

Hello 757swim Family,

Today I'd like to talk about goals and goal setting. Before that, a big THANK YOU to the parents and swimmers who already completed their quick Safe Sport online course. You are helping us complete one of 757swim's goals of earning a Safe Sport Recognition Award. The information and instructions for that were emailed out on Wednesday. Thank you all for doing that sometime in the next week, and please let me know if you have any questions about it. Now, back to goals.

The importance of goal setting cannot be overemphasized. A swimmer who sets goals will improve much more than those who do not, and they will have a higher chance of sticking with this demanding sport. Goals provide direction, motivation, and (I love that Drew wrote about this yesterday.) inspiration.

Every year, all 11 and older swimmers that I coach are given a homework assignment. The major component of this assignment is to come up with goals for the season. For the younger swimmers, one of the questions is to list 3-5 goals for the season or year. For older swimmers, it would be much more in depth where they would come up with goals for every event. Let's stick with the younger swimmers for now. For many, this is the first time that they will learn how to set proper goals and why they are important. I will loosely follow the S.M.A.R.T. acronym when explaining the goal setting process. Even after going through this, many swimmers will turn in goals that do not follow the directions and they will be asked to redo them. Here is what the acronym stands for with examples.

The S is for SPECIFIC. Goals need to be specific. I've had swimmers say they that they "want to be better at butterfly". Well, how much better? If we are just talking about stroke technique, how are we defining good vs bad butterfly? Goals need to be specific where one knows when they achieve it. Where if they held onto their goal sheets (which they definitely should), they could put a check mark by it when they achieve their goal and then set a new goal.

M stands for MEASURABLE. Going back to the last example, how does one measure if butterfly is better? In swimming they should set a goal to be a time to beat or something that can be tallied. The most common goals (and rightfully so) are times that swimmers would like to achieve in specific events. For older swimmers, we definitely ask for these. However, I have been very impressed with some creative measurable goals that swimmers have given me over the years. Some swimmers have said that they want to go at least 3 lines underwater in a streamline off of every wall in practice. ...a great goal that many of our older swimmers could still benefit from. Some swimmers who used to miss a lot of practice to go to the bathroom have set goals to not leave mid-set to go to the bathroom for a month (specific and measurable). Some swimmers set other practice goals that couldn't be achieved in a meet such as kicking a 50 Free on a board in under 50 seconds. A final creative example: knowing that I pick the best swimmers at a particular skill to demonstrate if needed, some swimmers have said that they want to be called on to

demonstrate before Christmas. Specific and measurable, but it has a small fault that we'll discuss later.

I personally lump the next two letters of the acronym together. Goals need to be ATTAINABLE and REALISTIC. I've had 1st year swimmers say that they want to earn an AAAA time by the end of the year. That is a specific and measurable goal, but it isn't realistic for a new swimmer. Goal setting provides motivation and inspiration, but achieving a goal is one of the biggest highs in swimming and in life. Many times swimmers have come back to me after a race, jumping up and down, huge grins, with tears of joy. I've never experienced a swimmer doing that after falling short of a goal. Please don't misinterpret what I am saying to where I think swimmers should set goals that are too easy though. When I explain what goals I am looking for, the actual phrase that I use is **challenging yet realistic**.

The T stands for TIME BASED. I force this on swimmers with the directions of the assignment, goals for this season/year. I set the time parameter for them to one season or one year. Some swimmers add another parameter of before their birthday as well. The deadline encourages focus, motivation, and inspiration. A lot of people have to-do lists. I know personally, the items on my to-do list that I don't set deadlines for stay on that list for a very long time. Setting the deadline adds priority to a goal, and should always be included in goal setting.

Going back to MEASURABLE, there is one important pitfall that swimmers need to look out for. Goals need to be measurable within the swimmer themselves. One of the most repeated incorrect answers I receive from swimmers in their homework is that they want to be the best at _____. This goal factors in the rest of that swimmer's teammates, or even the rest of the world. Being the best can be a powerful motivator. It drove the likes of Michael Jordan to be the legend he became. However, very, very few people are gifted with the tools to become the best of all time which sets 99.999999% of people with that goal up for failure. I fell into this trap in high school. I set myself the goal of being the best 100 flyer on my team. To be fair to my younger self, when I set this goal I took into account my teammates and it was a realistic goal to shoot for. However, mid-season a new swimmer joined the team after moving to the area. This swimmer was so far beyond me in my quest to be the best, that my once realistic goal became impossible for that year. My inspiration and motivation tanked. However, if I stayed within myself and just set the goal of getting under let's say, 50 seconds in 100 Fly, nobody outside of myself could have held me back. In fact, I could have used that swimmer as motivation in practice to help me achieve my goal. ...so circling back to when a swimmer had the goal of wanting to be a demonstrator, I loved the creativity of the goal but it had the pitfall of needing to be better at something than the rest of the group.

Goals inspire the process to achieve that goal and are one of the most important parts of becoming successful at swimming and at life. Achieving a goal is one of the biggest highs in swimming and life, but falling short of a goal can be one of the most important and powerful learning moments. Failure is the often overlooked but equally important

other side of the goal setting coin. For my next article on Tuesday, we'll talk about failing to achieve a goal, the appropriate response, and how to learn and grow from it. Thank you all for reading. Stay safe, and have a wonderful weekend!

-Mike