

# 5 WAYS TO USE GOAL SETTING TO IMPROVE YOUR SWIMMING

Published: January 15, 2013

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Having goals -- whether they are end of season, end of week, or end of workout, can help give swimmers focus and direction when it comes to the pool.

The only thing that makes a swimmer happier than hearing "Get out swim!" yelled out loud across the pool deck is standing on the podium, looking up at the scoreboard and seeing that goal achieved and lit up.

Here are 5 ways to use this technique to help get the most out of those goals:

## **1. Get Real Specific.**

Open-ended goals are dangerous. They are dangerous because they are very slippery. Without a clear target to aim at, it can be difficult to grasp and focus on that goal. "I want to be successful", or more specifically to swimmers, "I want to win Nationals" is an example of an open-ended and vague goal. As inspirational as this goal may be, you don't specifically know what time you will have to race to win. We hold little sway over the actions of other swimmers.

Pick a time. Write out the splits. How fast your start will have to be. Take that goal and make it as real and unmistakably clear as possible. Pick a date you are going to do it.

Give yourself as clear a target as possible so that there is no leeway or guessing as to what you want to accomplish.

## **2. Build a Framework for the Achievement of Your Goal**

Goal setting offers you a peek behind the curtain of what it will take to accomplish your goal. What's your goal for this season? National record? Best time? Make a team? Surely you have a good idea of roughly what type of time it will take to make this happen.

With that end result in mind, it's necessary to work backwards. What is missing right now that you will need to achieve this goal? What are the areas in which you can improve? List them all out so that there is no confusion about what you need to improve to get close to that goal.

Having that big goal in the horizon, particularly those yearend goals, can be daunting to the point of being overwhelming. Instead, focus on the building blocks that will get you there.

## **3. Activity vs. Productivity**

In the process of achieving our goals we need to outline the steps necessary to get us there. A faster start perhaps, or half a second off the turn. When generating this list it can be easy to insert activities that are better off on a "to do" list and not on a "to achieve" list.

Let me explain why it is important to know the difference between the two.

I commonly see goal setting sheets filled with tasks such as: Buy new suit, watch clips on YouTube to get motivated, wash towels every day after practice.

Where these "activity" type of steps get us into trouble is that they have little to no effect on the outcome of our goal, and are only written out because crossing them out instills a false sense of accomplishment when we complete them, keeping us from focusing on the stuff we should really be doing.

Want a simple litmus test to determine whether it's activity or productivity? If it doesn't directly impact the outcome of your goals, then it's activity.

#### **4. Monitor & Evaluate**

No matter how well we think we know ourselves, and no matter how well we plan, invariably our path changes course. Perhaps we get injured, our motivation lags, or we simply don't "feel like it" anymore.

In those moments of struggle it is necessary to step back and evaluate.

Where are you falling behind? Are you doing everything necessary to insure that the progression towards your goal is proceeding? Were you unrealistic in your original goals?

Don't allow setbacks to derail your goal. Evaluate, snip at the parts of your life where you aren't doing so hot, and escalate the things that are working well. Reload and refocus.

#### **5. What Are You Willing to Invest?**

At this point most goal setting guides would ask you, "What are you willing to sacrifice?" Sacrificing activities for something you love isn't a sacrifice at all, it's an investment.

Many swimmers come to this cross-road, particularly in their late teens, early 20s. It's difficult to ignore those texts when everybody is going out to party on the weekends and you have an early morning distance workout the next day. If your goals are big, greasy and awesome, then you will come to those junctions in the road where you will have to decide where to put your time and energy.

It might be social time with your friends that suffers. Spending less time on Facebook and Twitter so that you can finish homework that night. Or foregoing that epic end of year party at your best friend's house.

How likely you are to achieve your goals is impacted directly by what you are willing to invest in it.

Can you think of any other ways that goal setting can help a swimmer's performance? Leave your answer in the comments below!

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