



COACHES

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# GOAL SETTING

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As the summer winds down, you become more and more excited about the upcoming season: the new cheerleaders, the new challenges, and the new material. Yet, in the back of your mind lurks this feeling, perhaps a doubt, perhaps merely an inquiry. You begin to reflect on last season. As you think, you remember all of the little annoyances, the daily problems and indecision that sapped your energy the previous year.

You seem to remember telling yourself, day in and day out, that you would do something about that next year. Well, next year is now this year. What do you do to keep from having to deal with the same problems again this year?

The answer to this question is a complicated one. However, one of the best ways to head problems off before the season even starts is by setting goals with your team.

**Goals** are a list of things that you and your team hope to accomplish throughout the duration of the cheerleading season. They might include everything from behavioral expectations to skill accomplishments to competition results. These goals are so important because they provide structure for your team and give them something to strive for throughout the school year.

All athletic teams set goals for themselves at the beginning of the season. The football team might strive to win more games than last year. The soccer team might decide that they want to improve their shooting skills, and the field hockey team might decide to focus on keeping the ball out of their end of the field. Without these goals, the teams would approach each practice with no purpose.

Sometimes, finding goals in cheerleading is difficult. After all, we participate in an activity that is very much dependent upon the sport that we are cheering for. Nevertheless, we still need to set goals for ourselves to keep focused and to approach the season with a purpose. Let's face it — a lack of purpose often leads to a lack of discipline on a team.

### DIFFERENT GOALS

Goals can be general or specific in nature.

**General** goals would be goals that affect everyone on the team as a whole. For example, you have noticed that your school is seriously lacking in spirit. Your squad decides that one general goal is going to be to find ways of increasing school spirit. Maybe you have decided that your squad wants to compete for the first time this year. As a squad, you would set that as being another general goal.

A **specific** goal is a goal that affects only certain aspects, or



individuals, on the team. Let's say your squad just attended summer camp where they learned a really neat new stunt. Your team might decide that they want to hit that stunt with each of their stunt groups. Maybe an individual on your team has decided that this is the year that she is going to perform a perfect spread-eagle jump. She has just set the personal goal to improve her own jump.

### HOW DO WE WORK TOWARD OUR GOALS?

Merely listing goals is not enough. Every year, you enter the season with high expectations and hopes, but if you do not implement a plan to see these expectations through, they will not be met. What do you do to ensure that these goals are met?

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The first step is to put the goals down on paper. Early on in the year, perhaps at summer camp, gather your team together and ask them to think of team and individual goals that they want to accomplish during the course of the season. Have the individual cheerleaders brainstorm and write down these goals.

After they have been written down, have a team meeting (perhaps at a slumber party to keep the atmosphere light) to discuss each person's goals for the team and for themselves.

At this meeting, you should take a good, long look at the goals and ask some important questions. What exactly is it that you hope to accomplish this year? Are these goals attainable? Has everyone agreed upon the general goals? Have individuals agreed upon the specific and personal goals? The only way goals work is if everyone can see the value in them.

Once it has been decided that the goals are attainable, realistic, and agreeable to everyone involved, the team, and individuals, can begin to actually work toward the goals. You will find that this can sometimes be a very frustrating undertaking, especially if progress is not being made as quickly as expected. A great way to keep the cheerleaders from becoming discouraged is to announce whenever a goal has been reached.

For example, at one gym a gymnast threw a new skill for the first time without a spot, they were allowed to ring a bell in the gym and the instructor announced that the gymnast had accomplished something new. To some, this may seem like a trivial thing, but everyone wants to ring the bell!

By recognizing the little accomplishments as they are attained, your squad is less likely to become discouraged by the minor setbacks that always pop up during the season.

## THE BIG PICTURE

So, how important are these goals to the team and individuals? The answer to this will not become evident until you take the time to sit down with your team and give them an opportunity to set goals.

Individual goals give individual cheerleaders direction and a focus. Team goals allow the entire team to retain focus during a very long and trying year. All of the goals can act as a constant reminder to the cheerleaders as to what it is they are trying to accomplish that year. You will find that your practices run more smoothly and that you have a good rapport with your cheerleaders because they now know what is expected of them and they are the ones who set those expectations for themselves. What better motivational factor is there?

