Setting SMART goals for your Fitness program

by Kate Chesher

"If you don't know where you are going, then you will end up some place else"-Yogi Berra

You have made the decision to join your local Fitness Centre. You are unsure of what to do when you get there so you accept the complimentary assessment with a Fitness instructor, acquire a good pair of training shoes and arrive on time for your assessment. You are thinking the hardest part is behind you, it' smooth sailing from this point. You have made it to the assessment room taken a seat across from your Fitness consultant and answered the first two questions flawlessly, my name is Jane Doe and I am 30 years old. Feeling strong and ready to relax into, assuming they have it covered from this point, they ask 'what are your goals for the program and what exactly are you looking to accomplish?' Uh-oh what do they mean, I joined the gym for God' sake, is it not obvious, I want to be fit. Raking your brain for an answer, you state 'I want to lose weight and tone-up', granted it comes slightly less confidently than the first two answers (they went so well), but good enough, so you think.

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You have just unconsciously joined a large majority of people lacking focus and will unfortunately be treated as such. More than likely this will result in a lame, cookie-cutter program with limited creativity and even less personality.

If this scenario sounds familiar or if you are interested in avoiding it all together, take a breath and let's go over how to avoid such an encounter. Setting goals and narrowing your focus when it comes to your fitness program can seem like a daunting task, the following will help you breakdown your aim so that you can see your desired outcomes more clearly and you can allow your fitness consultant to work with you on a more individualized level. Go on, grab a pen and make a few notes as we work through this.

Setting SMART goals

Specific

Prioritize with this one, start by making a list of all your desired outcomes being as specific as possible. Very often we feel overwhelmed by the amount of things we wish to do making it all too easy to get caught in the trap of trying to accomplish too many things at once and never achieving any to our own satisfaction. In order to be really productive and actually have more goals realized, the answer is to focus on one thing at a time.

For example, if you are making your triumphant return to training following a lengthy hiatus, your first goal on the list may be to establish a routine which successfully intertwines your workouts with your regular day to day routine. Perhaps you have been successfully training for some time and would like to develop your resistance training program. By identifying this as your main focus, you can then outline your desired outcomes (whether it be size, strength, tone, or endurance of your muscles) and deliberately train for them.
Maybe you are already quite athletic and train regularly but wish to balance your existing fitness program by incorporating core training techniques, for example. In this case your main focus becomes developing your core strength while maintaining your existing level of fitness.

Measurable

We all know that being able to see and measure results makes all the difference when it comes to personal motivation. However the measuring stick used will be significantly different as it is fully dependent on the individual focus.

For example, a 40 year old parent of three children, a 30 year old marathon enthusiast and a 20 year old footballer have all been performing a cardiovascular training program for 3 weeks. The parent may be ecstatic after 3 weeks to find they are not winded anymore after playing with the kids all Saturday afternoon, the marathon enthusiast is seeing improvement on their 5 km personal best and the footballer is impressing the coaches, managers and teammates by being able to maintain consistent pace across an entire match. Each person experiences measurable results, achieves success and therefore replenishes their motivation.

Attainable.

Every good long term goal with have short term goals that lead it. Not only does it make practical sense but it allows you to avoid becoming overwhelmed and losing your focus.

For example, a new mother has set a long term goal of rejoining her high-intensity kick boxing class. Her short terms goals are to re-gain her aerobic capacity (starting with lower intensity alternatives

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and constantly progressing to higher intensity activities), then to strengthen all muscles weakened throughout pregnancy, ultimately progressing and preparing her body for her favourite fitness class. It will take time, but with consistent baby steps (no pun intended) she will realize her goal.
Similarly, an injured athlete must follow the appropriate steps in order to achieve their ultimate goal of return-to-play. Life is a process, we might as well be active participants.

Realistic.

A realistic goal should push you to your limits but not deplete your motivation of break your spirit. With that being said be careful not to sell yourself short. Just as setting goals that are far to difficult can be discouraging, setting goals too easily attained can elude that you are not very capable. Rule of thumb: Set the bar high enough so that you feel satisfaction upon its achievement.

For example, setting a goal to perform 1 hour of training every day, 7 days a week is probably unrealistic. The first time something unexpected keeps you from the gym, it will chip away at your motivation. A realistic goal may then be to perform 1 hour of training 3 times per week for a month. After a month, readjust possibly increasing either the time spent training or the frequency of training per week for the next month and so on.

Time-based.

This is not a race to achieve your goals, this is your life and you should live it. There are plenty of joys and gains to notice and enjoy along the way from square one to realizing your long term goals. It is not all or nothing. However you can use dates and/or events for motivation along the way.

For example a 70 year old man may use his daughter's wedding date as motivation to maintain his training program. The more limber he is, the more times he can sway his daughter around the dance floor on the big day. A college student may use spring break as motivation to continue squeezing workouts in between classes, studying and partying, after all beach volleyball is key to picking up on holiday. The 'little one' on last year's squad may use the spring training dates as motivation to train hard all throughout the winter months in order to fight for his spot on the new team.

Fitness should be something you work towards all your life. By consistently setting SMART goals you will never again find yourself trapped by a dull exercise program. Setting SMART goals is about changing the way you think about success.

Decide what you consider a success and take steps towards achieving it. They will always be as unique as the individual setting them, don't be afraid to share them and adjust them. Remember a goal well set is halfway reached.

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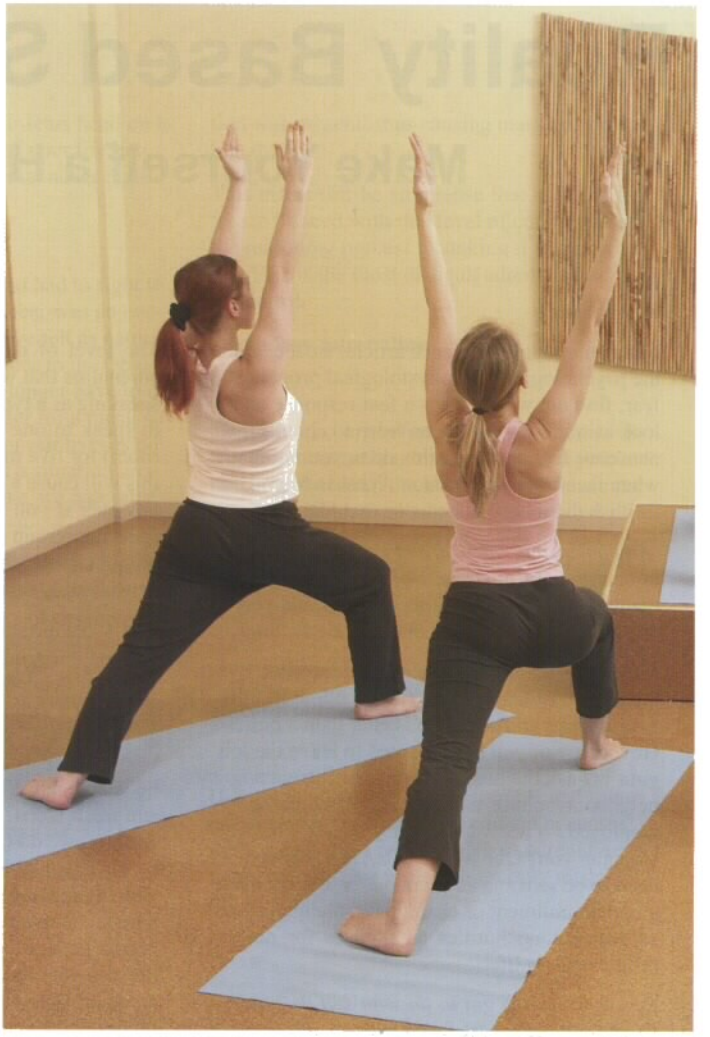

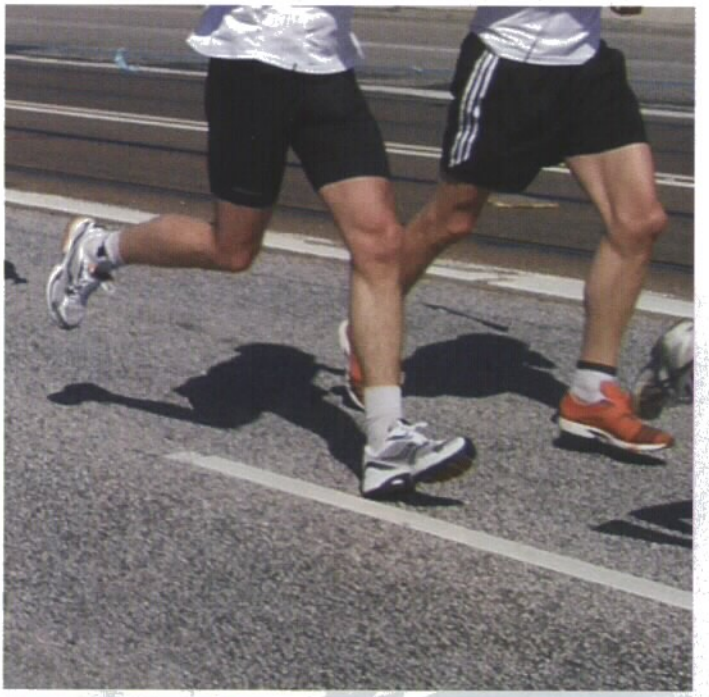

Quick Tip

In addition to a good aerobic exercise, you should add weight training in, which will help balance out the fitness routine and provide you with the best results. If you are not sure where to start, a professional trainer can help get you started on a healthy program.