



The Art of Goal Setting

“The reward of a thing well done is to have it done”

- Emerson

By Dana W. Toedtman

With the advent of trimester 2, it is the perfect time to re-invigorate the art of goal setting. To begin, encourage your students to reflect on their performance to date by asking themselves: What is working? What is not? What shift(s) do I need to make?” By understanding the role and importance of goals, parents and teachers can assist students in learning more effective ways to help them become more independent and successful learners.

Evidence from previous research about the merits of setting goals was related specifically to achievement. More recently, research has broadened the benefits of goal setting to include many different phases of self-regulation that include forethought, performance control, self-reflection and evaluation, motivation and learning.

It is important that an individual understands the process of creating a well-thought-out goal. Defining the intended outcome is important and best if it is a self-made goal that will be supported with energy, enthusiasm and effort. Commitment is key. By realizing that the pursuit of a goal is a journey and something worth achieving, you can help your student plan the strategy and begin to pursue the goal in incremental steps.

The outcome or result should be something the student can describe as real and unmistakable. Some of the qualities of creating a specific goal are:

- A goal needs to be challenging but doable,
- A goal needs to be measureable, and
- A goal needs to have a timeline with a deadline.

It is helpful to chart a long term goal and divide it into sub goals. Next, help students list the action steps they will need to employ to reach their goal. It helps if the check list of action steps cites activities that students can make routine as a daily practice. If they can check them off each day, they can be self-monitoring their progress better. At the same time, encourage them to seek the resources they will need to reach their goal(s).

White Paper Summary

The Art of Goal Setting...

- Reflect on “what is working, what isn’t, and what shifts need to be made.”
- Goal setting benefits different phases of self-regulation, including forethought, performance control, self-reflection/evaluation, motivation, and learning
- Defining the intended outcome is key.
- So is commitment!
- Qualities of a constructive goal:
 - Challenging but doable
 - Measureable
 - Includes timeline and deadline
- Multiple goals are acceptable as long as they are realistic
- The reward is in the accomplishment!



For example, if your student chooses “to be better organized to get my homework in on time” as a goal, some of the action steps might include: To use the planner each day for each subject, to print out each syllabus at the beginning of each week and store it in the planner, to record the assignments and due dates, to make adjustments to the assignments as necessary, to prioritize and number the order for doing the homework, to estimate the time it will take, to complete the homework, to store it in a homework folder and finally, to turn it in on time.

One of the challenges for students is presented when they attempt to accomplish goals in several areas such as the social arena and other activities and endeavors that compete with time for academics. Be assured that multiple goals are possible as long as they are realistic. Verbal encouragement will help to motivate a positive outcome.

As students reach a successful conclusion to their goals, the reward is in the accomplishment and, hopefully, in a multitude of benefits including better self-management and higher achievement. If not, then maybe the goal setting exercise was not practiced consistently or effectively. Another attempt is in order perhaps refining the goal setting or action steps.

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