

***TAKING A TIME-OUT AND LOOKING FORWARD TOWARD YOUR NEXT SEASON***

We embraced the beginning 2013-2014 squash season with optimism and a lot of renewed energy. Our batteries were fully charged and we felt highly confident and ready to perform to our very best. We were positive and ready to take the bull by the horn. Now that the unofficial squash season is winding down, it is time to reflect on our accomplishments. For some athletes, it was a year when they were able to make improvements in their rankings, win some exciting matches and/or tournaments, or perfect their technique. For others, it was a year when they improved their overall fitness or accomplished other goals outside squash, but nevertheless enjoyed wonderful achievements. On the other hand, there are others who are now looking back at the ending squash season pondering what happened to my 2013-2014 resolution?

My guess is that it was not for lack of trying. My hunch is that they truly meant to accomplish meaningful goals. But, as we look into our summer break and seeing the next squash season in the horizon, I wonder, if they were to keep the same habits, what are the real chances that their goals for the next squash season will be met?

A “squash New Year’s resolution” may be a trick in disguise. It tends to get us all pumped up for a short while; we imagine ourselves achieving our goals, winning keys matches and/or finally defeating the one opponent that we badly wanted to beat. However, when frustration, interruption, and challenges interfere with reaching our goals, old habits kick right back in. What we had hoped to achieve is suddenly put to the side hoping to catch up with those great goals sometime later, but in reality we never do. By the time we realize it, the entire squash year goes by and those resolutions are still sitting on the shelf. There is nothing wrong with setting goals; however, what we need to pay most attention to is the process that leads us to meet those goals rather than focusing on the end result. In other words, we need to focus more on the “how” and less on the “what.”



We all create habits, positive and negative ones. But, you may be wondering, how are habits created? Habits are created by no other reason, but the accumulation of life experiences that end up stored in our brain. When we try to learn something new, it takes a while for the brain to master all the nuances that lead to perfecting a specific move. Learning how to ride a bicycle was challenging at first; all the muscles in our bodies in conjunction with our nervous system needed to learn how to synchronize the perfect balance while keeping the bicycle straight. The same thing happens when we learn to hit the perfect drop shot. Learning something new requires a deliberate process for the slower left brain to capture all the nuances before jumping to the domain of our right side of the brain, whose function, among others, is to store information that is subconsciously available.

We grab the squash racquet and hit rails without much of a thought process. We ride a bike after years since we last did it with no thoughts about it. Our subconscious muscle memory is built from accumulated life experiences. Equally so, the manner in which we deal with winning and losing becomes part of our life experiences. If our squash experience is such that we get upset and lose concentration when we play poorly, then we are feeding those emotions and behavior to the right side of our brain. Unknowingly, our right brain is being fed information on how to deal with frustration at an unconscious level. In fact, the more frequently we show negative emotions, the quicker such an emotion will show up the next time we play poorly. Unless the brain learns different coping skills on how to deal with frustrating emotions, it will continue showing what it knows. Now that we know that habits are stored in the subconscious brain, it is no wonder that we tend to repeat the same experiences regardless of our good intended squash New Year's resolution.

**Here are a few ideas that are intended to help you achieve your 2014- 2015 goals:**

**Feed the subconscious right brain:** Do you remember a time when you achieved a task and how great it felt afterwards? You felt great because you were pushed beyond your comfort zone and still got it. Goals that are worth pursuing present obstacles. If you often find yourself frustrated, annoyed and wanting to give in, then take a pause and put a strong effort to undo your habits. Take a few breaths, go for a walk,



bring to mind a positive image (of a prior success, your dog, a friend/partner) and feel it in your body and it will help you redo new and productive habits. Keep working hard at it. It is supposed to be difficult. Great achievements do not come easy. In fact, pushing through those habits will most likely lead to creating new behaviors and increasing your resiliency level.

**Maintain a positive outlook:** We are often challenged by many unexpected surprises. I wish our path to success came with ease and comfort.

But, reality is that it won't. When you least expect it, you will be asking yourself, "what am I doing and is it worth putting this much effort? Why is this happening to me right now? Or, I'll bet you anything that I am the only person who has to go through this." One of the ways to develop new habits is to state positive

self-statements, such as: “stay focused and relaxed,” “I know I can handle this,” “I’ve done it before, I can do it again.” Use self-statements that bring optimism and positive outlook. Practice optimism ALL the time; it will soon become a strengthening habit.

**Create a plan:** to increase the chances to accomplish a task, write it down and set a realistic timeframe. Take a 3x5 index card and write down three goals and a timeframe for when you expect them to be achieved. Seeing your goals on a piece of paper increases the chances to get them done. Before going to bed, take 5 minutes to successfully envision finishing those goals. When we sleep, our brain does most of the work in our subconscious. If we seed positive intentions and envision the accomplished goal, the brain will work overnight to see that happen. Then, bring this index card with you ALL the time until you cross over the achieved goal. Place the index card where you will constantly see it, like in your wallet, with your cell phone, or in the backpack. Some people say that “seeing is believing,” well, it may just be true for goal setting!



So, when we get frustrated, take a few breaths, accept you are frustrated rather than react to it, state positive self-statements, and remain on course with the plan you created.

I hope these steps will help you instill habits that lead to achieving your 2014 goals!



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