

Are You On A Mission? - Goal Setting That Works

“ARE YOU ON A MISSION?”

How to set goals that will help you reach a consistent high level of performance.

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Pretend that you are visiting a friend in Boston and it's your first time in the city. You arrive in Beantown, overwhelmed by the “Big Dig” detours, the one-way streets, and the traffic, on top of not having a clue where you're going. You remember that you have a map, but after an hour of going in circles, you decide the map is no help. Instead, you call your friend for help and he tells you to “stay positive, you'll find it.” Another hour passes and you're still lost. You call your friend again and he tells you to “keep working hard, you'll find it.” You punch the gas, but you soon realize you're getting lost twice as fast. The problem isn't in your ability to stay positive in the face of adversity, or to work hard, the problem is that you're in Boston and you have a map of Chicago.

Often in sports we're told to work hard and be positive, but we leave our preparation, training, and performance to chance because we don't have a specific plan for improvement—we don't have the right map. The individuals and teams that win and have the most fun, play and practice like they're on a mission—there's a purpose and a concrete strategy behind everything they do.

PURPOSE OF GOAL SETTING – GOING ON A MISSION

As you think about your personal mission in sports, you should answer three critical questions: 1.) Why do you play?

2.) What would you like people to say about you and the way you played the game?

3.) What do you want to accomplish in your sport?

Answering why you play is critical because when you know why you play sports it will help you battle through the hardships that are inevitable with seeking excellence in sport. When answering why you play, try to get as specific as possible. Answering that “it is fun” is too vague. Answering “I love the competition of going head-to-head against another competitor, the camaraderie of the team, and the challenge to be great” is much more specific and will provide you with more motivation.

When you answer what you would like people to say about you, you'll probably answer, “I'm a hard worker, I'm a great team player, and I'm the kind of player that never quit.”

Once you decide what you would want people to say about you, you must do those things everyday. If you want to be remembered as a person that worked extremely hard, you must work extremely hard today.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR GOAL SELECTION:

Here are a few key questions that will help you plan your mission, and will serve as your road map to help you accomplish your goals: (Write down the answers and share them

with your teammates, coaches, parents, and others who will support you. This will also cement your commitment.)

1.) What would you like to be able to do in your sport that you can't do now?

Ex: "Throw my fastball for strikes consistently."

2.) How would your athletic performance improve when you achieve your goal?

Ex: "I would get ahead in the count more often, I would walk less batters, thus giving my team a better chance to win."

3.) How long have you wanted the goal?

Ex: "Since I saw the statistic that showed the astronomical amount of walks that score."

4.) What have you done to achieve it?

Ex: "I have been charting my bullpen and practice sessions to see if I am improving my location."

5.) What resources—i.e. people that will support you, places to go to get information—do you have to help you achieve it?

Ex: "Coaches, teammates, and the use of video tape and charts."

6.) What things may be holding you back that you're willing to sacrifice in order to help you achieve your goal?

Ex: "I don't throw enough between games. I would be willing to sacrifice my personal time after practice to throw more quality bullpens and to do more visualization at night."

7.) What will you accept as proof that you're achieving your goal?

Ex: "Walking less than 2 batters per 7 innings pitched."

8.) What is your plan of action, or mission, for accomplishing your goal?

Ex: "I will chart my practice and games and I will focus on throwing first pitch strikes. I will approach practice like it's a game by giving myself more game specific situations such as starting a batter with two balls and no strikes so I'll have to deal with more pressure to throw strikes."

GUIDELINES FOR GOING ON A MISSION:

1.) Set Specific and Measurable Goals:

The first step to a successful mission is knowing where you want to go and having a clear plan/map on how to get there. Give yourself specific performance goals such as "I want to get my first pitch in for a strike and I want to control the pace of the game on the mound."

2.) Set Process, Not Outcome, Goals:

Goals often center around outcomes such as becoming state champions or making the All-State Team, which is important, but outcome goals are secondary to process goals because *we don't always have control over an outcome goal—we do have control over the process goal.* And we need to focus on what we can control.

Let's say you want to hit .300 this season, a specific and measurable outcome goal. Now ask yourself, "What do I need to do to hit .300?" Your answer is the process goal, the directions for your map. Your answer would probably come out something like, "I need to hit the ball hard consistently to hit .300."

Take it a step further: to hit the ball hard consistently, what do you need to do? “I need to swing at pitches that I can hit well.” To swing at pitches that you can hit well, what do you need to do? “I need to be in control of myself at the plate. I need to recognize the pitch once it leaves the pitcher’s hand, and focus on driving the ball where it is pitched.”

Now if you drive the ball, and swing at pitches you can hit, don’t you think that you’ll have the best chance of hitting .300?

3.) Set Positive Goals:

At an early age, we are conditioned to think negatively. “Don’t touch the stove, you’ll get burned.” Or, “don’t cross the street without looking both ways.” No wonder, we tell ourselves: “Don’t get picked off” or “Don’t walk this batter.”

Going on a mission is telling yourself specifically what it is that you want to accomplish, not feeding yourself with thoughts of what you want to avoid. For example, “I want to come out aggressive in the strike zone,” or “Throw a strike to this hitter and get ahead,” would be much more productive than telling yourself to or “Don’t walk this batter, or don’t fall behind.” Focus on what you want to have happen, not what you want to avoid.

4.) Set Short, Medium, and Long Range Goals:

Set daily, weekly, and seasonal goals. For example, today I am going to work on driving the ball the other way with power by letting the ball get deeper in the zone. This week I want to hit the ball the other way with more power in games by looking for a good pitch to go with. This season I want to raise my batting average by 50 points by staying in control of myself and swinging at pitches that I am looking for.

5.) Readjust Your Goals:

Readjusting goals is critical—it keeps you motivated and focused on improvement. For example, a pitcher that wants to get ahead of 70% of the hitters he faces with strike one, but is already getting ahead of 68% of hitters with stroke one will lose focus because the goal is too easily within reach. This athlete would want to readjust his goal to get ahead of hitters 80% of the time or greater by the end of the season to keep them motivated on a daily basis.

6.) Foster A Commitment To Your Goals & Set Up A Support System:

Lou Holtz, the former football coach The University of South Carolina, said that there are two reasons why he has become successful: “I have a great spouse and I am very goal oriented.” Holtz was goal oriented and he had a support system—people that believed in him. You need to communicate with your coaches, teammates, family, and friends about your goals. Surround yourself with people who believe in what you’re trying to accomplish, you will need their support when you will struggle this season, and we will all struggle at some point this season.

To achieve success athletes must develop a specific, measurable, positively phrased, challenging plan of action to improve their performance, and most importantly, they must work at it TODAY!.

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