

The Importance Of Setting Goals In Hockey

By Graeme Townshend, ProSkatingCoach.com

If you don't know where you are going, you'll never know if you have arrived there. People do not plan to fail they fail to plan. You must have a roadmap to follow in order to achieve your full potential as a player. Don't be afraid to set big goals for your career. It is better to shoot for the stars and wind up reaching the clouds, than to shoot for the trees and wind up in the dirt.

I am going to give you a real life story that will illustrate this fact.

Years ago when I was in high school, several friends and I were in the cafeteria having lunch one day. The topic of our futures came up and when it was my turn I said my goal was to get a scholarship to play college hockey in the United States, and then go on to play in the NHL. The group went silent at my lofty goals. My best friend, Greg, scoffed, "That's impossible, you're playing in the lowest league in the city and you're already 16. Nobody has ever made it to the NHL from your league." Greg was actually right; nobody from my league had ever made it to the NHL, I even got cut from all the Junior B teams that I tried out for. What was I thinking? I looked Greg straight in the eye and said, "You watch, I'll make it."

Three years later, I was recruited by 7 Junior A and B teams in the Toronto area and by Christmas I was the second highest recruited player in North America, I turned down offers from NCAA Div. 1 and #2 ranked Michigan State, Michigan, Ohio State, Maine and several other schools. I committed to the #1 ranked and eventual 1985 Frozen Four National Champion Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI). I had earned a full scholarship to play in the best program in the country! After being told by my coach and a few teammates that pro hockey would be a pipe dream for me, I went on to sign a contract with the Boston Bruins at the end of my senior year. The rest is just history.

How did I do this? I certainly trained hard physically, but most importantly, I set goals for myself. I knew I had to get to the junior hockey level by my 19th birthday. I only had three years to make that dream a reality.

The first step is to decide where you ultimately want to end up. Your goal might be to someday be a first line player on your high school team. If you feel you have what it takes to someday play Division III college hockey, Division I or perhaps Major Junior Hockey, then set that as your goal.

Now, in order for you to achieve your goal, you need to believe in your heart that you will achieve it. I don't recommend that you just decide to believe this. It has to be a belief to your very core and soul, your subconscious mind. The way you get your subconscious mind to actually believe that you will achieve your goal is to break your goal down into believable steps that you will take along the way.

Work backwards from your ultimate goal. Let's say your goal is to someday play Division I College Hockey. Let's say you have 5 years until you will be at the age to play at that level. You need to set up a 4-year goal that if you achieve, will bring you as close as possible to reaching your ultimate goal.

For example, your 4-year goal might be to become the first line center for your high school or junior 'A' team. Next, decide what you need to do each year over the next 3 years to get yourself as close as possible to your 4- year goal. Perhaps you can identify the current first line

center and study his skills and attributes, even start hanging out with him and pick his brain. This will help you determine your path and help give you concrete and specific steps to reach the 4-year goal. Your goal by year 3 might be to be on the second power-play unit and a second line center by your junior year in high school.

In year two, you might set a goal to make your high school varsity team as a sophomore. Ask yourself, what are the top players doing at that level now? What are they not doing? In year one, your goal might be to make a regional team and compete at the highest level of Bantam Hockey. Finally, break down your first year into monthly goals, then weekly goals, and finally daily goals.

Your subconscious mind will be able to believe that if you achieve your daily goals, you'll automatically achieve your weekly goals. If you achieve your weekly goals, you'll automatically achieve your monthly goals, and so on.

The final and most important step in achieving your goals is to put them down on paper and read them at least 2 times every day. Do this for 14 days, and you'll be amazed at how effective this is. This should become a habit and you should keep reading it. You'll likely need to measure, monitor, and adjust your goals as you go along. Rewrite your goal statement any time you feel it is necessary.

You've got to make the effort to put your goals down on paper and read them every day. This will be the fuel that powers the engine that will take you to where you want to go. This will be your motivation to consistently work hard every day. Your subconscious mind will get involved and start to work magic in your life. Setting clear and defined goals will help you achieve clear focus.

Clear focus leads you to a state where you can effectively manage your feelings. Remember, your feelings affect your thoughts and your thoughts affect your feelings. You can't maintain the right focus without managing feelings of fear, anger, pain, and fatigue. "Run positive programs on your mental TV and you will get more of what you think about", says Dr. Saul Miller. (*Hockey Tough*, by Saul L. Miller, Human Kinetics 2003).

So now sit down and start to plan to succeed. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

- Why do you play hockey?
- What do you want to achieve?
- Do you have a long-term hockey goal?
- Do you have a career goal?
- What is your goal for the season?

To achieve your season goals, you will have to improve your strength and conditioning, as well as your reading and reacting skills. Your fitness goals may be to get to the gym or your trainer once a week and workout on your own once a week. Your skill goals may be to shoot 500 pucks a day and perform stick-handling drills daily. Make sure to set time restrictions as well. For example, stick-handling for 15 minutes daily. List your mental strength goals for the season. For example: pre-game preparation and emotional control. Team goals may be leadership and toughness.

One goal I had in practice was to hit the net with every shot. I would keep track of every shot I made in practice. At the end of practice I would determine what my on-net shooting percentage would be. I decided that 80% would be a good goal because during one summer Adam Oates told me that the NHL's best players hit the net at least 80% of the time. I was eventually able to achieve this goal.

About The Author

Graeme Townshend was born in Kingston, Jamaica. The 41-year-old Townshend moved to Toronto at the age of 3. Played one year of Junior Hockey for Mimico Monarchs of the O.H.A. Central Jr. B league. As the #2 recruited player in North America, Townshend turned down offers from 14 schools, including Michigan, Michigan State, Maine and Cornell, to accept a full scholarship from #1 ranked and defending NCAA Division 1 Frozen Four Champion, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI).

As captain at RPI, Townshend, recruited as a forward, led all RPI defensemen in scoring and was one of the top scoring defensemen in the ECACHL as a Junior. . After a very bad experience in college with a coach who constantly mentally abused his players, Townshend was able to overcome the odds and prove his critics and coach wrong, by signing a Free Agent contract with the Boston Bruins. The power forward went onto play for the NY Islanders and the Ottawa Senators.

Known mostly for his physical play, Townshend went on to beat the odds and scored an average of 19 goals per year throughout 10 professional seasons in the NHL, AHL, IHL and WPHL.

Among his awards Townshend earned the IHL and WPHL Man of the Year Awards for his outstanding community service and leadership. Townshend went on to coach for three years professionally . He has been the Player Development Coordinator for the NHL's San Jose Sharks, and is currently the Skills and Skating Coach for the Toronto Maple Leafs. Townshend has also operated youth, adult and college level hockey schools and clinics throughout North America, Canada and Europe.