

# Setting Goals

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Show season has started; in fact I am already home from competing in Thermal. So should I have set my goals for this year already?

Yes.

But I haven't. So here is a crash course on getting set up with setting goals.

Last year my friend Gail Greenough said to me, "You've got to set goals, and not just short-term goals, but medium and long-term goals."

Ok so; I want to feel confident, I want to jump 1.30m., I want to stay jumping 1.30m and be competitive.

So that's done, phew!

Oh no, wait, that isn't the whole thing because I am going to need a plan for how to actually accomplish this.

To help plan and set goals, I like to write webs with the goal in the middle and the 'how' and the 'why' all around it. This may seem

obvious to everyone, but when you aren't accomplishing your goals you might be able to look back at your web and see exactly why things aren't coming together.

## Short-Term Goal: Confidence

We already know I didn't have my confidence goal defined before I went to Thermal. Reason? I didn't do half the things on my 'Confidence' web. No lessons, no coach to call on, not enough practice, etc. I did, however accomplish a lot of these things while I was in Thermal after finding a great coach in the legendary Susie Hutchison. We lessoned the first week only (no showing, and got some things figured out). We practiced some exercises I would see in the ring and started small. I also had a friend I called every day for support and started visualizing the feeling I wanted in the ring each night. As they say, 'Failure to prepare is to prepare for failure.' Lesson learned - come prepared to the show.



## Medium-Term Goal:

### Jump 1.30m (This year's goal)

This is a tough one for me. It seems it has been just out of reach for years. One of the major components to accomplishing this goal is having a horse that has *been there and done it* before to help me build my own confidence. My current horse has not jumped that big before, and it would likely be a lot to ask of him. So when Susie asked me if I thought I could be competitive in reaching my goals with him, I had to answer no. Bummer. Although I knew it would be a lot to ask him to jump his first 1.30m's while it was also my first 1.30m I hadn't quite connected the dots that it was more a dream than a reality. Lucky for me, my husband had his retired Grand Prix horse in the field and offered that if I worked to get him fit and bring him back, he could teach me the ropes. Yes! Ok, here we go! But accomplishing this goal also means making a smart schedule. Will I take this horse to the Summer Series at Spruce Meadows – one of the toughest places to compete, and where I would likely need to drop down a level? Probably not the best plan to get to my goal. I need to make smart decisions about where to show so that I can get to where I want to go.

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For goal setting web template go to:  
[www.albertashowjumpers.com](http://www.albertashowjumpers.com)





Long-term goal: Stay there!  
(Likely the hardest one of all)

This web may constantly evolve, because the components will build on and evolve from both prior webs. It will include building confidence by having consistent lessons, asking for help, keeping perspective by aligning my horse's ability with my goals so that I'm not expecting too much from him, picking my shows appropriately, and so on. After I master the new level then I would try my hand at places like Spruce Meadows where the courses and competition are top in our sport.

Surround yourself with good people no matter what your goals. You are going to need support when times get tough and advice from people that are actually pulling for you. In short, goal-setting isn't just deciding "I want to go to the Olympics." It's a string of conscious decisions on how to get where you want to be, who you need to help you do it, and of course sitting on the right horse.

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# BREATHING THE

Most people understand that breathing is important to get oxygen into our bodies as fuel for our body tissues. Many people have heard that correct breathing is important in yoga. However, few people know that how you breathe can drastically affect your health in the long term and your riding performance in the short term.

The ideal breathing pattern for daily life and sport is into the lower ribs. Put your hands on the outside of your rib cage and ensure that your shoulders don't move and your belly doesn't puff out. Allow the air into the back of your lower ribs and feel that your ribs open out to the side. If you tighten your stomach muscles, as if someone was going to try and push your belly in, you should still have good rib mobility. This allows you to have good core activation while walking, riding and exercising. If not talking, eating or exercising heavily, the lips should be sealed, the teeth parted and the mid tongue resting against the roof of the mouth. The breath out should be two counts longer than the breath in. Use the horse steps as your count if you are riding.

## *'How you breathe affects your performance.'*

All of these elements combined help to calm the nervous system (overcome show ring nerves), relax the upper body (free up your arms and stop pulling), allows the spine to move in a supported way (gives your seat more stability without bracing), and prevents your heart from overworking. Research has shown that heart rate can increase to 80-100% of the maximal safe range while jumping a course in competition.

Breath holding or breathing in a different pattern may further increase the heart rate. If a rider breathes too shallowly (shoulders move), quickly, or with mouth open, even for a minute or so, their judgment ('should I move up or wait') and short term memory ('where IS my next fence') may be affected.

Practice this breathing pattern in all aspects of your life (sitting in your car is a great place) and discover how much more easily you can calm your nerves while waiting for your round, soften your arms and secure your seat. Breathe well, live well, move well, ride well!!

(If you want to know more about the long term health effects of sub optimal breathing look up 'hypocapnia' or contact Sandra at [sasok@shaw.ca](mailto:sasok@shaw.ca))

Photo Credit Lynne Burns

