

Proper Goal Setting

Everyone has goals in life. How do some people achieve them while others do not? It all comes down to properly setting goals and the steps to achieve them.

WHAT ARE GOALS?

A goal is something a person wants to accomplish with ambition or effort. Goals can be broken down into either task oriented or objective oriented. Both types of goals have their place; however, focusing on one type versus the other is the key to accomplishing your goals.

OBJECTIVE ORIENTED GOALS

Objective oriented goals focus on a desired outcome in the future. These are also known as 'ego oriented' goals. Wanting to make an international team or winning a game are examples of objective oriented goals.

TASK ORIENTED GOALS

Task oriented goals focus on what needs to be done in the present. These are also known as 'performance oriented' goals. Wanting to lift X amount of weight by Y time is an example of task oriented goals.

ARE YOU SETTING THE RIGHT GOALS?

That is a question that only you can answer! What are the things that YOU want to do for YOU and YOU only?

Take for example a goal that a lot of people have is to lose weight. Most of the time when you ask "Why?" the response is "I just want to look better". Right out of the gate, and without even knowing it, this person has set themselves up to fail. Why? This goal is dependent upon something outside of their control. They can't control how other people view their appearance.

So is the goal of losing weight a terrible goal? It doesn't have to be. The few people that say they want to get healthier, improve athletic performance, improve self-confidence, or any other goal for themselves they are setup for success. These individuals will be able to set tangible goals (health markers) and time frames in which to accomplish these goals.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH A GOAL?

Seems like a weird question, but think about it for a moment. Why do you want to accomplish a goal? Is it because it is something you want to do or you feel someone expects you to accomplish? Do you want to feel successful or all of the things you think come with success?

A good example is 2 people with a goal of being an Olympian. The first person wants to be an Olympian because it means they were at the pinnacle of their craft. What people would call “love of the game”. The second person wants to be an Olympian because they think it will bring them fame. Both individuals spend the same amount of time training and they both qualify for the Olympics. Which person is going to relish their accomplishment the most?

It is easy to sabotage your own goals and dreams if you aren't doing them for YOU. So make sure you are setting goals for things that will make you happy and feel a sense of accomplishment.

HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

First you need to have some type of dream; an objective or ego oriented goal. Something that would be considered a really ‘nice to have’ goal; however, does not define who you are as a person.

Staying with the Olympic theme, let's say you want to win a gold medal for weightlifting at the Olympics. This is a very lofty goal and not very many people will be able to attain this goal. There are many factors that are outside of any one individual's control that would prohibit someone from achieving this goal. An individual can come out and set a world record, only to watch the next athlete set the bar even higher on the next attempt.

There could be other, non-athletic/performance factors that could affect whether or not an athlete wins a gold medal. Let's say an athlete is head and shoulders above all other competitors. There are some political issues and their country boycotts the Olympics. Or worse yet, the sport is dropped from the Olympics all together.

If the athlete's true goal was to win a gold medal, any of those scenarios resulted in a failed goal. There is no way to control how talented their competitor will be on competition day, the political climate, and they can't influence the IOC's decisions on future participation. The goal was doomed to end in failure to start.

“What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.”

– Zig Ziglar

Take your dream and start turning it into task oriented goals. In order to win a gold medal at the Olympics that individual must set a goal to be the best possible weightlifter they can be. Still a generic, objective goal, but much more narrow in scope and within their own control. No one else is going to have control over how much or how hard they train, recover, diet, etc. Those important items are controlled by the individual.

Set 2-3 task oriented goals and get started. Goals should be just outside of reach to allow you to accomplish something and start working on new goals. You should also list out how you will accomplish these goals. Below are examples of task oriented goals for a new lifter.

1. Find time to consistently train
 - a. Work with my coach to determine an appropriate plan
 - b. Determine the days and times during the week I can train
 - c. Rearrange and/or reprioritize thing outside of training to fit a training schedule
 - d. Follow new training times for 4 weeks
2. Ensure proper diet
 - a. Work with my coach, doctor, and/or dietitian to determine an appropriate plan
 - b. Determine how to implement plan everyday
 - c. Follow the new diet plan for 4 weeks
3. Ensure consistency and proper technique
 - a. Work with my coach to determine current major technical flaws
 - b. Develop plan to work those flaws
 - c. Correct flaws within 4 weeks

For a new lifter, these are very attainable goals that focus on specific tasks, a plan of action, and a due date. Once each goal has been achieved, a new goal can replace the existing goal. This is the best way to show progression.

As a coach, these are my expectations of any new athlete that wants to work with me. These goals are the same; however, the timeline may be different. I will not be able to help someone reach their full potential unless they can achieve these goals to create my next point.

TURN YOUR GOALS INTO HABITS

The new lifter goals, and my new lifter expectations, (train consistently, eat correctly, and proper technique) are goals that become habits after some work. Old goals need to become habits as they are the base for the next goal. It is easy to see that once the new lifter achieves the train consistent goal, that the lifter must continue to train consistently to achieve the next goal. Another example is ensuring that the technical flaw that was corrected must stay corrected in order to maintain the technical base.

“Let me tell you something, in this world, if you can’t swim...you bound to drizzown.”

– ToothPick; Don’t Be a Menace to Society While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood

When you turn a goal into habit, you have successfully achieved a goal and are ready to set the next goal.

WHY IS IMPORTANT TO SET THE RIGHT TYPE OF GOALS?

Sticking with the weightlifting theme, have you ever witness someone experience the high of highs one week and then the low of lows the next? Or even day-to-day? Odds are that person is focused on objective goals that they do not have full control. This person may have a tremendous training day and feeling confident. Then between training days they realized a rival had an even better training day. The next day they come to the gym looking to do better than they did the prior day. They have a good training day, but they do not surpass the prior day and consider themselves behind their rival; therefore, not achieving their goal. This is a slippery slope that goes downhill very fast. The athlete starts losing their self-confidence. They start going off program. Their numbers start to suffer. If you are a coach of a team, and you are lucky, this only affects the individual. However, more times than not, this bleeds out and negatively affects the team.

A task oriented individual only concerns themselves with achieving their own goals and tasks. Since they have complete control, outside influences rarely have effect on them accomplishing their goals and moving forward. Generally, they will stay pretty even keel and the variance between the highs and lows are very minimal.

Achieving goals and showing progress is one of the best ways to build confidence. Without confidence your performance will suffer. It doesn’t matter what area of life, but confidence will make the difference between success and failure. Research has shown that people that are confident make good choices. People that are not confident tend to make bad and sometimes erratic choices.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As a weightlifting coach, I've seen examples of athletes/coaches with both objective and task oriented goals. I've seen some good decisions and some that, at best, weren't very good. I won't be specific, but it is easy to spot.

Below is a good example of starting with a task oriented goal that shifts to objective oriented and the problems that can cause.

Recently, I was coaching an athlete who was on the cusp of making an international team. Making the team was an objective goal as it relied upon how other lifter performed before and after she competed. Going into her session, we would know how some of the lifters faired, but during and after we had no control over what other lifters were going to lift. We had a game plan with nice task oriented warm up and attempts. We also had a good idea of what numbers we were capable of making. Going into the snatch portion of the event we were able to stay true to the plan. We ended the snatch session making 2 of 3, missing a PR attempt, and 1kg ahead of our competition for the international team.

Heading into the clean and jerk competition we were getting closer to the finish line and achieving the objective goal. I think she sensed this and she wasn't quite the same lifter in the warm up that she was during the snatch portion. She was looking strong, but the snap and quickness I am used to seeing from her was missing. Then we missed the clean on her last warm up at 90kg.

Right then I knew 2 things. First, part, if not all, of our focus was making the international team. We were thinking about an objective goal that is in the future. Second, I know how strong and talented she is and that we just needed to refocus on a task oriented goal to bring her back to the present and to revive her confidence.

Our plan had her opening at 93-95kg and getting to 100-102kg. With our goals refocused to one lift at a time, we lowered her opener to 91kg while our competition opened at 93kg. Focusing on things within our control we make 91kg. Our competition makes 93kg. We made a nice jump to 96kg while our competition went to 97kg. Again, the focus is on making our lift. Even though the weight increased, it actually looked like they took weight off the bar as she performed the movement on the platform. You can see her confidence rising. Her competition also made her second attempt at 97kg. We took our third attempt at 100kg, which she just made 2 months prior for a huge PR. While doing so, we left the door open for our competition. Instead of focusing on the weight on the bar or her competition, her focus is completely on the task at hand. She makes this lift even easier than her second and better than any other warm up attempt. Her competition missed 101kg. She qualified for the international team and achieved her objective goal.

As you can see, we had a plan with small task oriented goals for the competition. We finished the snatch part and our mind wandered a little and starting thinking about the objective goals. As the warm up progresses, the objective goals got closer and closer.

The task oriented goals were still present, but had to share mental memory with the objective goals. Fortunately, I have an athlete that trusts me and we quickly regrouped and setup a new plan and a new focus: one lift at a time. I mentioned the international team one time. It was indirectly right before her first attempt in the clean and jerk. Didn't even mention it specifically when I told her to forget about everything else and just focus on the next lift. Just by focusing on the task at hand kept her mind off the objective goal we got her back in her comfort zone of just making lifts.

This is a strong example of what happens when you focus on your objective goals versus your task oriented goals. I was taught at a very young age that if you take care of the little things (task oriented goals) the big things (objective oriented goals) will take care of themselves.