

Goals vs Process

by Olivier Leroy

One of the big misconceptions about being process-focused is that it means you don't care about your goals anymore. Which is not the case. Although a process-focused mindset looks like you are ignoring what it takes to be successful on race day, it's simply another in a long list of paradoxes in high-performance swimming:

- You don't swim fastest with brute strength alone
- You do big things only by doing what others won't
- Massive swims are a result of focusing on small details, and you produce your best performances when you don't obsess over the result.

For the ambitious swimmer with big goals, being process-focused does not mean you aren't serious about the results or the outcome... It's simply that you understand that obsessing over the outcome is counter-productive, you can only control today's effort, and that excellence on race day means excellence in every step of your preparation.

And yet, for plenty of swimmers who have big goals and every intention of achieving them, they participate in behaviors that are running at warp speed away from what needs to be done:

- You want to improve your breaststroke, but you avoid doing it each day at practice because you are embarrassed your kick isn't where you want it to be already.
- You want to tighten up your nutrition, but catch yourself eating according to whims and short-term pleasure instead of according to your long-term goals and performance.
- You may want to drop five seconds on your 200-freestyle, but you do the bare minimum at practice, hoping instead that a magical taper or some sudden windfall in talent will help you get there.

It's not that they don't have the goal... And generally, I don't even think that it's not that they don't want to do the work to get there... They simply haven't moved past the "I know, I know..." stage and put serious and thoughtful work into creating a process that is enjoyable.

A good process is enjoyable in its own right.

The goal-obsessed swimmer thinks that once they get that best time, or break that world record, or get that scholarship, that everything will be right in the world. Only then, will they be satisfied with the swimmer and person they are. Which is flawed.

The swimmer and person you are is reflected in the day to day journey. The early morning workouts, the challenging main sets, the encouragement you give your teammates. The process makes you "that" swimmer and person. Not the medal. Not the record. Not the sectionals cut.

"Success is the ability to engage with the process correctly."

~Aaron Piersol, Olympic champion

When you execute your process, you are going to get a serious shot of *hey-that-made-me-feel-good-about-myself*. You have a chance each day to feel this way. And your process is the pathway to doing it *more consistently*.

A good process helps you focus on what matters.

One of our most prized possessions is our *focus*. Where we *choose* to shine our bright and powerful laser beam of concentration and effort. When we are unfocused in the water, we get bored, we get distracted, and time suddenly starts to stretch out, making practice feel like it's taking forever.

Your process has a lot of benefits... And one is that it helps you drop a nuke on distractions, both external and internal.

If your process includes "give a 9/10 effort at practice today" then all the other stuff, like:

- What other people are saying about your goals
- The team gossip making the rounds
- How fast your teammates are going

- The boredom of not being present and engaged
- The uncertainty around when your next swim meet is
- The fatigue that is teasing you into malingering in your effort

all fade into the background, unable to sap your precious reserves of concentration and energy. Your focus and concentration are precious, and a process-based mindset teaches you to regain control of them.

Building a process that is enjoyable (and will help you swim faster than ever)

I know that *you* already know what your big goals in the pool are. (Even if they might be on hold at the moment...) The goals loom large in your imagination. You have rehearsed it so many times in your mind that it feels like you've already done it. Setting goals is instinctive.

But building a process that is rewarding and enjoyable is not. My challenge to you is this... Zoom your focus out from that big goal for a moment. And look at the daily things you can do in service of that goal. Things that are controllable, clear, and simple. Some of my favorites include:

- Giving an 8/10 or better effort each day at practice
- Do every turn as fast and as well as I can
- Spend 30 minutes each night meal prepping for the next day

Set goals. Big, greasy, and awesome goals. But be all about that process.

See you in the water,
Olivier

PS: Being a process-focused swimmer has limitless application. You can apply this mindset to anything that you are trying to improve or gives you frustration in the pool (and life, for that matter).

Get too worked up before big races? Build a process that includes deep breathing technique, a pre-race routine, and a race strategies with performance cues.

Catch yourself giving up during hard sets? Build a process that includes positive self-talk, focusing on an aspect of your technique, and "chunking" the rest of the set.

And so on...