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Setting Study Goals

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Setting goals for yourself is a great way to really put things into perspective.

Goal setting is used by successful people in all areas of life, careers, and industries. For instance, high achieving businesspeople will set career goals, money goals, lifestyle goals for themselves, and usually will set a time frame for which to achieve these goals by. Setting goals allows you to focus and direct your thoughts and activities in a way that is most beneficial to help you stay on track and avoid digressing at any moment. It allows you to organise your time and energies to help you make the most out of what you are hoping to achieve. Setting goals when studying is a great way in which you can benefit from study and career success in your industry.

**It's only a dream until you write it down,
then it becomes a GOAL**

When setting goals, people can often be vague and lack the ability to clearly specify exactly what it is they want to achieve. Setting yourself clearly defined goals when studying helps you measure your successes, for instance by using a Study timetable or Revision checklist. This way you can tick off what it is you have done, and therefore is a clear indication of not just what you have yet to accomplish, but also what you have thus far achieved.

Make sure you write down your goals, the overall ones as well as the smaller one(s). This helps to visualise what it is you want to achieve and keeps your goals in mind if you ever feel yourself losing focus or getting distracted.

The following is a guide on the best practices to adopt to help you set and, more importantly, achieve your goals.

1. Set an overall goal

There are many steps in the goal setting process, however with all goals in mind, there needs to be one goal that you are working towards. This way no matter how many other steps in the process there are, you are always focused on the goal. For instance, if you are working toward securing your first job in your chosen industry or gaining your next big position in another company. This is of course the ultimate goal, though there will be many steps and goals before this happens that you should be clear of; for instance, successfully completing all the required training to ensure you are qualified for the position, apply for your position, send off CV's and applications, practice interview skills, pass assessment and tests that may be set, get invited for an interview, then accept the job offer.

As you can see there are many steps in the process, although there is a clear goal in mind - securing your first job in your chosen industry or gaining your next big position. To decide on your overall goal spend time researching around what is most important and relevant to you at that time and prioritise your goals in order of importance. Brainstorm these ideas and talk them through with family, friends, your supervisor, or advisor.

In terms of your actual goals, you make a useful way of setting the right goals for yourself is to set **SMART** goals.

S - specific

M - measurable

A - attainable

R - realistic

T - time-bound

This is a very helpful way of setting the actual goals you need as following the SMART process enables you to be clearer in your ambitions; for instance a goal of securing a job as a Marketing Assistant, using the SMART guidelines can then be elaborated to - securing a job as a Marketing Assistant with a respected company within three months of successfully completing my PR and Marketing training course. In this one sentence you are clear of your goal, how you are going to achieve it and in what time frame. Good preparation and following the advice given above will certainly ensure you are achieving your goals.

2. Setting smaller more manageable goals

Once you have decided on what is the most relevant, important, and achievable goal for you, the next step is to ask yourself how you are going to get there. To do this you can ask yourself the following questions:

- ☐ *What is it I want?*
- ☐ *How will I know once I have achieved my goal?*
- ☐ *What do I need to do to get me there?*
- ☐ *What are the daily tasks / activities required to achieve my goal?*
- ☐ *When do I want or need to achieve my goal by?*

Setting Goals When Studying - Asking yourself these questions is a good way to put into perspective what exactly it is you need to do to achieve the overall goal. These questions also allow you to gain insight into what the smaller steppingstones and daily tasks that are needed to complete these goals. Once you are clear of your daily to-do-list of what you need to do to achieve these goals, you are then better prepared to achieve the short- and long-term goals. Bear in mind, writing down the goals will be a good way to help keep these goals in mind reminding you every day (or every time you visit your study area) what you are working towards.

It is important to note that as your circumstance may be subject to change, this can in turn influence your goals. Do not be afraid to adapt your goals according to your situation. For instance, someone who may have a goal to achieve a good job working in their chosen field, may be studying toward this. Though they may have previously been able to commit to 20 hours of study time per week, their circumstances may change. Circumstances such as starting a family, grieving a loss, travelling, moving house and so on.

In addition, there may be obstacles in your way to achieving your goals. For instance, studying an online course and you do not have access to the internet at home. Instead of using the obstacles as an excuse to not achieve your goals, or fighting against these obstacles, identify and accept these obstacles. Once you have identified all potential obstacles, and accepted them, you can then find ways of overcoming them; for instance, using the same example, find a local internet cafe or library, their internet facilities and opening times, then plan your study hours round this.

These are all situations that can impact on your ability to achieve your goals realistically. So as not to put too much pressure on yourself, make sure your goals are flexible as well as realistic. This will prevent you from becoming distracted and disheartened should your situation prevent you from achieving your desired goal in the right time. When this happens, a lot of people can lose hope and end up giving up. Don't let this happen by ensuring your goals are realistic and not too pressurising. Keep positive throughout any changes to your circumstances and you will continue the path to success.

3. Keep focused

Once you have decided on the overall goal and have chosen which steps to take to achieve that goal, the next stage is to maintain your progress by keeping focused. Individuals are driven toward achieving goals, and without clear goals can often become prone to aimlessly drifting in the world. When we do not have clear goals in mind for what we want to achieve and by when, this can lead to people becoming, and staying, unhappy with their current situations. For instance, someone who is in a job that they are not happy with. If they do not set them self a goal or set a vague goal such as "I want to find a new job", quite often these individuals will simply float on by in their job without making the necessary steps to change their situation. This is not from lack of motivation per say, rather this is usually because the task of achieving their overall goal seems daunting and unrealistic; they do not know where to start or what resources are required to ensure this goal is achieved.

With this in mind, as discussed, the need to write down your goals on paper using a format that makes the goal setting process SMART, will help you to keep focused.

Make sure the goals you write down are set by you and only you to avoid conflicting goals set by someone else, or goals that are not suited to your own needs and capabilities. To add to this, try to keep updating your to-do-list of daily activities, and review your list every week or so, this will keep you flexible and proactive in your efforts to achieve your goals, rather than being reactive to any circumstantial changes in your life.

Finally:

For some people there are a lot of demands on their time and so may set an overall goal which for some may just be a steppingstone to the overall goal. Do not be disheartened if this is the case with you. Remember the purpose of setting goals is not to put pressure on yourself, but rather alleviate the pressures involved with studying. Your goals should always be manageable for you and only you.

Further to this, find ways of rewarding yourself. Goal setting is meant to be a positive process rather than negative, and so rewarding yourself for achieving your daily activities, or rewarding yourself for continuing your path to success is a great way of keeping positive and reducing the pressure on you. By rewarding yourself for what you are achieving stops you from focusing on what you have not achieved in a negative way, and instead allows you to focus and keep positive on what you have done.

Final Goal Setting tips:

Be specific and clear-cut when setting your goals - make sure the goals you set yourself are clear and well-defined including dates and timeframes in which to achieve your goal by.

Set each goal as a positive statement - avoid setting goals such as “don’t fail at my final assessment”, instead opt for more positive statement such as “do well and succeed at final assessment in November”.

Write your goals down and put them in an obvious place - as it should be clear by now, writing down your goals will benefit you by not only acting as a constant reminder when you put them up, but writing them down will also help you better judge the suitability and appropriateness of the goals in sight.

Realistically prioritise your goals - though you may have just one overall goal, there still may be several smaller goals before that stage. In this case make sure you are not putting too much pressure on yourself. Prioritising is a good way to avoid this mistake.

Make the goals performance based - by setting goals that are based on your performance means that you are in better control of being able to achieve your outcome. By setting an outcome-based goal limits your control of the situation and thus chances of realistically succeeding at them. For instance, instead of “get 90% in the final assessment”, try “study for at least 15 hours per week using all my Study Tools from tutors”. This is still directed toward doing well in the final test, although the responsibility lies with you rather personally than your examiner.

Remember, goal setting is a technique employed by many other successful people in all walks of life, in all fields and all careers. It helps clarify important steps you want to take to better yourself and your career aspirations. It helps to filter out what is relevant or irrelevant keeping you focused and motivated toward moving yourself forward positively.