

The Ultimate Secrets of Goal Setting

by Dr. Kevin Elko

At Planet Hollywood in New York City, there is a letter hanging on the wall that actor and martial artist Bruce Lee wrote to himself. The top of the letter, which Lee wrote in 1970, has stamped on it "secret." It starts out, "By 1980 I will be the best known oriental movie star in the United States and will have secured 10 million dollars." The most interesting part of this letter, however, was the second part—the part often omitted when we sit down with our gymnasts to set goals. Lee goes on to write, "And in return I will give the very best acting I could possibly give every single time I am in front of the camera and I will live in peace and harmony." How fascinating that Lee wrote he would have peace and harmony after he said what he would do to obtain his goal.



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Similarly, Michael Johnson, the Olympic champion sprinter, had a goal to win the 200 and 400 meters sprint at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. The problem, however, was that the 200 and the 400 were traditionally run on the same day. This would have made it almost impossible for him to win because of recovery time.

After setting this goal, Johnson remembered something his father asked him every time he set a goal when he was a young person. "What are you going to do about it? and "Now that you have a goal, how are you going to achieve it?" Johnson developed a workout regime with his coach that involved specific weight training, stretching and running intervals five days a week. In addition, he petitioned the Olympic Committee daily to move the 200 and the 400 meters to different days.

There are two kinds of goals: product and process. A product goal is what you are going to achieve, such as, "I will become a Level 8 by next season," or "I will be the regional all-around champion." A process goal is what we will do to get it, which means developing a "prescription for success." This is a plan that the gymnasts will follow very closely in their daily work habits and periodically evaluate themselves on. The gymnasts need to fall in love, not with what they are trying to accomplish, but with the process of accomplishing it. All the great ones have. Not that they always love the work, but they have regard for the process.

After winning, most champions do not talk about what they accomplished, but what they have learned from the process and how that has helped them become more of a person. They have thought more about the process of what they achieved that brings about growth of self and community than anything else.

Hopefully, we, as gymnastics coaches, are teachers of something much larger than

gymnastics. If we could teach our gymnasts about the importance of process, as opposed to product, that tool would help them obtain success with life. "You do not focus on your destination until you get there. Until then, you keep your eye on the map."

Has this ever happened to you? When I was a child I got together with a few of my friends to build a tree house. When we were building and collecting scraps of wood we were so excited. We were running here and there to get what we could. Then we started building and the excitement kept growing while we were constructing, eagerly awaiting to see the end product. And, finally, it was done. Not anything Donald Trump would claim, but it was as well as we could do. Then there was a let down. Without knowing it, we were more interested in building something, and the excitement of the process, than we were the product. Teach to love the process. Explain to your gymnasts what you mean when you use the phrase, "The Process." It is what champions are made of.

Be Specific

Two ministers died and went to heaven and had to wait for their condos to be built. St. Peter came and told them they had to wait and could return to earth and be whatever they wanted until he called for them. The first minister said, "I want to be an eagle flying all day long over the Grand Canyon." Poof! He was gone. The second minister said, "I want to be a cool stud." Poof! He was gone. Some time later St. Peter asked his assistant to retrieve the two ministers because their condos were done. The assistant asked where he could find them. St. Peter replied, "The first will be easy. He is soaring above the Grand Canyon. The second will be a little harder. He is spinning around on some snow tire in Detroit."

The product goal and, more importantly, the process goal need to be very specific. The gymnasts need to develop the discipline of specifically focusing on exactly what they are to do every time they enter the gym. Abstract goals could be deadly.

The United Way was studying goal setting and motivation with giving. They went in and asked companies to do the best they could. They asked other companies to specifically do "10 percent better than last year." The companies that were asked to do 10 percent better than last year, on an average, did 24 percent better. The companies that were told to do the best they could did worse. I think when we say we are going to do the best we can, it becomes the best as soon as we become uncomfortable. If we have a specific goal, we push to reach it.

Have the gymnasts reach, when both of you feel they can. Be very careful, however, not to reach beyond what they are capable of or you'll be asking for injury. To reach the process goals, make the reaching specific. Define together exactly what they are going to do every workout. Plan your work and work the plan, specifically.

The 3 to 5 Method

I have had success with gymnastics teams setting three to five process goals every time they practice and compete. For example, when a gymnast goes into a meet she can set the process goal of, "I will specifically increase my breathing and focus out of my head and on the task when initiating my vault." And conversely, "I will slow down my breathing and relax my body using the self-talk phrase focus when attempting and performing on the beam." These goals are not worried about results or product—that will take care of itself.

They are focused on what to do.

This has not only been effective in increasing performance, it has also been a relief—an anxiety catharsis for the gymnasts. If a gymnast tells her body to win, it produces anxiety. The mind says, "Win, what is that? What specifically does that mean? What if my mom comes? "What if she brings my aunt and they expect me to win? Oh my, I'm so nervous." It is too abstract and the mind can not react to the instruction. It is like putting yourself in a car and saying, "Drive to New York. No map, just get to New York."

When a gymnast walks into a meet with three to five process goals, she will usually increase performance. She can do three to five specific things in a meet. It gives her something to focus on—simple instructions the gymnast can give her brain three to five times a meet.

The same should be true in the gym. Every time they walk in, they should have specifics in what they are reaching for. There should be three to five things they are trying to get done so they are not spending time in the gym, but investing time. Specific goals may be, "Develop self-talk to focus on the beam after my balance is lost, or develop a system of cue words on bars that prepares successfully for each skill." How will the gymnast progress and grow, if she is not mastering specific techniques during every workout?

Visualizing The Product

Movie star Jim Carey set a product goal to sign a movie deal for 12 million dollars. The problem was, he was a stand-up comic in Los Angeles. When he set the goal, he wrote a 12 million dollar check to himself and carried it with him. He left stand-up comedy, which his friends thought he was crazy to do, and went on the show "In Living Color." He kept locked in his mind the product, a 12 million dollar movie deal. He kept moving up and finally signed a major motion picture deal, Batman Forever. How much? 12 million, of course.

In the attempt to reach the end result, it is the process that gets us there. It is seeing the product that keeps us hungry. Seeing the reward and even writing a check out to yourself in the mind's eye, has a strange way of helping dreams become a reality.

Everything that was ever built—buildings, careers and champions—first existed as a thought. Holding on to the thought has a strange way of inviting people and places into our lives to "make it happen." I can't explain it, but I know it is true.

I was working with a woman who wanted to be a motivational trainer in her company. She taped a picture of a woman training on her mirror. She locked the picture in her mind and kept working the process to make it happen. Finally, she got the position she had dreamed of. When she went out to buy the dress she would wear for her first training, she got home, put it on and realized something—it was the exact same dress the woman was wearing in the picture!

Seeing Themselves Better Than They Are

Research says there is something valuable about being a bit delusional. Actually, those who inflate the view they have of themselves tend to be happier. In comparison, those who see themselves realistically tend to be depressed. Moreover, when someone sees herself in a

positive light she tends to eventually become it. How many high paying stars have you watched and thought, "This person doesn't have any talent." Evidently they think they do. So do their bank accounts.

For gymnasts, seeing themselves in a positive light and believing they are good helps them become that vision. They strive for being what they think they are. They do not become champions. They are champions and simply are being what they think they are.

This all boils down to this, gymnasts must think highly of themselves to become champions. To do this, have them visualize being champions. Have them write it somewhere so they can see it constantly. Let them know a champion isn't something they will become, it is something they already are. We just need to climb up the steps of the process to help them get there.

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This article appears in the September/October 1997 issue of *Technique*, Vol. 17, No. 9.