

Hands-up if you've ever made New Year's resolutions? Hands-up if you've then failed in achieving those New Year's resolutions? You're not alone, many of us are guilty of this. We have the classic New Year's resolution of I am going to be healthier and get fitter this year so, we join a gym and believe that this will carry us to our improvement goal; 3 months later we are still paying the gym membership but haven't set foot in the gym for about 6 weeks! Another New Year's resolution may be to become a more tolerant person, a great personal improvement goal, but how do we go about achieving it? We may promise ourselves that we will display greater tolerance in scenarios where we might not have been previously. However, is this a strong strategy to achieve the personal improvement. While those are just two examples of countless other personal improvement goals you may be able to think of. The focus is on do we really develop and implement an achievable personal improvement strategy to realise our goals? I believe the challenges in achieving our personal improvement goals is not, generally, down to our lack of effort or commitment or not having the right attitude, but that we approach the improvement as one 'big whammy' (a technical term) and head straight for the silver bullet approach which often, in the end, is just too big a task to achieve in one bite. This can often lead to setting ourselves up for failure before we have even really started!

That's why today I want to introduce the 'marginal gains' approach and how we can apply it in our own lives to make personal improvement. Along with the philosophy of 'marginal gains' I will provide you with three practical tips that you can take away today to work on.

I played football at a very good level from a young age, so have been exposed to the principles of 'marginal gains' in a sporting context. However, I have also spent a large part of my working career within quality and continuous improvement, and I believe that we can utilise the improvement principles and techniques developed in different fields and put those into our work and personal lives.

So, what is the theory of 'marginal gains'? I am sure that many of you will have heard the concept of 'marginal gains' or the '1% Factor' and may even know that the theory was developed in elite sport. 'Marginal gains' was developed by Sir Dave Brailsford who in 2003 was hired to help a struggling British Cycling Team. British cycling was mediocre at best; we had not won an Olympic gold medal in nearly 100 years and no British cyclist had ever won the Tour de France!

Sir Dave Brailsford brought a simple and straight-forward approach to the British Cycling Team: Push the team to get 1% better each day 'Marginal Gains'! Brailsford's concept was that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into cycling and improved it by just 1%, you would gain a significant increase when you put them all together. Basically, he was applying the compound effect. Brailsford looked at every little thing he could possibly improve upon to create a winning team. He measured and monitored all of the traditional statistics of his athletes, like a cyclist's power output, physical fitness and nutrition. He targeted specific weaknesses of the team and sought to improve upon them bit-by-bit. But Brailsford also looked at improving often-overlooked areas, and implemented tiny tactics to help them get the edge, such as:

- Having seats redesigned for extra comfort and stability
- Rubbing alcohol on the tires for better grip
- Experimenting with different racing suits for better aerodynamics
- Testing various massage gels for better muscle recovery
- Testing electrically heated shorts
- Trained the cyclists on the psychological aspect of success
- Had their own pillows and mattresses to optimise their sleep and consistent posture

All-in-all, it was a much more holistic approach to success. The changes they made were tiny, but over time, compounded to make a significant impact. From 2007 to 2017, the British Cycling team won 178 world championships, and 66 Olympic gold medals. They went from being a mediocre team for 100 years to the most dominant cycling team in history.

Brailsford continued with the 'Marginal Gains' approach in his role at Team Sky, now known as Team Ineos. He set a goal to take his cycling team to a winning position in the Tour de France within 5 years. He implemented his 'Marginal Gains' principle and began working to improve every area of his cycling team by 1%. The results, they took home a gold medal at the Tour De France within 3 years and by 2018, they'd gone on to take home 6 Tour de France victories.

So how 'marginal gains' can help your personal improvement goals. 'Marginal gains' was developed in elite sport, but the concept is not just for people involved in sport or wanting to improve in their chosen sport. 'Marginal gains'

is an approach that we can all utilise in our lives to help us achieve our personal improvement goals. If you can get just 1% better each day for a single year, you'll end up thirty-seven times better by the same time next year. This also works in the opposite direction: if you get 1% worse each day for a single year, you'll decline down to nearly zero. If you focus on making small improvements each day, over time those small improvements will equate to massive change. If you can find a way to improve each of the major areas of your life by just 1% every day, beginning today, you will have transformed your life completely by this time next year. Unfortunately, most people apply the exact opposite approach: they'll use short spurts of motivation to work themselves into burnout; before losing steam and giving up before they see any progress at all. Don't let that be you!

Just take moment to imagine what your life would be like a year from now if you decided to apply the 1% factor to start making marginal gains on your goals.

- Your goal may be to lose weight and get in shape. Instead of focusing on losing a certain amount of weight, concentrate on physical activity for a small amount of time, 15 – 30 minutes three times a week for 30 days. Over time you will begin to see positive changes in your body. Thirty minutes a day, three times a week for 52 weeks equates to 4,680 minutes' worth of physical activity a year.
- Your goal may be to start getting up earlier each day. Instead of just setting your alarm clock 30 or 60 minutes earlier try the marginal gains approach and set your alarm clock for just 1 to 2 minutes earlier each morning. At the end of one month, you will be waking up 30 to 60 minutes earlier and will have formed a consistent approach that leads to a sustainable improvement goal.
- Your improvement goal may be to read more books. If you apply the 'marginal gains' approach, set the objective of reading just 6 or 7 pages a day and build up from there. After one month you will have read a full book.

So, at the start of this talk I said I would provide you with three practical tips around implementing 'marginal gains' in your own life:

- Tip number 1: Make time for 'marginal gains'. Balance out the challenge of starting the new task with something that feels good to you. For example, if your goal is to achieve a daily walk then find a good podcast to listen to on

your daily walk, alleviating any potential boredom of seeing the same green spaces; while also learning at the same time. Our brains often fall back into 'hedonic adaptation', which essentially means that the buzz you get at the beginning wears off, so find a way to stick to your habits but change up the feeling associated with it

- Tip number 2: Part of Sir Dave Brailsford's approach in the British Cycling Team was training the athletes on the psychological aspect of success. However, you do not need to be within elite sport to try this. My tip is visualisation techniques. Visualisation techniques are exercises you can complete to help you achieve goals. You can apply these techniques to use your imagination to visualise your goals. Creating a clear mental picture of your future success can give you the confidence, motivation and courage to work towards achieving your goals. Using visualisation techniques have many benefits:
 - Increasing confidence - techniques often have you visualise situations over and over until they feel realistic and attainable, increasing your confidence in reaching them. This can give you the power to make decisions that help you progress toward specific goals
 - Increasing motivation - When you have a clear mental picture of what you want to accomplish and have the confidence to work toward it, you may feel more motivated. This can help you achieve your goals without experiencing negative feelings, like burnout, low morale, or frustration.
 - Reducing stress and fear – The techniques can help you feel less stressed and fearful about the future. As you build a clear picture of your goals and build your confidence to achieve them, you might feel more positive and equipped for your future. Reduced stress and fear can have positive benefits for both morale and productivity, helping you reach goals more quickly and effectively.

Mental rehearsal is common visualization technique and one that I have used in my football career. You conduct mental rehearsal by imagining the completion of the task or goal. This allows you to mentally practice accomplishing outcomes, which can boost your confidence to achieve your goals. This may also help goals feel more realistic and achievable. I have recently used this technique with my daughter in helping her achieve specific gymnastics move that she was struggling to complete; it was more of a mental barrier that was holding her back. We spent about 5 minutes per evening, and only for a few days, with me talking her through all the

steps in the move while she visualised them and achieving the move. In the next gymnastics class, she successfully achieved the move!

There are many visualisation techniques you can try that range from painting a picture to writing a checklist. Do an online search on visualisation techniques as there are lots of good resources available.

- Tip number 3: Nice a simple - Focus on doing the action and not achieving a goal by a certain date. Easy and simple.

Although the 'marginal gains' approach was developed in elite sport, I hope my talk today has illustrated that it can be applied in all aspects of life to help achieve personal improvement goals. Keep in mind: 'marginal gains' are about paying attention to the small action steps, making small changes, and achieving more over time. Small improvements equals big results.

My challenge to you today is to get 1% better each day for the next 30 days. Select one or more areas of your life, whether that be physical, financial, mental, social or spiritual and aim to improve by just 1% each day.

Thank you for listening and good luck!