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Focus on Your Future

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Throughout my legal career, helping younger lawyers achieve their own career success and satisfaction is important to me. Since I owe much of my own success to knowing what I wanted to achieve in the future and focusing on that, I have always stressed the importance of setting future goals and having a plan to achieve them. Many young lawyers have wondered why setting goals and having a plan to achieve them is important. I hope what follows will give those who wonder an idea.

Recently, HBO featured a program about the 1984 Olympics held in LA. I taped it even though I had purchased a tape that came out at the time. I remember so vividly watching Mary Lou Retton, the young 16 year old from Fairmont, West Virginia, become the first American woman to win the gold medal in Gymnastics All-Around competition. Retton was locked in a close battle with Romanian Ecaterina Szabo. With two events to go, Retton trailed Szabo by .15 of a point. She then scored a 10 on the floor exercise but still trailed Szabo by .05 points. Mary Lou had to score a perfect 10 on the vault to win the gold medal. I remember watching her run down the runway with a look of determination I had never seen close up on an athlete. She leaped in the air and came down perfectly to become the first American woman ever to win the gold medal in the Gymnastics All-Around competition. It was an unbelievable moment. After her first perfect vault, she did it second time. Her achievement and the 1980 U.S. Hockey team featured in the movie "Miracle" are the two most inspiring sports events I have ever watched.

Mary Lou Retton's quest for the gold medal started many years before the event. She dreamed for many years about that moment in history in Los Angeles. On the HBO show there was film of her tumbling at age 7. She worked endlessly to achieve her goal. In fact, she worked so hard, that just six weeks before the competition she tore the cartilage in her knee and had to have surgery. No one thought she would be able to rehab in time to compete. But, reportedly she told her doctors: "I've made it this far-no one's going to keep me from trying" Mary Lou rehabilitated her knee in a short period of time and prepared earnestly for the victory she had dreamed about many years before. After the Olympics, Time Magazine reported that the night before the finals, Mary Lou Retton lay in her bed visualizing and dreaming about the perfect performances she would have the next night to win the gold medal. Later, Mary Lou Retton said: "Each of us has a fire in our hearts for something. It's our goal in life to find it and to keep it lit."



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Daniel Teitelbaum is the author of *The Ultimate Guide to Mental Toughness*. In the book he suggests that top performers:

- Expect to win.
- Always keep their minds focused on the “best case scenario.”
- Know exactly what they want out of life, both short-term and long-term.
- Have a high level of self belief.
- Know how to keep themselves focused and motivated.
- Stay out of their comfort zones.

Teitelbaum also describes a Harvard School of Psychology study focused on the differences between three levels of achievers: 1. Low achievers tend to focus on the past and can't get their minds off of past defeats. 2. Average achievers focus on the present, on just getting done the work they have. (for lawyers the billable work we have to do.) 3. Top achievers stay laser focused on the future, on the specific victories they are planning to make happen and they consistently think about and visualize those victories.

While none of us are world class athletes, and we each have lots of demanding day to day work that occupies both our time and attention, the principle still applies. It is for this reason I have encouraged young to set both personal and professional goals and have a plan to achieve them. I owe a large part of my success to being laser-focused on the future.

By [Cordell Parvin](#)

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