



The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Using
SMART GOALS
for
Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

by

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The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Summary

So you've started Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, taken a few classes maybe even got your first stripe. You're attending classes and learning techniques. But do you know where you're heading? Have you set yourself goals? And are these goals SMART goals?

So many students of BJJ attend classes regularly but have no specific goals. Some, may have the goal of attaining the next colour belt, others want to win tournaments. But are these SMART goals?

Use this evidence-based booklet to set achievable goals, increase your motivation, and give yourself every chance of success.

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The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Introduction

Everyone has their individual reasons as to why they start Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). Often individuals will list reasons such as:

- Fitness;
- Self-defence;
- Exercise with purpose;
- Socialising;
- Ego boosting; and
- Self-esteem and confidence;

just to mention a few.

These individual, or combination of reasons, motivate the individual to start and to continue training. Motivation is a complex matter but there are some things we can be sure of regarding motivation:

- Different things motivate different people;
- Any one person is motivated by different factors at different times; and
- We often don't understand what it is that motivates us to act.

When watching the multitude of YouTube and other social media instructions on BJJ one may assume that winning (submitting the training partner or winning a match at a tournament) motivates us, as the instructions almost always lead to a submission or the defence of a submission. However, many BJJ students never participate in a tournament and the majority will not be proficient enough to win against many training partners. So winning in itself is unlikely to be a sustainable goal as it becomes unrealistic and unattainable, especially for the student in his or her first six months. In fact, many BJJ students quit within these first six months – precisely for this reason. Their goal of winning is unrealistic and unsustainable. Instead, those who persist beyond the first six months probably set

MENTALITY

The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

themselves a different goal, an inner goal that is realistic and achievable. Personally, my first goal, after joining an academy, was simply to keep going for three months then six months and just survive that initial time with no pressure on myself. I did achieve that, but I could have done more as I did not learn much during the first six months other than survive and, in fact, my fitness declined.

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The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Let's look again at what might motivate a student to join a BJJ academy and see if these are realistic for the first six months.

- **Personal improvement** – If you have the right attitude this is certainly an achievable goal as you will learn a lot about yourself and improve your fitness from a different perspective. Nevertheless, there are probably easier ways of getting fit such as joining a gym and attending classes regularly. As your sparring will be limited over the first six months you are more likely going to lose some fitness if you already have attained a high cardio or strength level before joining. Having said that, personal improvement comes with the humility you will learn and your resilience in sticking to learning a new and difficult skill.
- **Health and fitness** – Again this is achievable as long as you don't injure yourself and have the right attitude. Remember though, as stated above, there may be easier ways of attaining strength and fitness with less risk of injury.
- **Making friends** – Yes and no. If you choose the right academy you will meet lots of like-minded people. You will enjoy each other's company while practicing. If you're lucky you might meet one or two other people you connect with and this might develop into a friendship. But I would not join a BJJ academy just for the goal of making friends, there's easier ways of doing that too. Nevertheless, I would highly recommend you take advantage of the FREE initial training session most BJJ Academies offer. Trial a couple of academies before deciding to join one. And be careful of those academies that require a high initial sign-up fee and the purchase of a branded uniform (GI).
- **Fun** – Absolutely. BUT, I challenge you to always put a smile on your face when you train at the gym. Even laugh and joke around a little without interfering with instructions or other's and your training. Particularly during sparring make sure you smile, as many students will get very serious and competitive. At the early stages of your training this is NOT a good way to stay motivated and will make sparring a chore.
- **Winning** – This goal is counter motivational. YOU WILL NOT WIN when you start training. You might get a few lucky submissions or spar against an unfit or less knowledgeable student but

MENTALITY

The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

don't count on it. If it does go your way ... take it, thank your opponent and stay focused on your real goal.

- **Exhilaration and excitement** – If you have the right attitude and train according to your schedule you will feel the exhilaration of the practice of BJJ. It is an exciting sport.
- **Feeling of personal control** – There is so much to learn from BJJ other than the techniques and fitness. Just attending regularly and learning from your mistakes is an achievement. You are personally responsible for implementing your training schedule and, if you do that, you will feel like you have personal control in other areas of your life too.
- **To intimidate or control others** – Well. This is just not going to happen. Not at the academy at least. Other's will be able to control and intimidate you. So you will soon quit if this is your goal. Personally I have noted how gentle and level-headed most advanced students are. They know that intimidation or control is not the essence of BJJ. If you have this as your goal, I recommend you don't even take up BJJ or, maybe, do take it up and learn that this is not an advantageous mind set.
- **Medals and trophies** – No. Not in the first six months. I do recommend that serious students set a goal to compete but it is highly unlikely that you will win this competition.
- **Respect** – You will gain respect from other students by turning up regularly and having a good attitude.

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The Process of Motivation

Motivation is action, without action there is no motivation. Nevertheless, we need direction to be able to move or act towards something. Otherwise our actions are aimless and will soon de-motivate us. Goals do not create motivation in themselves, however, they give us direction. Moreover, a specific goal will help us with direction and staying on target. But do not mistake the setting of goals as motivation. Motivation only comes from action, the moving towards something of value.

Research shows that if we have a specific goal to aim for we are more likely to be successful, and that:

- The more specific the goal the more precisely the performance is regulated; and
- High commitment to goals is attained when the individual is convinced that the goal is important and attainable.

For goals to be attainable they need to be specific, otherwise it is difficult to measure whether or not we are achieving them. A BJJ student's goal may be to go from a white to a blue belt. This, however, is too broad a goal and progress cannot really be measured as success can only be measured by the attainment of the goal, which is the blue belt. As most of the time this takes at least two years of regular training with much dedication there is little feedback as to success until goal attainment. In addition, this singular goal is not flexible and stimulating to the journey hence de-motivates us.

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The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu


Setting Goals

Rather than having distant or broad goals we need to set **SMART** ones, that is:

Specific	vague goals lead to vague, half-hearted attempts to achieve them;
Measurable	we need to be able to evaluate our progress;
Attractive	if we don't want it, we're unlikely to put in a sustained effort;
Realistic	we must be capable of achieving the goal. If you set goals that are too hard to achieve you will not be rewarded for your behaviour and this may impact not only on your motivation but your self-esteem also;
Time-framed	we need to have an appropriate time frame in mind.

We also need to be able to distinguish between a vision and a goal. A vision as a student of BJJ can be to be fit, able to defend yourself, have higher self-esteem, and be healthier. Whereas a goal is more specific as in attend training three times per week for the next three months.

Example SMART GOAL

SMART Goal	
Life Area: ⁽¹⁾	FITNESS STRENGTH and MENTAL TOUGHNESS
Project Name: ⁽²⁾	FROM AVERAGE TO EXTRAORDINARY
Sign/Symbol: ⁽³⁾	
Purpose: ⁽⁴⁾	To live up to my true potential.
Values: ⁽⁵⁾	Hard Work and Discipline “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit”. (W J Durant)
Goal: ⁽⁶⁾	IMPLEMENT WEEKLY PROGRAMME
Specific: ⁽⁷⁾	Evidence-Based program from ‘The Curriculum’ 3 x per week BJJ + 2 x per week HIIT (CARDIO) + 2 x per week WEIGHTS
Measurable: ⁽⁸⁾	Keep a basic tick (✓) chart for the schedule / curriculum and maintain notes.
Attractive: ⁽⁹⁾	Reaching these goals will boost my self-esteem and change my life for the better.
Realistic: ⁽¹⁰⁾	The specific goals are challenging but realistic as long as a positive attitude is maintained.
Time-Framed: ⁽¹¹⁾	The 9 Week Program (16 August – 16 October 2021)

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Notes

- (1) SMART Goals are not just for specific sports related life areas. Define if your goal is in relation to finances, relationships, career, or other areas. In this case the goal relates to 'health and fitness' but you might call it sports or anything that holds meaning to you.
- (2) Call it any project name that you like. Just try and be a little creative and focus on the goal to make it motivational.
- (3) It's always good to have a sign or symbol for your goal to keep you motivated. Not only can you paste the sign/symbol into your SMART Goal template, you can also print a larger copy or poster and hang it on a wall or place it on your refrigerator door.
- (4) Think about what the purpose of the goal is. Why do it if there's not real reason to do it? The purpose is also related to whether the goal is attractive or not.
- (5) What are your values? Do you like to acquire new 'knowledge', have and develop 'courage', maybe you're a people person, or you may have other values and virtues.
- (6) Here you will put your goal. Note this goal is not an outcome but rather specific.
- (7) Drill down the specific even further with actions you will take and can measure. For example, a goal is specific by stating I will attend class three times per week. It is not specific by stating I will attend class regularly or I will get better at BJJ. You may note that at work managers often state the goal is to earn, say, \$100'000 per week. This is an outcome and does not teach the staff how to attain it. A specific goal in this case would be: 'I will make 20 sales calls per day using our client data-base'. This is by far more measurable and the goal is action specific NOT outcome specific.
- (8) How will you visually measure the goal?
- (9) Remind yourself why this goal is attractive to achieve. If it's not attractive there's no real reason to achieve it.
- (10) It is very important not to set goals that are unattainable. If you can attend class three times per week, do not list a goal of five times per week. You will be unlikely to achieve it and lose motivation. If you find your goal easy to achieve you can always make it more challenging later.

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- (11) Make the goal time-framed. This will keep you honest. Setting no time-frame let's you make excuses as to when you will start you journey.

SMART Goal

OK, so now it's your turn.

SMART Goal	
Life Area: ⁽¹⁾	
Project Name: ⁽²⁾	
Sign/Symbol: ⁽³⁾	
Purpose: ⁽⁴⁾	
Values: ⁽⁵⁾	
Goal: ⁽⁶⁾	
Specific: ⁽⁷⁾	
Measurable: ⁽⁸⁾	
Attractive: ⁽⁹⁾	
Realistic: ⁽¹⁰⁾	
Time-Framed: ⁽¹¹⁾	



The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Measuring your Goal

The following is a sample measurement chart. It will be entirely up to you how you will measure your SMART goal. Nevertheless, the sample below may help you in developing your own.



The Psychology of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

Sample SMART Goal MEASUREMENT based on the 9 – Week Program

FIGHTING FITNESS STRENGTH and MENTAL TOUGHNESS

WEEK 1							
Join the Group <input type="checkbox"/> Using SMART Goals for Brazilian Jiu Jitsu <input type="checkbox"/> An Evidence-Based Approach to BJJ for the Total Beginner <input type="checkbox"/> Wheel of Life Balance <input type="checkbox"/> Find an Academy <input type="checkbox"/> Plan and Schedule your 9 WEEKS <input type="checkbox"/>							
	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Morning							
Midday							
Evening							
WEEK 2							
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP	EVENT
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
WEEK 3							
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
WEEK 4							
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
WEEK 5							
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

FIGHTING FITNESS STRENGTH and MENTAL TOUGHNESS

WEEK 6								
Sign up to a BJJ Competition <input type="checkbox"/>								
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP	EVENT	
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
WEEK 7								
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP		
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
WEEK 8								
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP		
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
WEEK 9								
BJJ	HIIT	WEIGHTS	READ	SOW	SHARE	GROUP		
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
COMPETE								

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In Closing

Finally, make sure you monitor your progress. If there are changes, make changes. If your goals are too easy to achieve make them more challenging. If they are too difficult make them less challenging. While your goals should be challenging they should ALWAYS be achievable. To constantly fail at achieving your goals will be counter motivational and eat away on your self-esteem. Most of all, ensure you're having fun. Goals should be about making your life more enjoyable not less. If you're not having fun and you become miserable chasing your goals, there's something wrong with your goals.