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The Story of York Minster.

Just what is “goal-setting”?

(Why does it work?)

Dream Outcome Goals

There seems to be a huge amount of confusion over “goal-setting”, but not much *thinking* about it. This seems to be because almost everyone holds a tacit belief that they know what is meant when the phrase is used.

Regrettably, this seldom seems to be the reality and the misperceptions about the subject are making it very difficult for recreational skiers to use the process to their advantage, while professional athletes gain enormous benefits from it.

For these reasons I offer the following metaphor and technical considerations.

Becoming the best skier you can be, is analogous to constructing a fine building; one that will impress, and last for a very long time. If you're going to do this, you need to have a long term vision to sustain you in times of stress or setbacks. This is your long term goal, your dream, your vision of your most desired well formed outcome. In sports goal setting terminology, your **Outcome Goal**.

“Winning the Gold Medal” is an outcome goal. “Beating Manchester United on Saturday” is an outcome goal. “Skiing black bump runs” is an outcome goal.

When whoever it was decided that York Minster had to be built, this was his outcome goal. It was also a goal which he would never see achieved; the task was too big to be completed in one lifetime so he knew he could never bring it about. Nevertheless the journey was important enough that he knew a start had to be made, and the right people were recruited and set to work.

Performance Goals

For the next however many centuries, craftsmen worked on the project, arriving every day for the whole of their working lives, exercising their craft and often handing the work onto their sons as they became too old. It was a *lifetime project* for them, with no prospect of being there at the opening ceremony. Nevertheless they knew they were working on something of real value, and they maintained their focus on a daily basis.

What, apart from their pay, motivated them? Why did they not either just give up, or perhaps do the work, but slipshod? They did it by having *goals*. And two types of goal were available to them, the next of which were **performance goals**. Examples of these for them, could have been - “Carve the next stone with even more precision than its predecessor”; “Adze two more beams this week than last week”.

Performance goals are concerned with “outcomes”, as are “Dream outcome” goals but their focus is more precise, and shorter term. You can think of them as the stepping stones toward your dream goals, without them your dream goal will remain just that - a dream.

But how did those ancient masons, as they worked on the great cathedral **bring about** their performance goals?

Process Goals

They did it by working from minute to minute, hour to hour, using **process goals**. Both Dream goals, and Performance goals are *desires*, but they don't get anything **done**. And we only get what we get, by doing what we do. And how we *do* it is pivotal to our success.

So our craftsman stonemason would diligently work to hold his chisel in *precisely* the right way, and *precisely* the right place, or to work it with his mallet with *precision* strokes. He would be constantly preoccupied with the **process** of what he was doing, and in that way could for long periods put to the back of his mind the enormity of the long term task upon which he was working and take constant and repeated pleasure from achieving his process goals. And he would only do **one** of these at one time, never try to achieve two simultaneously - every time he did that he'd hit his thumb or knock the nose off the gargoyl.

Imagine he started out as an apprentice; at first his efforts at precision would be varied in their success. Sometimes the stone would be beautifully carved, but the next one might be mediocre. One side of a supposedly symmetrical pattern would be better than the

other. Some work might even be rejected by his master craftsman.

Gradually though, the desired outcome, the high quality carving, would become more predictable. The quality would gradually improve as well as its accurate repetition. The mason would become **skilful**. And when he was, he could do automatically what previously he had to concentrate hard upon. That would free-up some of his attention span and perhaps he would begin to aspire to moving on to some of the more prominent and prestigious carving, perhaps one day to become a master carver himself.

Important

The most important aspect of this story is to notice that in order to achieve either the dream goal of the project's originator, or the performance goals of the craftsman, what worked, and what can **only** work, was for the performer of the work to concentrate, without self-criticism and with persistence and diligence, on the **processes** involved, so that his carving gradually improved and in so doing slowly but inexorably moved the project forward toward its distant but grandiose dream.

No point in worrying about the distant outcome - doing so would just get in the way and perhaps make the task seem impossible- just concentrate on immediate process goals so that the the quality of performance gradually improved.

Precision

The issue arises as to what will be the appropriate level of precision and detail in our goal setting, for each type of goal. The graphic illustrates this.

Rather like weather forecasting it is very difficult to be extremely accurate and precise about things that are way out into the future. But accuracy, detail and precision are possible in the near-to.

So it is with effective goal-setting. You will I hope have noticed by now that effective goal setting is **nothing** to do with "targets". The government's "targets" for the health service, are not *goals*. They do not *work* like goals, and they do not - or so it would appear - work as *motivators* toward the achievement of the long term desired outcome.

Rather, what happens with "targets" (to which punitive codicils are often attached for non-achievement - how is *that* for motivation?) is that those to whom they have been applied spend much more of their time finding ways to ensure that the reported results *appear* as success, than they do working on the day to day *processes* which will bring it about. The old Russian empire was a classic example.

At last - skiing !

Now let's transfer this to a ski run. Your dream goal is to ski steep deep powder, but all you currently get is mouthfuls of snow, and not much forward or downward progress.

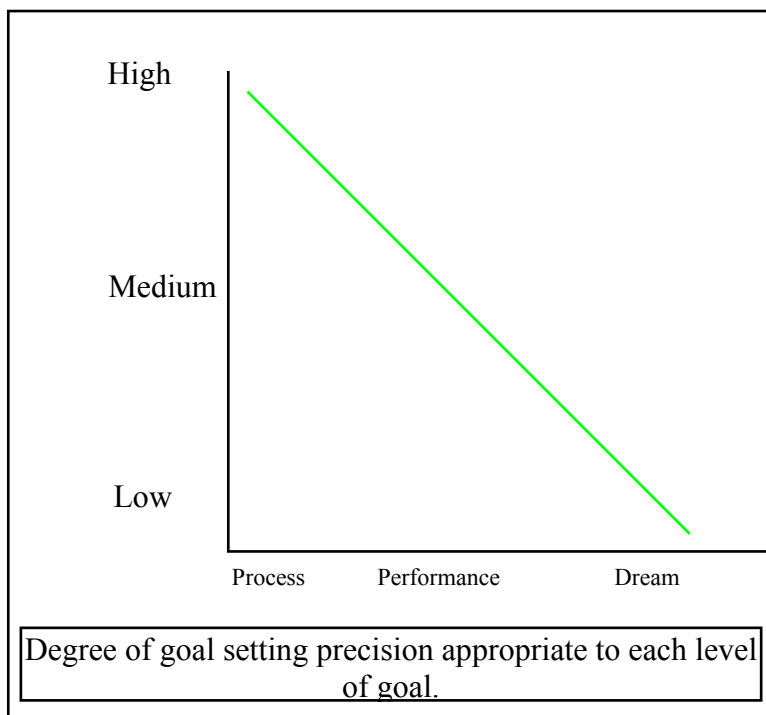
Keep your dream. Don't ever let it slip away, but remember that it's *in the future*, you can't have it *now*.

You are about to set off on a training run, of about 200 metres. You can now choose between two types of goal. If, let's say, you are working on short radius arcs, and things have been going quite well today, you could set a *performance* goal - say, "three more arcs between those two lift pylons, than I managed last time".

This is your desired outcome, and in concentrating on it, you may well find you do, almost without thinking, what you need to do to bring it about.

OR - you could choose a *process* goal; something which *if you do it* will bring about a change in your effectiveness. So you might choose to execute a series of arcs with a faster rhythm, or to make leg extensions and flexions slightly more aggressively than hitherto.

By concentrating on the modalities of what you do, you will bring about changes in outcomes and if you are perceptive they will modify your performance.



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