

It always bugs me when people call me a natural shooter. I spent many years in a gym working hard to become a “natural” shooter.

Chris Mullin
Five-Time NBA All-Star

1.2 Effort as a Habit

NBA stars LeBron James and Carmello Anthony learned something important as members of the US Olympic basketball team that won the 2008 Gold Medal in Beijing. They saw firsthand how hard their teammate Kobe Bryant worked *every day*, often starting at 6:30 a.m. to be the best basketball player he can be. Think about it. Kobe – rich, famous, arguably the best player in the world – gets up at dawn to practice. Many observers believe James and Anthony have both elevated their games, especially their defense – which is largely about effort – since being exposed to Bryant’s work habits.

Along with cultivating a Teachable Spirit, which we’ll discuss in the next chapter, there may be nothing more important to your ultimate success than fostering the habit of working hard. While most people think talent is the key to success, effort is more important. And, best of all, it’s in your control because you control how hard you work.

Our culture gives us “either/or” messages. Either you’ve got it or you don’t. You’re smart or you’re not. You’re a good athlete or you’re not. But it’s not talent *or* effort. It’s talent *and* effort. Talent and effort are intertwined.

But if you have to choose between them, effort is more important than talent because effort over time leads to skill and ability. And, as Chris Mullin discovered, if you work hard over a long time, people may even begin to call it talent.

On the other hand, talent without effort is just sad. The world is full of talented individuals who never learned to work hard and who, sooner or later, shuffle out of sight, never fulfilling their potential. Talent can be a trap that way.

■ Avoiding the Talent Trap

Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, identifies two common mindsets.

The first is the “fixed mindset,” in which one sees one’s ability as set. How hard you try doesn’t matter much because you either have it or you don’t. In fact, in this mindset you don’t want to be seen as trying hard because that implies that you don’t have it (talent).

This mindset is a dead-end because whether you succeed or not is determined by something totally outside your control – the amount of talent you are born with. If you believe your talent determines how successful you will be, you have fallen into the Talent Trap and you won’t reach your potential.

The other mindset is the “Growth Mindset,” in which you believe in your ability to grow and improve, regardless of where you start. With a Growth Mindset, your ultimate success is dependent on how hard you work, not on how much talent you were born with. And Dweck’s research with college soccer players demonstrates this. She found that the more players believed their ability was a result of effort and practice (rather than talent), the more they improved over the course of a season.

Triple-Impact Competitors develop a Growth Mindset and talk to themselves in Growth Mindset language:

- “I can improve my serve if I **work hard at it.**”
- “I can learn to go strong to my left if I **work hard at it.**”
- “I can make 95 percent of my short putts if I **work hard on them.**”

They understand that setbacks are inevitable, and they respond to them with renewed effort. They may get discouraged from time to time because everyone does, but they understand that success comes from effort over time. Triple-Impact Competitors rise above their disappointment and figure out what they need to work on to do better next time.

■ Effort Goals

Because they have a Growth Mindset, Triple-Impact Competitors set goals differently than most people. First of all, they write down their goals. Secondly, they use “Effort Goals” to help them get where they want to go.

Most people don’t set goals at all, and those who do tend to set “outcome goals.” Examples of outcome goals are averaging 20 points per game or making the all-star team. But outcome goals are often not within a person’s control. You may perform at your best but not meet your outcome goals.

That’s why Effort Goals are so powerful. Effort Goals are under your control because you can control how hard you work. And well-designed Effort Goals should, over time, move one toward Outcome Goals.

For example, a volleyball player may set an outcome goal of hitting at least four aces per match. A good Effort Goal might be to keep her head up and follow through on each serve.

Notice you can’t control how many winning serves you hit, but you absolutely can control whether or not you keep your head up and follow through. And, if you do that every time, you’ll hit more winners.

Most successful people set goals, and most unsuccessful people don’t. Use Exercise 2 on the following page to help you set and achieve your goals.

Exercise 2: Setting and Accomplishing Your Goals

Successful people set goals and work hard to achieve them. Unsuccessful people don’t. The following framework, adapted from the research of Richard Lerner of Tufts University, is designed to help you accomplish your goals in sports and life.

Think of a GPS device, which contains your destination and step-by-step directions. The letters GPS represent steps in reaching your goals – Goal Selection, Plan of Action (the strategies you will pursue), and Shifting Gears (when things don’t go as planned).

G – Goal Selection

Picking the right goals is crucial. Here are some guidelines for the G in your GPS.

- Pick challenging goals and visualize achieving them. For example, if you want to increase your vertical leap to be able to dunk a basketball, close your eyes and see and feel the excitement of elevating and dunking. If a goal doesn’t energize you, you aren’t likely to stick with it long enough to reach it. Recognize that a hard goal that you fail to achieve may cause you to improve more than achieving an easy goal.
- At the same time, avoid a “too-big” goal that may discourage you and cause you to give up on it. Set a time frame for interim goals that are achievable.
- Write your goals so you can see them. By writing them, you are signifying your commitment to achieve them.
- It’s motivating to know your hard work will help others, so include goals to make teammates and the game better. Knowing your team needs you to improve your serve, for example, will help you follow through on practicing 50 extra serves every day.
- Make sure your goals work with each other. For example, avoid setting an athletic goal that takes so much time you won’t be able to achieve your academic goals.

P – Plan of Action

Goals go nowhere without smart action, so energize the P in your GPS.

- What gets measured gets done. Divide goals into bite-size chunks and check progress with, for example, a chart you fill in each day.
- Set Effort Goals (see Chapter 1.2) in terms of time-on-task, such as, “I’ll spend 5 hours this week working on stick handling.”
- Make a “public commitment” to your effort goals. Commit to check in each week with a friend, parent, or coach.
- Visualize working on your goals in a specific place at a specific time. For example, tell yourself, “I’m going to sit down at my desk and study for 25 minutes as soon as I get home from practice.”
- Reward progress. Tie something you enjoy to your Effort Goals. For example, I often reward myself for reaching my weekly writing goals by seeing a movie.

S – Shifting Gears

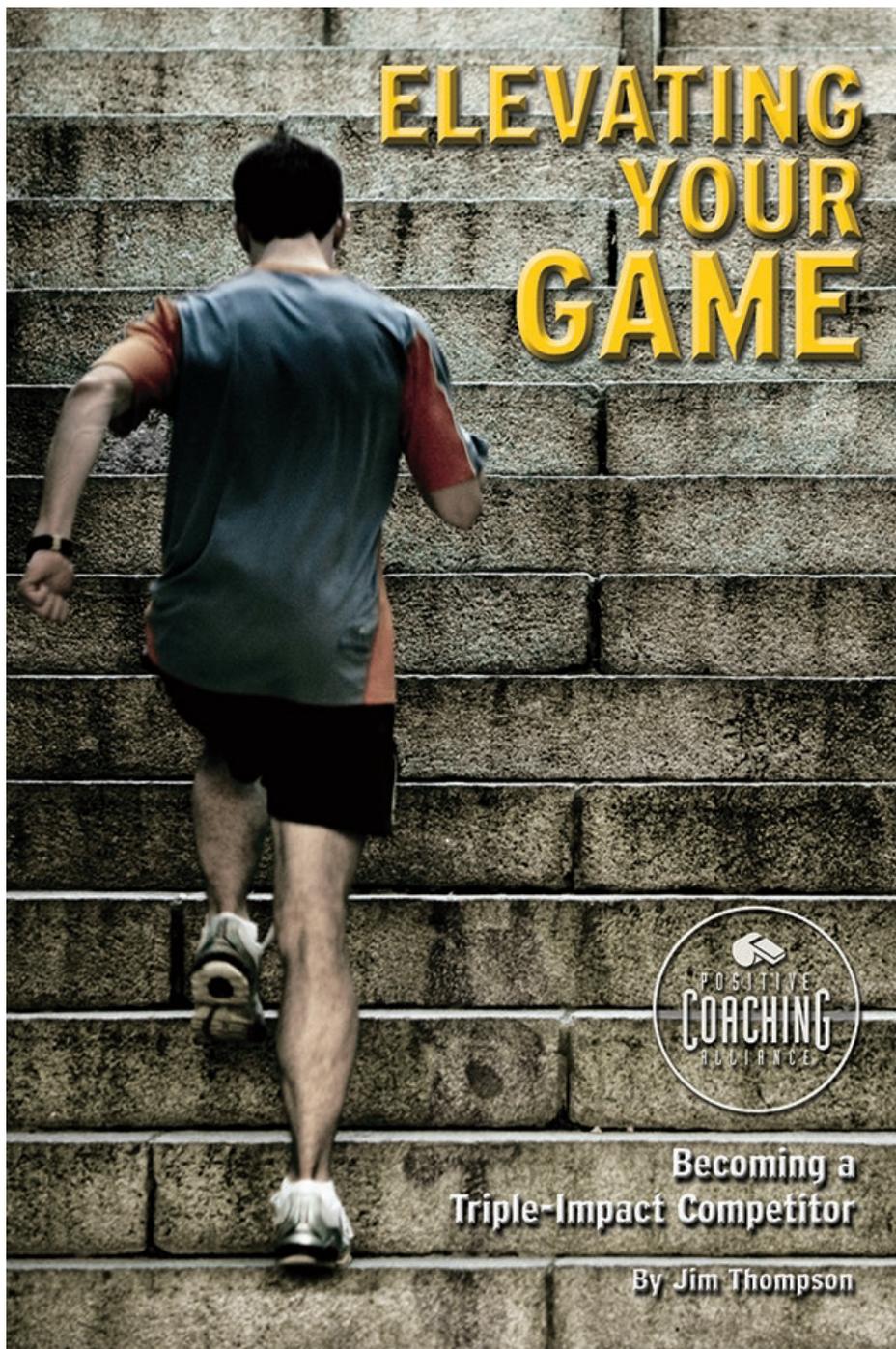
Most goals require adjustments along the way. Expect to shift gears at least once.

- Expect “inevitable setbacks.” Rather than get discouraged when meeting a barrier, remember that setbacks are just part of life. Take them as a challenge.
- Remember to WAG: Watch, Ask, and Get coaching.
- Be willing to recalibrate your goals. That may mean changing an unrealistic goal without getting discouraged. Ask, “Do I need to work harder, try different strategies, or should I adjust my goal?”

The Most Important Thing

Don’t worry about doing everything right in goal setting. The most important thing is to begin. Recalibrate goals and shift gears to new strategies if you run into problems. Use a chart like this one to help you commit to your goals and track your progress.

GOAL	PLAN	SHIFT
Lower my cross-country time 15 seconds by district meet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Add weekly interval training to up my speed.● Increase mileage by five miles each week.● Get Lauren to run with me to make it more fun.● Set up weekly check-in with coach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Developed shin splints at the end of week two.● Cut back mileage for two weeks.



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BETTER PEOPLE**

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