



Goal setting

Goal setting is very common amongst athletes, at both a junior and senior level. Whether it's qualifying for the county championships or winning an Olympic medal, the majority of athletes will have aspirations and objectives for the season ahead. Goal setting is also used in business, though may be under a different guise: KPI tracking, objectives, targets, performance plans etc. Many of us also have personal goals; whether that's running a marathon, losing a bit of weight, or improving a relationship with a loved one. So, we caught up with Olympian Lizzie Simmonds and pulled together this useful factsheet which outlines the lessons she learned while training and competing as an elite athlete and provides some top tips to help you set and stick to your goals.

Quite simply a goal is an ambition for an outcome, a vision for the future, something that we're aiming towards. Goals are important to all of us, although arguably they are even more important if you find yourself lacking direction during this current period of uncertainty.

Where do I start with goal setting?

First, you need to decide what you're aiming towards – what outcome you want – whether that is a work goal, your personal development or something in your home life.

There are three ways we can go about setting goals.

We can choose to focus on:

- **Outcomes** – I want to achieve XYZ
- **Processes** – these are the steps I need to take in order to achieve XYZ
- **Identity** – this is who I need to be to achieve XYZ

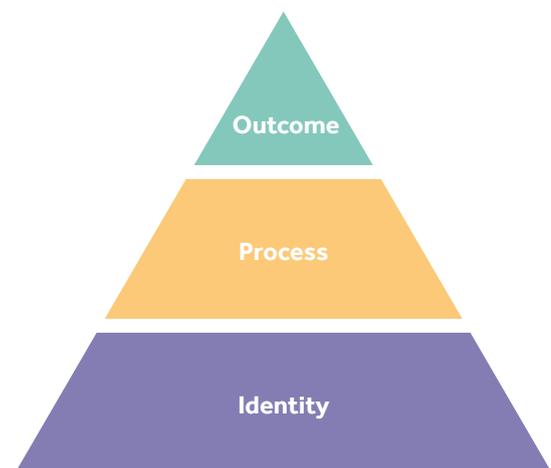
Once you have set your goal, the reality is that most of us need to change our behaviour and our habits in order to achieve our trajectory towards a challenging goal. This might be increasing our weekly exercise, reducing unhealthy snacking, or putting time aside to work on a specific project or business case.

The importance of IDENTITY and behaviours

Most people will be familiar with setting goals that focus on outcome. But thinking only of outcomes can be a problem, because we often become disillusioned and demotivated if we don't see proof of progress straight away.

Instead, the foundation of your goal setting should focus on identity and behaviours. Who do you need to be in order to achieve your ambitions?

Beginning your goal setting by looking at identity is a much more powerful way to stick to lasting behavioural change.



The Next Step: What are the small PROCESS steps I need to take?

With any goal, there will be a process involved in getting there. The idea behind process goals is that if you commit time and effort into mastering the skills that go into a performance, then you are more likely to achieve the desired outcome. This could mean working on technical skills, tactical objectives, or behaviours, attitude and effort – everything that could lead towards your eventual success.

With the right behaviours in place, you can focus most of your time on these processes – the small, everyday steps that will drive you towards your goal. Often an ambitious goal can seem overwhelming, but the first steps might be as simple as arranging a call to get some advice from a colleague or buying some running shoes!

This stage is all about action. Mini process goals make it easy to assess where you are at any given point, which means you can adapt to challenge and adversity and pivot more effectively if needed.

Outcome: The End Result

Deciding who you need to be, your behaviours and processes are the key ingredients to ensuring you give yourself the best possible chance of achieving the result you want. Get these right and the outcome will take care of itself!

The reality is that we don't always achieve our goals the first time around, but having new habits in place, and understanding the steps involved, give you a great chance of going after your ambition again.

Tips for goal setting

1. Reassess the landscape

Set aside some time to reassess the current landscape and how your goals fit into that.

2. Adjust your goals

Although it's frustrating to do so, some goals might need to be adjusted or postponed due to COVID-19. That doesn't mean you can't create new goals and re-orientate yourself towards a new set of objectives.

3. Have work-related and personal goals

Make sure you have both work and personal goals. There isn't a hierarchy of importance so focus on the things that mean the most to you.

4. Take ownership

If someone else is setting your goals at work, then make sure you still take ownership of them. This might mean a

conversation where you discuss small changes you'd like to make, or an advancement on the original suggestion. Having autonomy over our goals is incredibly important, so don't hesitate to make them your own where you can.

5. Determine behaviours needed

Once you've settled on your goals, look next at the set of behaviours you'll need in order to achieve these goals. Success comes from action, and action is driven by our habits. If you have habits that aren't leading you towards success, then you need to take some time to re-evaluate and address this. We humans have the capacity to adopt a multitude of identities. If you don't know what identity or behaviours you should adopt, think about someone else who has achieved something you want to achieve and follow their example. Who do you need to be to fulfil your role successfully?

Behaviours drive actions >> Actions deliver goals >> Achieve success

6. Create process goals

With the right behaviours in place, you can focus the majority of your time on systems and processes – the small steps that will drive you towards the outcome you want.

7. Share your goals with others

Sharing goals with a friend, colleague, partner or boss makes us more accountable and more likely to commit to achieving them. Having objective insight from another party can also be incredibly valuable, as they might spot an opportunity that you've missed or be able to offer advice from their own experience.

8. Review your progress

Remember, success isn't linear, so don't worry if you have setbacks along the way. Make sure you're reviewing your progress regularly and that you stay agile enough to pivot in a new direction if an unforeseen barrier arises or a new opportunity comes up.

Together, #wecandothis

Lizzie Simmonds



Lizzie is a retired British swimmer who has won medals at World, Commonwealth and European Championships, and has represented Great Britain at two Olympic Games. She retired from professional competition in 2018 but still has many roles within high-performance sport, including supporting fellow athletes throughout and beyond their sporting careers. Lizzie has also developed a successful programme transferring the systems and habits of elite performers into the corporate world and works with companies to help staff find ways to prioritise their own physical and mental health.

Follow Lizzie's story on Twitter @LizzieSimmonds1

To read more on this topic, Lizzie recommends 'Atomic Habits' by James Clear.