

Who's afraid of a little goal setting?

Athletes of all abilities have goals, but setting and meeting them can be tough without the right approach

Everyone has something that they would like to improve on, whether it's dropping a few pounds, shedding minutes in a marathon, improving a relationship or just being happier as a person. An often-scoffed-at technique to help any sort of life improvement is goal setting. Why are people so against goal setting? Truth be told, I have no idea, but I shiver when encouraged to set goals.

Is it a fear of not achieving your goal? A belief that it won't work? Apathy? No matter the reasons, goal setting is something that has proven to be very beneficial to behavioral modification in all areas of life.

No matter what you are looking to improve on, a variety of benefits can come from setting goals:

1. Helps expand expectations and push limits
2. Allows us to measure progress (or lack thereof)
3. Can provide a sense of accomplishment and pride
4. Brings about more self-awareness (strengths and areas for improvement)
5. Encourages accountability
6. Helps in designing a behavioral modification plan

The benefits of goal setting are substantial, and the rewards are increased when you follow a few guidelines.

TIPS FOR GOAL SETTING

■ Goals should build on themselves: If your goal is to run a sub-three-hour marathon, you need to make that your end goal. Now create a series of smaller goals that will help you reach that goal.

■ Goals must be realistic but challenging: It is essential to make your goals attainable. If they aren't, you will not reach them, injure yourself or quit before achieving them. If they're too easy, you are not going to

grow and improve.

■ Goals need to be a mix of qualitative and quantitative in nature: See below for a full explanation of what this means.



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■ Tell a friend: When you put your goals out there to another person — a friend, teammate, family member or even your Facebook followers — it has

shown to improve the likelihood of achieving your goals because of the accountability.

■ It is OK to not reach your goals sometimes: When setting goals, if you are doing a good job and setting challenging (but realistic) goals, you may not always reach them. That is OK — there is always next year.

■ Don't be scared to have A, B and C goals: Having a goal of running a three-hour marathon is great. That would be your "A" goal. The "B" goal is your backup to some extent, like running a 3:10 marathon. "C" goals would be finishing the marathon. Sometimes, due to circumstances, even reaching a "C" goal can be very fulfilling.

THE 2 Q'S OF GOAL SETTING

There are two types of goals: quantitative and qualitative. Both are fundamentally different, but both are equally important.

1. Quantitative goals: These are very easy to understand, as they are mathematical in nature, easily measured and very concrete. They can be measured with a stopwatch, calendar, scale, measuring tape or merely by counting steps or reps. They have some sort of numeric value associated with them, and so they cannot be debated — you cannot "sort of reach the goal." The measurement of these types of goals is quite easy and very objective.

People often get hung up on quantitative goals — many athletes live by them. This can be extremely dangerous, as it can be discouraging and shortsighted. This approach can also underestimate progress. The positive is that they are very easy to measure and based on results.

Examples of quantitative goals include:

1. Drop 10 pounds
2. Read one book every month
3. Go to the recreation center four times a week
4. Bike 25 miles a week
5. Spend 30 minutes meditating a day

With these goals, there is no subjectivity or grey area. There is always a definitive "yes" or "no." While this is very important, it does not tell the entire story of improvement. For example, if your goal was to bike 25 miles a week and you didn't make it, but you still rode 20 miles a week, that is likely far better than where you were before setting the goal. This is where qualitative goals can be equally (or even more) important.

2. Qualitative goals: These are a little more difficult to grasp. They can't be measured with a watch or measuring tape, making them more abstract. However, they are still very important and frequently help you reach a quantitative goal. This type of goal is generally felt more than measured — completion will be a feeling, as opposed to a concrete result. This

is going to be subjectively measured as opposed to objectively measured.

These goals frequently encourage the behavior that will lead to the quantitative improvement. Qualitative goals are often more process-based rather than results-based. Qualitative goals should be viewed as very important and can enhance more than just time on a stopwatch.

Examples of qualitative goals include:

1. Exercise more to feel better about yourself
2. Read more to learn about the world
3. Improve overall mental health
4. Enjoy exercising
5. Increase self-esteem and self-worth

While these two types of goals are fundamentally different, when combined, both can lead to incredible improvement. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative goals is going to improve the efficacy of any sort of behavioral change. So stop being scared of this awesome tool. Set some goals, improve and grow as a person!