



## Goals, Systems, and Plans

**O**n 12 May 1964 Don Shepherd, a 48-year-old gold miner (actually an underground locomotive driver) from Crown Mines in Johannesburg, set out from the Los Angeles City Hall to begin a solo coast-to-coast run across America. At the time, this was the longest run in the world by an amateur runner. Part of his preparation involved running from Johannesburg to Cape Town. He ran alone, completely unaided, with no backup vehicle, and only a small transistor radio for company. He had no financial sponsorship, and did the trip on a shoestring budget, allowing himself \$10 daily to pay for his food and accommodation. He had spent much time saving for and planning the trip. He carried a small backpack containing a spare shirt, socks, plastic raincoat, shoe patching equipment and scissors, petroleum jelly, toothbrush and toiletries, a small water bottle, and a map. Because he didn't trust the American style of running shoes, he posted a parcel containing a spare pair of canvas takkies to the postmaster in Lincoln, Nebraska, to be collected halfway through his journey. Don completed his 3200 mile (5100 km) journey to New York City in 73 days, 8 hours, and 20 minutes, averaging 70 km per day, typically running for nine to fourteen hours a day. His amazing story is told in his book «My Run Across the United States», published in 1970.

I met Don Shepherd and read his book while I was in primary school, and was inspired by the story. However, not everyone can undertake such a feat. Many years later, in 2010, I visited Guernsey (one of the Channel Islands), and remembered the story of the coast-to-coast run, and realized that sometimes one needs to re-frame grand ideas into goals that can actually be accomplished. A coast-to-coast run across the USA is beyond my reach, but Guernsey was small enough for me to fulfil my long-standing ambition to do a coast-to-coast run (not quite LA to New York, but still lots of fun). I started my run touching the ocean on the east coast at St Peter Port, Guernsey's capital, and headed west running along scenic tree-lined leafy narrow roads until I reached the ocean on the west coast less than ten kilometres later. The biggest challenge was finding the correct bus to get back to my hotel afterwards.

Goals are so important to many people, and can indeed provide direction and motivation to accomplish great things. Yet, they can also lead to disappointment if they are not achieved. All too often, life interferes with the plans we make. In the words of Robert Burns: 'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley'. Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams has written numerous articles and a book on the benefits of systems over goals, saying that 'goals are for losers and systems are for winners'. When trying to improve at something, it is perhaps better to implement a system (that can grow into a habit) than to set goals that often remain unmet. A system is something you do on a regular basis that will inevitably lead to improvement in the long run, whereas goals provide only occasional moments of great satisfaction, punctuating a more common state of non-accomplishment. Working to a system means that you focus on things you can control, rather than aiming at goals that are missed because of extraneous circumstances. Back to my running story: I prefer to run along trails that are enjoyable and pleasurable to me, rather than setting a goal of a certain distance per week. In this way, no willpower is required to exercise, and I have continued to participate actively in this sport over many years.

Time has passed so quickly over this past year, and my time as President of SAIMM is almost at an end. When I look back over the year, I see great strides of progress that have been made in certain areas, along with limitations brought about by the difficult state of the mining industry at present. Some plans have taken shape, some goals have been achieved, and some things have had to be deferred until better times. However, the structure of the Institute is a very sound one in that it ensures a steady flow of new ideas and energy into the organization, while retaining continuity for existing initiatives. I believe we have a very good system in place.

William Shakespeare (in his story of Troilus and Cressida) said: 'Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing'. We should take pleasure in real achievements and not only in the accolades that sometimes accompany them. It has been a great pleasure to work with a wonderful team in carrying out the business of the Institute during this past year.

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