

The Art of Mental Training

Chapter 19

On Goals

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Warrior/Champions set out to turn their dreams into reality by taking action through goal setting. Often, personal growth and peak performance are directly related to how well an athlete has mastered goal-setting skills. Mental athletes are goal-oriented. They have vision.

When an athlete complains of lacking motivation, you can be sure that it's almost always caused by goals that fail to inspire him to action. Goals serve to keep you on target. They increase the desire to achieve. Goals increase your self-confidence as you experience measurable improvement. With proper goal setting, the quality of practice sessions automatically improves. Goals enhance performance, and help create achievements.

While setting your own, private goals, be sure that they are both challenging and realistic. Slightly out-of-reach goals are best: inspiring hard work, yet still attainable with dedicated effort. Goals need to be set neither too high, nor too easy and low—which would defeat their very purpose. Goals should be written down and reviewed frequently. Goals should come in the forms of daily goals, monthly goals and annual goals, and remember that what you are striving for is progress rather than perfection. Believe me, as you begin to focus on meaningful, specific goals, the power of your hidden reserves will be unleashed and good things begin to happen.

I well remember when I came to meet Leo-tai with “Goals 1 to 25” neatly transcribed, which I proudly showed him.

Leo-tai stroked his chin.

“Hmmm,” is all he said and I was instantly on the defensive. (Hmmm with Leo-tai never meant, “Well done.”)

“What do you mean,” I demanded. “Aren't those good goals? If I achieve those rankings, I'd be one of the top kick-boxers on the scene.”

Leo-tai walked into his tiny, immaculate little kitchen, and returned with two green teas. “My friend,” he asked, “Are these your goals or did you have help in deciding upon them?”

I wondered how that might be bad.

“Listen, Danielsan. Goals are most meaningful when they are what you truly want for yourself, not what others want for you.”

“OK, but I do want these goals.” I objected, a little annoyed.

“Secondly,” he said, paying no attention at all. “What’s this you have written here, ‘Don’t lose in the early rounds at nationals.’”

“What’s wrong with that?”

Leo-tai shook his head.

“How many times must I remind you that you must make sure to state your goals in a way that emphasizes what you *want* to happen, not what you want to avoid. This ‘Don’t lose in the early rounds’ is not a goal at all, it’s fearful.”

I looked at the 25 things I’d written down more carefully now. Around a quarter of them were negative-orientated. I scrunched the paper into a ball and having let the paper fly, I made a perfect goal, straight into the waste-basket.

“So what am I supposed to do then?”

Leo-tai beamed.

“There is nothing wrong with your goals, but you must lay them out thoughtfully. Ask yourself what you want to accomplish over the next two or three years. Make these your long-term goals. Give them a completion date.”

“Right. And then?”

“Then think of at least three things that you want to achieve within the next year. Make these your short-term goals. Give them a completion date.” he told me.

“And then what?” I asked him.

“Then decide what it is that you can do every month to help you accomplish your short-term goals.” he said. “Write these down. These are your monthly goals. Give them a completion date too.”

“Set daily goals, that help you achieve monthly goals, that help you achieve your short-term goals, that in turn help you achieve your long-term goals. When your goals fit together this way and you set off to accomplish them, you make progress. But first you must make sure it’s your dream and not anybody else’s dream—this is the way forward. Any more tea?” he asked.

“No, thanks.” I said. I was busy thinking about what he had given me. With this framework it all seemed comparatively simple. I found myself consumed with the desire to start listing my goals over again, more patiently, more logical, more perfectly.

“Do it now,” Leo-tai urged me. “Use the guidelines and the system of goal setting I just described for you. I challenge you to create your plan. Start right now and point yourself in the right direction by taking the steps necessary to begin to accomplish your goals and dreams.”

Leo-tai poured himself more tea.

“Think deeply. Everything you need is inside of you, inside your very dreams. Goals represent your dreams along a timeline, showing you the steps needed to achieve your success. Remember that every journey is taken step by step. So start thinking. Be creative, take risks, try things, and most importantly, set your goals before you—and believe in your ability to accomplish them. If I were you, I would start right now.”

For the next few days, I was busy thinking and dreaming. I took his lesson seriously. I have never regretted having done so.

Remember: Setting goals is critical because they help you achieve. They represent your dreams along a timeline and help you to progress.