

5 Goal Setting Tricks for Swimmers

By: Olivier Poirier-Leroy is a former national level swimmer based out of Victoria, BC. In feeding his passion for swimming, he has developed YourSwimBook, a powerful log book and goal setting guide made specifically for swimmers.

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It's a new season, and you know what that means — new goals! Whatever it is that you want to achieve this year, you gotsta put a plan together in order to achieve it. Accomplishing grandiose stuff doesn't generally happen by accident, so as the 2013/2014 season begins to roll out, take a few minutes to properly outline your goals for the year with these 5 goal setting tricks for swimmers—

1. Define What Success Means for You as a Swimmer.

What does success in the pool look like to you? Is it qualifying for a particular meet? Dropping XYZ seconds off a best time? Being the first swimmer to swim butterfly and freestyle at the same time? (Dare to dream, right?)

This is the extraordinarily fun part of the goal setting process; where your inner dreamer lets loose and imagines all of the things you'd love to do with your swimming. Don't censor yourself quite yet, and don't constrain yourself with what others might think; write out what success looks like for you.

2. Slap a Specific Date and Number on Your Goal.

Next, we are going to take that lofty goal and bring it down from the clouds and into reality. To do so we are going to slap a very specific number on that goal. This is done to avoid any ambiguity, or reliance on the performance of others to achieve your goals.

Here are some examples:

Nope: I want to swim fast this year.

Meh: I want to qualify for the World Juniors team next summer.

Whammy: I want to swim a 22.43 at XYZ swim meet for the 50m freestyle, July 2015.

If your goal is to make a specific team, do your best to figure out the time you will have to go. Saying that you want to place top 3 isn't good enough, as achieving this goal is reliant on how your competition does (i.e. things which you have no control over).

Focusing on you and your performance alone sheds you of the burden of feeling discouraged when you see a competitor swimming particularly well; you can only control how you swim so dial in on that.

3. Break it Down

Here is where you need to get into guts of your goals while also trying to be as objective as you can regarding your own strengths and weaknesses. (Collaborating with your coach on this point in particular is almost a given.)

What parts of your race are you going to need to focus on? What technical, mental, and physical improvements will you have to see? Does your start need work? Does your underwater butterfly kicking need to improve?

Break down the major opportunities for improvement, and write out how you are going to tackle each one of them. So, let's say you want to improve your fly kicks. What are you going to do each day at practice to make them better? Write out the steps until you have a concrete plan of action to move forward with.

4. Set the Roadposts

You've got your final end time. The things you will need to do to put you in the condition necessary to achieve it. Now to set smaller goals or road-posts along your journey so that you have an idea of how close you are to being on track.

These smaller bench marks serve two main purposes:

1. They provide an opportunity to assess how far you have come along.
2. They provide real world proof how sensible and realistic your goal setting is. Setting goals is a skill, something you need to hone.

List the major meets between now and the end of the season. Starting from your final goal, move backwards from meet to meet, charting the times you'll have to swim, until you have returned to where you are standing right now.

5. Start Living Your Goals

Positive thinking is nice and dandy, but much better and far more effective is positive action. Fake it till you make it isn't just a rhyming catchphrase, it's an actual, like, real thing. In research done as far back as 1970 at Clark University showed that the moods exhibited by participants quickly mirrored the expressions they were asked to make. When told to smile they felt happier, when asked to clench their teeth their anger quickly rose.

If you have seen the movie Boiler Room you have already heard of "acting as if." This same technique can be applied to your swimming.

Act as if you are a champion swimmer. Act as if you love the hard sets. Act as if you love the grind.

Acting as if doesn't mean sitting around, thinking and dreaming about your goal and expecting it to happen. Acting as if implies exactly what it says – acting. That part is unavoidably critical – you must act, or take action in accordance with your goal.