

GOT GOALS?
or
THE ABC'S OF CHAMPIONSHIP GOAL SETTING
(THE SECRET TO CHAMPIONSHIP GOAL SETTING)

By Dr. Alan Goldberg

Let's say that you want to go on a road trip for your vacation.

Would you simply pack up your things, hop in the car and then take off without having a clue as to where you were actually going? Of course not.

You would have to have a *specific destination* in mind for your travels, **a place that you'd really like to get to**, otherwise you'd end up spending all of your vacation time driving aimlessly around. However, having a desired end point for your trip isn't enough to guarantee that you'll actually get to where you want to go. Just as important, **you also need to have very clear directions for the specific routes and towns along the way** that will eventually lead you to where you want to go.

This is how goals work for you. First, you should have a big, scary/exciting, far-off destination, a **long-term goal**, that you'd *really* like to get to somewhere down the line in your swimming career.

Second, you need to know what routes to take along the way and the places you'll pass through in order to turn that dream into a reality. That is, you must have smaller, more immediate **short-term goals** that when achieved, will systematically lead you to your dream.

To go as far as possible in swimming, you must learn how to effectively use both kinds of goals.

Your long-term goal is what I call a "**Big Enough Why.**" It's the **primary reason** you train and compete in the sport. Your "big why" provides you with the motivation and excitement to keep on keeping on through hardships and setbacks. This long-term goal can be as varied as making the Olympic team and medaling, getting a college scholarship, breaking a pool record, or qualifying for Zones.

There are two important rules to follow when picking out an effective long-term goal. The first is related to ownership. **Your long-term goal must belong to you**, and not mom, dad or your coach. Swimming is far too difficult a sport to do for others.

Second, you need to **be sure that your long-term goal really excites YOU**. It needs to be **something that you really want to achieve**. On a daily basis, your long-term goal should answer the question, "Why am I doing this?" If that big goal is exciting and meaningful enough to you, then you'll have a good reason to *regularly and consistently* push yourself outside of your comfort zone to do what's necessary for success.

If your long-term goal marks the final destination of your swimming journey, then **your short-term goals are all the roads and cities that you must travel through to get there**. Your short-term goals provide you with both direction and a source of ongoing motivation. Because your long-term goal is so far off in the future, it's easy to lose sight of your progress week to week and month to month.

By setting smaller, intermediate goals that you can work on during the year and then breaking those down into even smaller weekly and daily goals, you will have a better perspective on the progress that you're actually making. The successive achievement of these short-term goals keeps your motivation to train high and keeps you moving towards that big, far-off goal.

There are two kinds of short-term goals:

The first is "**outcome**" goals, which reflect discreet achievements like swimming under a minute in the 100 free, becoming the fastest flyer on your team, making the "A" relay squad or qualifying for an important invitational. These outcome goals are like those towns that you must drive through on your trip in order to ultimately reach your final destination.

The second is "**process**" goals, which focus more on exactly "**how**" you will successfully reach all of your outcome goals. Process goals are like the specific roads that will lead you to where you want to go. Examples of "process" goals are making eight practices a week, correcting a specific technique mistake in your breaststroke, improving your starts and turns or perfecting your ability to breathe every third stroke, especially when you're under pressure and tired.

Another useful way to understand the relationship between short- and long-term goals is to consider the riddle, "**How do you eat an elephant?**" Answer: **One bite at a time!** The elephant represents that big, far off, long-term goal of yours. By chunking that big dream down into manageable, bite-sized pieces and then working and focusing on these, one bite at a time, (i.e. your daily, weekly and monthly short-term goals) you will be able to maintain your on-going motivation with each bite you successfully take.

As you work towards that big dream in swimming, your ultimate success depends almost entirely on how well you handle the potholes and rocky patches that you will encounter along the way. No journey worth taking is ever smooth from start to finish. There will always be setbacks, failures and breakdowns that you must persevere through. A good rule of thumb to follow that will help you navigate these rough patches is: **The problem isn't the failures and setbacks. The problem is how you react to them.**

You need to *expect* that there will be difficult, discouraging times. They are a *normal* part of any important quest. When you hit one of these bumps in the road, get lost or go down a dead end, don't despair. Instead, turn yourself around and keep going. Remember, success is always one or two towns beyond failure.

So, once you finally reach your big goal and achieve that long-sought-after success, what then? Simple. Think about another "trip" that you'd really like to take, another emotionally important goal that you want to achieve, and then start the whole process over again.