

4 STEPS TO ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE

By
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What steps does an athlete need to take to be a winner in sport, in the classroom, and in life? I would like to propose a 4-step process for what it takes to become a peak performer. In this 4-step process the athlete must:

1. **raise their standards** regarding mental toughness & work ethic.
2. have a **clear vision** of the outcome they want to attain.
3. have a **plan of action** that directs them to the goal.
4. **focus on the process** of learning, adapting, & improving the skill, technique, & strategy.

Raising standards

When Michael Jordan was asked what made him one of the greatest basketball players of all time, he responded by saying that *he asked more from himself than anyone could possibly ask*. Personal excellence in any form requires raising the level one is currently living at and then continues to raise that level incrementally over time. The way one raises the level is to raise their standards for themselves, to ask more from themselves than anyone could possibly ask!

Clear Vision

All great athletes have a clear vision of the future. They can see themselves winning before it ever happens. So to be a champion, you need to become a champion within yourself. This means you need to believe in yourself with total certainty - no doubts, no second-guessing. You must imagine you're performing at an outstanding level. Visualize in your mind performing at your very best. Use all your five senses with total clarity. *See* yourself performing the skill with total accuracy and perfection. *Hear* the fans cheer as you perform at your very best. *Smell* the aromas in the air as you make unbelievable breakthroughs. *Feel* your entire body doing the task with control, focus and accuracy. And finally, after your perfect performance, *taste* the cold quenching Gatorade as your teammates, coach, parents, and fans congratulate you on a spectacular performance. A clear vision creates a true reality.

Plan of Action

Creating a plan of action has five basic steps. First, write the *goals* you want to attain. Make sure the goal is specific. For example, if you are a judo player and want to improve your technique, you may write, "To develop a personal fighting plan. Second, create *objectives* that will help you reach the goal. Make sure your objectives are measurable. An objective needs to be measurable in either quality or quantity. For example, an objective would have numbers,

pounds, frequency of behavior, etc. in it to qualify as measurable. If your goal is to develop a personal fighting plan, you may have four major objectives to reach this goal. Your first objectives might be to "To learn and practice *Bate and Catch for sleeve Grip* 20 times per practice." The second objective could say, "To develop two ways to create the optimal angles for launching my winning technique." The third objective could state, "To develop four linking techniques that are used as set ups or counter strategies for when I try my winning technique." The third step in your plan of action is to create training *strategies* surrounding the goal and objectives you have recorded. One of your strategies may be to take 15 minutes after practice and work independently with the coach or do and do an extra 100 repetition of the particular technique. Fourth, you need to create a *resource list*. This list is all the possible things that could assist you in reaching your goal. This list may consist of parents, coach, strength and conditioning coach, nutritionist, sports psychologist, videos, books, and seminars. Once you have identified your resources, design a plan that will enlist their assistance to help you reach your goals. Fifth, you will need to document your progress with the goals and objectives. You need to know if you are moving closer or further away from your target. Each day, week and month document your progress or lack of progress. If you are moving toward your outcome, you will be using the right strategy. If you are not making progress, go back and look at your plan and see how you can revise it so that you are getting the results you desire. Repeat this process whenever your goals change.

Focus on the process

Outstanding champions all over the world over have developed the skill of pinpoint focus and concentration. Focus only on the present. Concentrate on the process when training and competing. Don't worry about things in your personal life or what you will have for dinner that night. Think about what you are doing at that time-in that moment. Let every movement be guided by the belief that your skill is matched with the challenge. Find one thing and focus on it, like your breathing, for example. Work a technique over and over as you continue to breathe rhythmically staying totally focused on just your breathing and the skills you are attempting. Be in the moment.

About the author

David Loshelder, M.S.Ed. holds a 3rd degree black belt in judo and is the author of the book entitled: *Protect Yourself: Top 10 Lifesaving Self-Defense Techniques*. He conducts judo and self-defense seminars for local clubs, universities, colleges, libraries and local businesses in the area. Visit his website: www.protectyourselftop10.com or www.davidloshelder.com