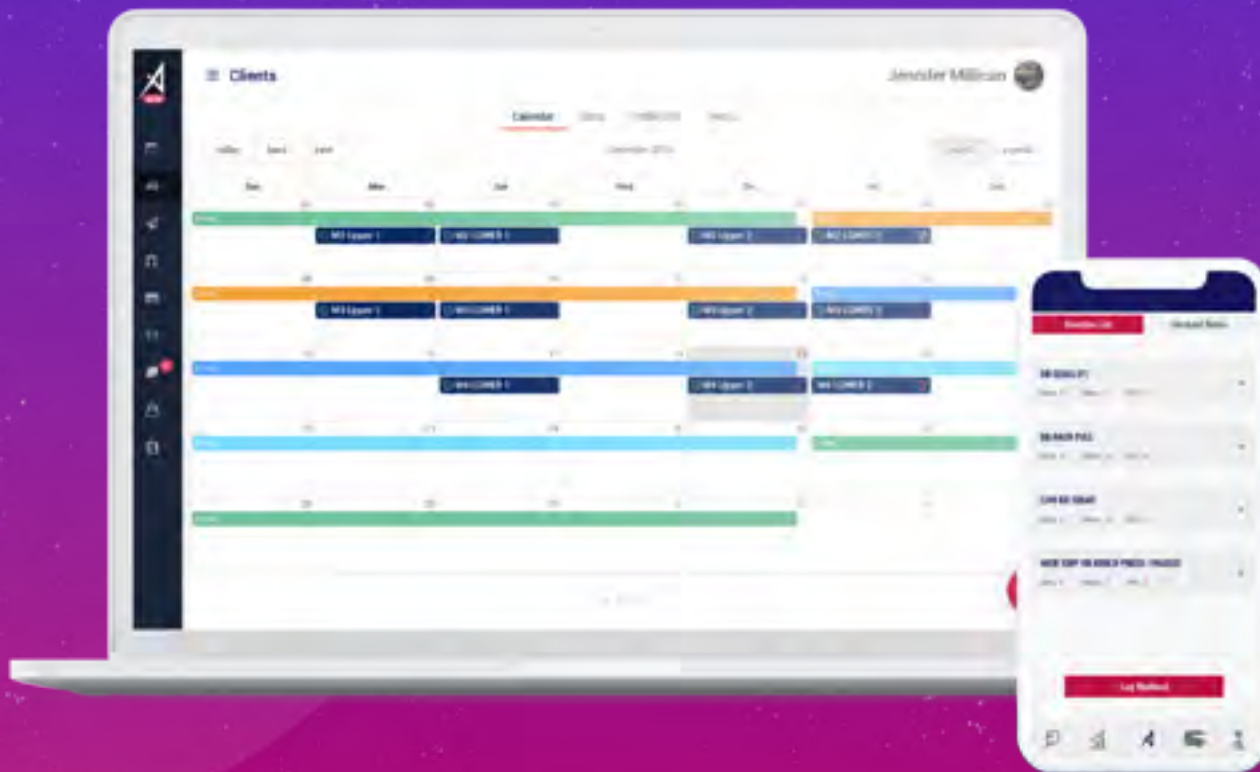
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane Jenne is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) and National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) Certified Personal Trainer® (NSCA-CPT®) through the NSCA, as well as an online personal trainer at shanejenne.com. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Webster University and afterwards volunteered as a Strength and Conditioning Coach under the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Webster University Athletics Department, Matt Saitz. Jenne is presently a 2nd Lieutenant Army Infantry Officer serving in Fort Bliss, TX. His work



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