

How to Optimize Performance, Process, & Outcome Goals— Practical Applications

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Abstract

[Part 1](#) of this series discussed the effects of performance, process, and outcome goals on various variables in several applied settings. The purpose of this article was the summarize the findings of article 1 and demonstrate how to properly apply these goals in a training program.

Overview of Performance, Process, & Outcome Goals

Before discussing how to use goal setting, we need to review some terms from the first article.

Performance, Process, and Outcome Goals

Three types of goals Psychologists have focused particular attention to are outcome, performance, and process goals.

Outcome goals, also known as *competitive* or *ego goals*, focus on comparing yourself to others, and defeating them. For example, focusing on out performing someone in an event, or winning a bodybuilding competition. These types of goals are in large part out of the control of the individual, because athletes can not control how their competition prepares for an event. For instance, the competition in a bodybuilding contest may be well above expectations; and though an athlete showed up in the best shape of their life, if they lose, they would still be disappointed, because they lost.

Performance goals, also known as *mastery goals*, focus on your overall performance (self comparison). For example, improving your 1 repetition maximum (1RM) on squats by 20 pounds, or losing 2 inches off your waist. Unlike outcome goals, these types of goals do not involve comparison of yourself with others, and therefore, are in your control.

Process goals focus on improving form, strategy, and other processes an individual must go through during a task to perform a skill successfully. For example, focusing on keeping your back erect during dead lifts, or recording your diet on a daily bases, and following certain guidelines such as eating 2 tablespoons of [essential fatty acids](#) per day.

Practical Applications

Now that the reader has a firm grasp on several important concepts, we can discuss various practical applications, based on the research reported in article 1.

- Performance and outcome goals should be set prior to events. For example, before actually working out or competing.
- An emphasis should be placed on performance goals, as results clearly demonstrate that they result in greater performance, among many other important variables, when compared to outcome goals. However, evidence suggests that having two goals—performance and outcome goals—results in greater performance, and increases in other measurements such as intrinsic motivation than having one goal orientation. Therefore, the current author suggests that the athlete should focus on a mastery goal orientation, and coaches should foster a mastery oriented motivational climate. However, we should *not* be dogmatic with these practices, and ignore outcome goals. We should acknowledge outcome goals and reinforce them when they are done. For example, athletes/coaches should acknowledge and celebrate victories. Or in an academic setting, students/teachers should acknowledge and celebrate high grades. This should optimize incentive motivation, persistence, reinforcement opportunities, intrinsic motivation, and performance.
- When working out, practicing, or competing, the athlete should focus on process goals. This will effectively allocate attention towards the task, decrease various measures of anxiety, and enhance performance. So instead of focusing on defeating someone on squats, or getting 10 reps on squats—both of which can enhance anxiety—the athlete should just focus on the actual process of squatting when they are squatting. This can be applied to any exercise. The point is, during actual physical activities, you should focus your attention on the process of the movement.
- For beginners, focusing on key parts of the movement should facilitate learning of skills, and future autonomy. However, for advanced athletes, they should set holistic process goals, which means goals based on the entire movement, rather than breaking it up into parts. For instance, someone squatting should not focus on keeping their back straight, going down in 3 seconds, up in 2 seconds, and looking up, etc. Instead, just focus on one holistic term such as being smooth on your lifts. For other sports such as hockey, many of the skills such as skating are automatic; by focusing on the process, the player can focus their attention on the many cues in the environment, such as opposing players. A good example of how to use process goals as you proceed along the learning curve is demonstrated in the following quote by a very successful pistol shooter:

I would write what I wanted to do and say to myself, 'What am I going to do this training session?' I wouldn't just get on the line and pump rounds down the range, but would actually go to the line with an intent, a goal, even if it was just to make sure everything was smooth. When I go to the line, and set everything up, and take up the gun in my hand, I also mentally go through my shot plan checklist before I shoot. This strategy started out very mechanically, with a physical list of words which I have on the shooting table and which I read exactly. These words represented every single step involved in shooting a shot. Then, I reduced these to key words so that I could go through the list faster. Finally, I didn't need the list anymore. I would usually write on word to emphasize what I wanted such as, 'trigger' or 'smooth'. Then this shot-plan rehearsal became a mix of simple verbal reminders and images which I ran before each shot (Orlick & Partington, 1988, pp. 111-112).

As you see, at first, he was very mechanical and slow, and it took a great deal of cognitive effort for him to shoot. However, as he progressed, he became much more efficient, faster, and 'automatic.' Therefore, he only used one process term such as 'trigger' or 'smooth' just to get him to focus on the movement as a whole (not parts).

The main point is that your attention should be focused on the task at hand. Any other thought, such as saying you have to achieve 10 reps (a performance goal) will decrease your concentration of the task at end, and potentially elicit other adverse effects.

- Process goals can also be highly beneficial before competitions. You can set process goals for diet, training consistency, among other areas of interest. The current author designed a process goal sheet for dieting. This can be accessed by clicking [Here](#). The reader can easily adapt such a sheet to various types of process goals. You could also use that sheet to design performance and outcome goals.
- Knowlden (2003) designed an incredible goal setting sheet here, [Muscle Mind Doctrine - Goal Sheets](#). The current author highly advises applying it. Further, the reader will want to study his goal setting article here, [Muscle Mind Doctrine - Theoretical Concepts of Strategization](#). Both his articles and the current article are complimentary with each other, and should be combined for optimal results.
- This can also be applied to your spiritual life. A process goal sheet for instance, would be excellent to use to increase your adherence of reading the bible, praying more frequently, etc.

In conclusion, outcome and performance goals should be emphasized before and after exercise, with a greater emphasize on performance goals; while process goals should be emphasized during exercise and before and after exercise.

Keep it Hardcore,

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