



Today's Collegian



Mr. Breitsprecher's Edition

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FREE!

Get Results; Set Goals



Related to motivation and dealing with stress is goal setting. When we have a plan to work towards clear objectives, that outline allows us to take charge of our lives. Working with more purpose and direction means less worry and stress.

Three Types of Goals

Long-Term Goals. These relate to the next few years. In college, long-term goals might include: graduating on the Dean's list or with honors, running for student government, obtaining an internship or specific type of employment experience while in

school, or preparing for a specific job when you finish college.

Short-Term Goals. These relate to the current term. What can you accomplish this semester, or even quarter, that will move you towards your long-term goals? Short-term goals might include: passing classes, getting good grades, creating a study group for a specific course, or completing and turning in all assignments on-time.




Immediate Goals. These are the steps that need to be taken to successfully complete each short-term goal. Note that they always relate to a larger goal. Each short-term goal can be broken down into a plan to meet that goal. For example,

if a short-term goal is to pass courses, immediate goals might include: attending all classes, doing all assignments on time, and studying for exams.

Goals are Building Blocks






Note that our three types of goals are all related – starting with each long-term goal; it is possible to identify the things that have to happen in the current term to achieve each long-term goal. These become the short-term goals. Each short-term goal can be further broken down into the steps that need to happen to achieve that goal in the current term.

Creating goals that “dovetail” and each other keeps us moving towards the objectives we really want. This, in term, can be highly motivating, reducing or eliminating stress. Here is an example of how the three types of goals, long-term, short-term, and intermediate can be used to build a plan for success:

-  **Long-Term Goal.** Graduate in 4 ½ years with honors.
-  **Short-Term Goal.** Get A's in every class
-  **Immediate Goal.** (1). Attend class every day. (2). Work with each professor to learn what the expectations are to earn an “A”. (3). Get involved with class by actively taking notes, working with the professor during his/her office hours and

Setting S. M. A. R. T. Goals

In addition to the suggestions in this article, *Today's Collegian* suggests people use the acronym S.M.A.R.T. to help remember how to set more effective goals.

-  **Specific.** Everyone that would read this goal should be able to agree on what it means. Examples: I want to work with people. I want to plan social and educational programs for children and adolescents.
-  **Measurable.** Have a yardstick for measuring outcomes. Example: I want to earn a 3.00 GPA this year with no grade below B.
-  **Action-Oriented.** It's much easier to measure things being done. What are the action-steps you'll take in the process of achieving your goal? Example: I want to earn a BBA from UW-Whitewater with an emphasis in Accounting.
-  **Realistic.** Self-understanding is important. Acknowledging strengths and weakness helps. Be sure those goals are things that you can reasonably do and that the outcome is within your control. Example: I enjoy math and am good at it. I want to be a math teacher.
-  **Timely.** Set a target date for your goals. This is the only way that we can measure progress towards meeting them. Example: I want to earn a BBA from UW-Whitewater with an emphasis in Accounting before summer of 2009.

Check It Out!



Powerful Goals in 7 Easy Steps

Goals are tools to help us get where we want to go. *Top Achievement* maintains a Web page with a variety of good suggestions on goal setting:

<http://www.topachievement.com/articles.html>

utilizing any and all on-campus resources to be sure that each assignment more fully meets that instructor's expectations. (4). Study daily and create study groups to prepare for each quiz and exam.

Note how each of these goals flows from the long-term goal. In effect, we have worked the current "plan" (immediate goal) backwards from the long-term goal. Also observe how the immediate goals have more steps than the short-term and long-term goals. This is important because it translates bigger goals into manageable steps that we can work on and monitor to more fully assure success.

By starting with a focus in the future, we are more able to visualize and plan for the steps that need to be completed this term. Once we have our plan for the term, we look at the elements that will need to be accomplished to meet short-term goals. Meeting these will move us towards the long-term goals.

Problem Solving

At first, it might not seem like this is part of the goal setting process. Identifying problems, however, is the key to setting effective goals – our goals overcome problems and move us towards where we want to go. For example, if a person is not earning acceptable grades, identifying that as a problem is the first step in setting goals to earn better grades.

For most of us, identifying problems is not difficult – a problem is a "gap" between what we want to achieve and our current situation. Identifying these "gaps" allows us to set goals to overcome them before the problem becomes unmanageable.

Once we know what is wrong, the next step is to identify the specific cause of that problem – this is probably more challenging. For example, some students have problems with math. This leads to stress and anxieties, which in turn, makes concentrating in class, homework, quizzes, and tests more difficult.

Usually, when students have these types of problems in a math class, the problem starts early – often the first week of class. Being able to see this and identify the problem can be the difference between a successful semester and a long, frustrating struggle.

In this example, we have identified the problem, but now we need to look for the causes. Is the problem that we just feel anxious? Perhaps we have not accepted the difference between high school math classes and college math classes. Have we given the professor a chance to work with us or have we unfairly made up our minds about them? Sometimes, we have had a bad experience in a previous class and carry that negative "baggage" into the next one.

Identifying the problem allows us to reflect on the cause. Once we have a grasp on that, we can set a goal to get us past that problem. In our math example, it would be a short-term goal – each of the possible causes above suggests a different short-term goal to help us succeed in the current term.

In this example, recognizing the problem, identifying the cause, and setting a short-term goal for the term will allow us to plan each step in moving us towards the short-term goal. These steps become our immediate goals. In our math example, each of the possible causes suggests a different way to work our way through the problem.

Goals and Options

Understanding problems allows us to identify causes and look at different ways we can solve them. Let's assume that in our math example, we decided that the problem was math anxiety. We now have 2 choices: either master our anxieties and fears or avoid math classes entirely. Each of these options suggests different plans to meet that objective. Identifying choices allows us to reflect on the positive and negative consequences of each choice. That, in turn, should make the decision process easier.

If possible, it helps to discuss school-related problems with an advisor or counselor. They appreciate being able to work with students BEFORE there are academic problems – please use their services. Professors also appreciate when students ask for help BEFORE they start failing class.

Putting together a list of options and discussing them with someone that understands or can help is a great goal-setting tool. After some reflection, using help if necessary, we should be able to make responsible choices based on the options we have identified and analyzed.

Taking Action

The last part of the process, after considering the pros and cons of each option, is to make your best decision and start working towards it. Identify the steps that will be necessary to move towards that option. Remember, we don't always find the "best choice" on our first attempt. If things don't work out as planned – that is OK if we can use it as a "learning experience."

After making a choice and setting a goal, work out all the immediate steps that must be taken to reach that goal. This becomes the plan. Work the plan to the best of your ability and carefully monitor the effectiveness of the immediate goals that you are working on. Remember, the key is to identify problems as soon as possible.

Perhaps the decisions you have made and the goals you have set to solve the problem will work. If there are additional problems, our goal-setting strategies will help us get back "on-track." If there is a problem, identify the cause and options to solve that problem. This is called a "feedback-loop."

If we set goals, do the best we can to work towards those goals, and can identify any problems, we have the tools we need to re-evaluate our goals (either long-term, short-term, or immediate) and change the plan.

Effective problem solving is an ongoing process. Don't be too hard on yourself – once we get to college, any problems that we have might have been years in the making. They will not disappear overnight.

Goals are not meant to be burdens to carry that are set in stone. They are tools that allow us to adapt and change when needed. Their purpose is not to add problems in our lives. Use goals to solve problems!