

Activity 1.4

Writing a statement about your challenge(s)



Knowing what we need to tackle when making change in our lives starts with knowing what the challenge is that we're facing.

By stating that challenge clearly we can be focused on tackling a specific issue. Doing this avoids the overwhelm of it feeling like 'everything' is wrong.

Below are the key elements of formulating an effective statement that captures the problem that you want to deal with - whether that's in your personal or professional life.

A 'problem statement' is one that describes the undesirable gap between the current situation and the desired future state. It should quantify that gap and state why resolving the problem is important.

So how do I do that?

For a problem statement to be effective it needs to include the following information about the issue:

- **Gap:** what is the gap between where you are today and where you want to be? Make sure you reflect on this and connect with what is causing you 'pain' in your life.
- **Timeframe, location and pattern:** when and where is the problem observed? What kind of pattern does it follow? You might need to take some time to pay attention to this.
- **Impact:** how would you quantify the impact on you/your life of the issue? Think about the 'cost' to your life in terms of time, quality, personal impact, relationships...
- **Importance:** how important is this issue to you? How urgent is it that you tackle it - how much worse will it get if you don't attend to it?

The statement itself should be just a couple of sentences that focus on one problem. If there is more than one problem, you need more than one problem statement; address each problem one at a time.

Create your problem statement

What does a problem statement look like? If you're not sure, here is an example to help you get going:

Professional example:

I have had feedback from my line manager to say that my performance has dropped in the last two months (my sales figures are currently 15% below where they were this time last year in the North UK region); my next performance review in 6 weeks time. I am spending more time on travelling away from home such that I am away 3 nights per week on average (previously 1-2) and also having 20% less face-to-face contact time with my team.

Personal example:

All my past personal relationships have been 'toxic' in some way (controlling, manipulative, not meeting my needs) and this pattern has escalated with each relationship; I have spent years staying in negative situations and this stops me moving forward to find the right relationship. I want my next relationship to be a positive experience so I have joined a dating app which has led to me being asked on a date in two weeks time and I want to avoid making the same mistakes again.

What else should I know?

A few pitfalls to avoid when writing your problem statement:

- **Solutions:** the statement should not state how you're going to solve it. Looking at solutions should come later;
- **Symptoms:** what you are experiencing as a result of the problem. Avoid including these as they just muddy the water;
- **Causes:** these should be examined only once the problem is defined because often what we think the cause is, isn't;
- **Blame:** this process is about you - your actions, behaviours, decisions, mindset - not others. Resolving it starts with you taking responsibility for the problem.
- **Perceptions:** focus the statement on existing problems, not perceived or anticipated future problems.

Your problem statement: