

Improve Performance with Stretch Goals

An excerpt from *The Power of Double-Goal Coaching* by Jim Thompson

Stretch Goals can improve performance. A Stretch Goal is something you can't do right away, so a stretch is required. Stretch goals, which can be Effort Goals or Outcome Goals, go a little beyond what people think they can do, but are reachable with effort over time.

Incremental improvements can be great Stretch Goals in either practice or games.

- Basketball player: Commit to drive-dribble 3 times with weak hand;
- Soccer player: Increase distance in kick by 10 yards;
- Swimmer: Learn to do a flip turn;
- Lacrosse player: Cradle the ball with your weak hand;
- Reluctant shooters in any sport: take "their" shot at least 5 times;
- Basketball player: dribble looking up the court rather than the ball 4 times.

People rarely achieve more than they set out to achieve. More often we achieve less than we hope. But higher goals tend to spur us to achieve more even if we don't get all the way to the goal. When I coached high school girls' basketball (described in my book, *Shooting in the Dark: Tales of Coaching and Leadership*) my captains decided they wanted to shoot for winning the Central Coast Section title in our division.

I was worried that this goal was too ambitious and almost suggested we focus on winning our league title. But I didn't discourage them from their stretch goal, and we won our league. I believe part of our success was that we set our sights high. If we had set only the lower goal of winning our league, we might well have fallen short of that. The higher, more unrealistic goal actually was more practical.

The Just-Right Challenge: A particular kind of stretch goal is incredibly powerful. Deborah Stipek, Dean of the Stanford School of Education, describes the "Just-Right Challenge" in her book, *Motivated Minds*. A group of children was given a pre-test on their skill level with respect to 13 different puzzles. The children then were left alone with the puzzles and told they could play with any puzzle. Each child picked the puzzle one level higher than he could easily do. Children working on puzzles that are too easy had bored looks on their faces and often lost focus. When they got to the "just-right puzzle," they started to smile and stayed engaged longer!

Few things are as motivating as improvement. By helping athletes choose their own just-right challenges, a coach will find that motivation is a non-issue. You don't have to motivate people who can't wait tackle Just-Right Challenges.

Stretch Goals can change behavior. If we set an ambitious goal, we know instinctively that we can't achieve it in the same old way. We have to try something new or work harder or both if we want to achieve it. A Stretch

continues



Improve Performance with Stretch Goals, continued

Goal can be a catalyst to learning more about what it would take to do what we want to do. Help your athletes develop a practical, step-by-step plan to achieve their Stretch Goal.

Revisit Stretch Goals regularly to ensure they don't discourage players. They can be adjusted to make them more achievable and motivating. Properly set, Stretch goals become Just-Right Challenges that players are excited to work at.

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