

GOAL SETTING

'Getting Ready, Taking Aim, and Fire!'

Before we discuss in detail the methodology of goal setting let's take a moment to put it into the perspective of a tennis coach's life.

So many coach relationships begin with a telephone call that leads to the arranged appointment which then continues in an interrupted process of helping the pupil to play better tennis. Once the momentum has begun it may never be seriously questioned.

There is no criticism implied about these proceedings as the working relationship may well turn into a very pleasant experience for both the coach and the pupil who may eventually be well respected as a good tennis player.

The debate about the above arrangements starts by examining issues of efficiency, direction, purpose and professionalism.

Compare the nurturing of a tennis player to that of putting a jigsaw together. A picture on top of the box would enormously help the assembler of the puzzle, and if, as a result of an accident, the picture wasn't crystal clear, clues as to whether it was a sky scape or a flora still life would help to indicate that a blue coloured piece was perhaps part of the flower petals and not a piece of the sky.

Likewise, the idea of establishing the purpose and ultimate destiny of the pupil, although perhaps not clear cut at the beginning, will help prioritise the content of the future lessons.

Goal setting is such a part of our every day life; house or car buying, schools for our children; planning a journey or going on holiday. Imagine an appointment with an estate or travel agent and your answer to their first question is 'a nice house' or a 'good hotel somewhere'.

So please let's agree that having specific destinations, descriptions, outcomes, standards, game styles, a desire for certain competitions or whatever manifestation goals transform into, are desirable beginning discussion points for the coach and pupil.

If the pupil-coach process has reached a position where goal setting has been agreed in both principle and detail, independent of the process, paperwork or method used to arrive at these defined goals, certainly one thing should have happened and another is about to take place. But before being more specific about these events it is worth while taking a slight detour at this moment to reflect on the coach's position.

Although it may seem very obvious; the coach has already agreed to the demands the goals generate. Lessons should not take place just because the pupil expects one but because the coach wants to continue coaching the pupil and the player wants the coach's help.

So taking it that the coach is a voluntary, willing participant, the spotlight now falls on the pupil because the likely junction the two have reached is one where the goals have been harmoniously, but only verbally agreed and we need something to occur to 'seal the deal'.

The heading indicates, hopefully, that something is about to happen, but lets explore the words more fully. Below are questions that could prompt a conversation and lead to written answers.

To help the players accept the desirability of long term improvement it requires that they also embrace the uncertainty but excitement of change. To be more readily amenable to behavioural change it's important to examine the present so that the advantages and disadvantages of 'embarking on the adventure' of change can be balanced against each other. Developing this discrepancy between the goal and reality is an important catalyst for change especially if the player is the one who is actively talking about the costs and benefits. A key rule then for coaches here is to elicit this 'change talk' from the player rather than instilling it into the player.

GETTING READY

The disadvantages of remaining where or as you are

- What don't you like about your current situation?
- What worries you about your current situation?
- The advantages of changing
- What is the 'payoff'/reward from achieving my goal?
- Why do you want to achieve your goal(s)?

Throughout this goal-setting process, as coaches, we want to achieve the following:

- Help the player to understand why he wants to achieve his goal(s)
- Help players set appealing goals
- Help players establish goals that *make a difference*
- Create an exciting, positive and beneficial vision of what the future will be if they do change
- Enhance confidence (hope) in the player that they can change and reach their goal(s)

- Help players set goals that are worth more than they cost
- Help players own the goals they set
- Help players deal with competing agendas/commitments
- Help strengthen their commitment to striving for their goal
- Getting them to actually talk about changing as a person learns to believe what he hears himself say
- Encourage thoughts and talk of personal responsibility and control

PART 1

It is important at the outset to encourage the player to explore the idea of their self-identity being attached to who they are as opposed to what they do or achieve. Questions like the ones below may help the player to understand this link:

“What would you like to be valued for?”

“What would you like someone, who knows you and your tennis very well, to say about you and your tennis?”

PART 2

Outcome Goals - Beginning with the End in mind

- The purpose in this section is to engage the player in the kind of dialogue that will help them design, choose and shape their outcome goals. An outcome is what the coach is helping the player to establish at this stage. This goal is not an activity e.g. “I want to start a fitness programme” but a very measurable ‘end result’ e.g. ranking improved to a specific number; increase in win- loss ratio; match statistics in Nationals, etc.
- Ensure that the goals are something that the player wants or needs as opposed to something he wants or needs to avoid.
- Invite the player to identify between two and four outcome goals as opposed to just one. This will increase the chances of the player achieving success as opposed to having one single goal, which if is not achieved is 100% failure!

Exploring Importance

You will notice on the sheet that there is an opportunity for the player to rate the importance of the goal to them on a scale from 1-10.

The players' commitment to their goals will be strengthened as their perception of the level of importance of their goals is increased. This perception of importance can be enhanced, by the coach encouraging the player to talk about the important reasons for achieving their goal. This can be done very cleverly by the coach asking the following two questions:

- "How important is it for you to achieve your goals on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is high?"
- Then ask, "Why a _____ and not a _____ (lower number)?"
For example, if the player answers 7 to the first question, then ask "Why a 7 and not a 4?"
This question invites the player to look at where they have come from as opposed to where they need to get to.

Growing optimism for change

At some stage in the goal-setting process, perhaps now, it would be useful to excite the player about the benefits of changing so that they can almost experience what will happen when they achieve their goals. This is rather like creating memories of the future. To do this you will need to ask the player questions which will encourage them to access all of their senses to notice what is happening when they have achieved their goal. This can be achieved by asking questions such as:

- "How will you know when you have achieved it?"
- "What will you see?"
- "What will you hear?"
- "How will that make you feel?"
- "What will you see yourself doing differently as a result of achieving this?"
- "What will you notice others saying, doing or feeling?"

Players will often have increased motivation when they have more confidence of succeeding. As the coach encouraged the player to focus upon the importance of their goals, the coach can now use the same intervention to increase the players' perception of their confidence to achieve their goals.

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how confident are you that you can make this (these) changes (achieve this goal)?
- Why a _____ and not _____ (a lower number)?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how confident are you that you can deliver your:

Today's goal?
One month outcome goal?
Three month outcome goal?
etc

- Then ask; “Why are you at a _____ and not _____ (a lower number)?”
- What personal strengths do you have that will help you to succeed?

Exploring and creating meaning

One of the biggest mistakes in goal-setting is failing to explore and create meaning for the goal. So an important question for the coach to ask here, is; “If I were to offer the goal to you right now in the palm of my hand, would you take it?” If the ‘*why*’ is big enough, then the rest of the goal-setting process is relatively straight forward. For example 6am runs will be easy if the reason for doing them is emotionally high.

PART 3: PERFORMANCE GOALS

Moving from Outcome to Performance:

This is the stage in the process in which the coach helps the player to link how they will need to perform to maximise their chances of achieving the ‘end result’. Once again it is important that the coach helps the player to establish goals which are SMART:

- Specific, providing detailed descriptions to be verifiable and to direct and intensify behaviour
- Measurable so that progress can be verifiable i.e. evidence is available
- Agreed so that players truly *own* the goals. As the goals are those of the player they need to be agreed by the player! Players need to be helped to own the goals that are set.
- Realistic with regard to the resources (internal and external) available to achieve the goal(s). Effective goals are challenging but possible if the player trains hard and smart. At present they may be just out of reach but not out of sight.
- Timed so that the player has a reasonable, yet definite time frame within which to achieve their goal(s) to regulate intensity of work

SMART goals serve to paint a picture of the ‘finish line’. Simply put ‘if there is no finishing line there is no race.’

PART 4: PROCESS GOALS

Focussing on Process In Practice:

These goals are precise and detailed and describe only the 'how to do it' information. For example, 'I will do one centering breath before each time I serve'

PART 5: DETERMINATION

To enable the player to have a smooth transition toward achieving their goals it is important that the coach helps the player to identify possible obstacles to achieving them and resources that can be mobilised to get round them.

The assumption is that if players are aware of some of the possible 'potholes' on their road to achieving their goals they will be less distracted and de-railed when they come across them.

The identification of these 'what if...' scenarios allow players in advance to prepare and rehearse coping strategies for these possible obstacles if and when they occur. The principle here is reflected in the phrase "forewarned is forearmed".

PART 6: THE 'NOW!' GOAL

Gaining Commitment Before The Player Leaves The Discussion

The idea now is to 'get the player to walk not just talk'. The goal is now not motivation but action. The emphasis is now much more about doing than motivating. This is where the coach gains a commitment to an action which can be done as soon as possible to allow them to start their journey to build momentum, which will in turn increase his motivation to continue. This step is a vital part of the whole goal-setting process. If you are ineffective here as a coach, much of what has come before will simply be just words! The most effective way to do this is to invite the player to start today. The secret to this is to encourage the player to identify a specific time on that very day when they will start. The key principle here is that action leads to motivation which then results in more action!

Goal-setting fails when players don't achieve their goals! Very often players fail to achieve their goals because the consequences of failing are not particularly undesirable. Invite the player to provide a consequence for himself if he does not succeed and to reward himself in some way if he does achieve the agreed goals.

Using process goals within training is a fairly safe way to begin experimenting with this idea of rewards and consequences, as the inevitable mistakes by the coach on this untried learning curve are not serious in comparison to the mis-judgements when deciding to reward (or not) outcome goals.

To further aid the pupil's commitment to the goals it may help to encourage the player to 'live' the future consequences of under performing and consider what will happen if the goals, although reasonable, achievable and agreed are not attained.

To do this, ask them to consider the consequences of not achieving their goals?

For example:

- What will happen if you don't get it?
- What won't happen if you don't get it?

If all the people who have a vested interest in the goals, and the coach and pupil have been focused on so far, have arrived at the point where no further discussion is required there has indeed been significant progress. But before the final stage the coach may have needed to intervene because he needed to ensure the player understands and accepts that all this is his choice, increase his awareness once again of the commitment he is about to make to himself and the fact that he is now accountable for his actions.

This can be done by simply restating:

"If you're not quite ready, then I don't want you to make a commitment yet. This is too important, and you don't have to make up your mind right now. You can take time to think what you really want and need to do and only commit when you feel you are ready?"

When the position has arrived where there is no more to be said or reconsidered, move onto the final written statements in part 7:

PART 7: SEAL THE DEAL

You will notice that there are different people (coach, other player, parent) available to sign the agreement and provide support to the player.

It is up to the coach and player as to which people will be most effective in helping the player to commit to their goal(s) and keep going. Depending upon the age of the player, in some instances it may be effective to encourage peer support and invite a playing colleague of the player to be aware of the players' goals and to offer support.

So by this stage you may well have completed a goal setting sheet or even be doing it now using the information supplied above as a guideline.

To reiterate, understanding the principles outlined is much more important than slavishly following other coach's methodology.