

Goal Setting Part II

Now that you've determined where you are (by looking back over last season's results), it's time to map out a strategy for improvement – in other words, it is time to set your goals for the season. There are different types of goals you can set: performance-based (to set a personal best on the bike course at a race that you've done before) and practice-oriented (to swim 10x100's on 1:30), long-term (to qualify for the Hawaii Ironman, sometime) or short-term (to strength train 3 days next week), and physical (to build a solid base) or psychological (to have fun). All of these types of goals come into play when designing your training and racing schedule for the upcoming season.

Below is a list of principles to help you set your goals and get you on the road to a successful and purposeful season.

Goal-setting principles (Gould, 1993):

1. Set specific goals
2. Set difficult but realistic goals
3. Set long and short-term goals
4. Set performance goals
5. Write down goals
6. Develop goal-achievement strategies
7. Foster individual goal commitment
8. Provide goal support
9. Provide for goal evaluation

1) **Setting specific goals** is much more beneficial than setting general goals. Saying that your goal is "do your best" on the 40k bike-leg of a triathlon is not as motivating as saying that your goal is to cut your best 40k bike time by 3 minutes. When setting specific goals it is important that they be measurable (by 3 minutes) and are explained in behavioral terms (working on pedaling technique in the off season).

2) Goals should be challenging and **difficult, but realistic** enough to achieve. Setting our sights on making the Olympic team is not a realistic goal for most; but finishing in the top ten of a local sprint may be in reach. Easy goals that take little or no effort to achieve often result in a misleading sense of satisfaction from a mediocre performance. If the athlete does not stretch himself, he may never reach his potential or even understand what that potential might be. On the other hand, setting goals that are too difficult or unrealistic can lead to frustration, poor

performance and lowered self-confidence and motivation. As mentioned in the first paragraph, it is essential that you have a realistic understanding of where you are before you set any goals, whether you are a first-time triathlete or in your tenth year of racing.

3) Setting **long and short-term goals** is like climbing a ladder -- there are steps that you must take to reach the top -- each rung in the ladder represents an objective (short-term goal) that moves you along toward the top (long-term goal). Achieving short-term goals along the way provides an athlete with more immediate and usable feedback, which makes the long-term goal more attainable. A long-term goal thus becomes the natural consequence of properly set and acted upon short-term goals. For example, setting a goal of swimming 100-yard repeats at a certain pace is a step to achieving your goal time for the swim leg in a triathlon.

4) It is important to set goals based on your **performance** rather than that of others. You can only control how you train and prepare for your racing season. Your competition's preparation and development is completely out of your hands. You may "lose" to a competitor in a race and set a personal best; but if your goal was to beat the competitor, then your personal best will not be seen for the accomplishment that it is.

5) Once your goals are set, they should be **written down** in a place where they can be seen—daily. The perfect place is your training journal. By having your long-term goal in front of you every day, you can focus on your daily and weekly training and racing plans, knowing they are taking you a step or rung closer to the top.

6) **Goal-achievement strategies** are the road map to your training and racing season. For example, focusing on drill work in the swim during the off-season is a strategy to achieve a goal of lowering your 1.5k swim time by 1 minute. When setting your goal-achievement strategies, it is important to be flexible. Rather than saying that you will swim on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, it is better to say that you will swim 3 days a week. If you have to readjust your schedule to get your swim in, you will still achieve your goals.

7) Goals are impossible to achieve without **commitment**. You must be focused on the direction that you are heading and put forth a solid effort to reach your goals. If you are going to take the time to map out your season, you need to be committed to each step of the process in pursuit of your goals.

8) Having the **support** of others (coach, spouse, training partners, etc) is key in helping one achieve their goals. Having a coach in your corner helps maintain motivation and direction, a spouse or partner provides someone to share the moments with and training partners can help get you out of the warmth of your house for that long run on a cold and wet winter's day.

9) **Goal evaluation** and feedback are essential if goals are going to effectively change performance. Once you have your specific goal set and strategy mapped out, you need to have a tool in place for evaluation. For example, if one of your specific goals is to reduce your stroke count per 25 yards from 22 to 20, you can chart your average stroke count from your daily workouts. If, over a period of time the count is not decreasing, you can adjust your strategy to better achieve your goal. On the

other hand, if you achieve your target stroke count, it is time to check off that goal and move on to another. Similarly, if you are injured and cannot train as scheduled you need to reassess and set new goals that can be accomplished (e.g., pool running rather than regular training if one has a stress fracture).

Goal setting helps us transform our desires into our reality; for, as my Nana used to say: "If wishes were horses, we'd all be riding." So, with the New Year upon us, now is the time to break out the pencil and paper, jot down a few goals and map out a strategy to achieve them.

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