

Strategy Training: Set Goals



Imagine you were just hired at a company on the same day as another graduate from your college. Suppose that one of you were a fast learner and the other were a slow learner. Fast-forward 10 years. Which one of you would have the better salary and the better job? Which one of you would have the better house, car, and lifestyle? Obviously, it would be the faster learner.

Knowing how to learn quickly is a skill that can provide an enduring advantage in your life after you have forgotten everything else you studied at school. Here's one way you can become a faster learner.

The effect of goals on learning

Setting a goal and making a firm commitment to it are the most important steps a student can take to maximize his or her performance on an evaluation (Hattie, 2009). Educational research reveals that a simple and effective goal setting exercise accelerated students' learning by 75%. That's huge. Imagine that you were driving on the highway at 100 kilometers per hour and someone overtook you at 175 km/hr. That's the difference goals have on learning. But what is the best way to set goals for yourself at school?

Goal setting exercise: predict your next score

In class, your teacher can ask each student to predict his or her score on the next evaluation and announce the prediction to the group. All the students have to do during this exercise is to predict their scores and say them aloud so that the rest of the class can hear. Students should then do what they believe will be necessary to make that prediction become a reality.

These two steps (a thoughtful prediction and its public declaration) equate to setting a performance goal and making a firm commitment to it. Two hundred and nine research studies investigated the effect of this exercise with 79 433 students (Hattie, 2009, p. 44). This is a very robust and reliable finding. In short, it works.

What could go wrong?

1. Actually, three things could go wrong for you. The first is that you might not have enough time to study for the test or work on the assignment in order to achieve the score you predicted. To avoid this problem, you must make the public prediction well in advance of the test day or due date.
2. The second problem is that you might predict a score that's significantly lower or higher than you actually receive. The solution is to spend some time after an evaluation reflecting on how you prepared for the test or assignment and how to make better predictions.
3. The third problem is that you might get into the habit of predicting low scores instead of pushing yourself to excel. Remember that the real goal of education is to become a faster learner and a more effective communicator. Setting a low goal is almost as bad as setting no goal.

The important takeaway from the educational research into goal setting in the classroom and its acceleration of learning is this: the most important contribution to the success of students comes from the students themselves.

Reference

Hattie, J. A. C. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London, UK: Routledge.

Predict your score #1

What is the topic of your next reading test in this course? _____

What score do you predict you will get? _____

Have you told anyone your prediction? YES / NO

How much time do you have to prepare? _____

What are you going to do to make your prediction a reality? _____

Review your score

What score did you get? _____

Predict your score #2

What is the topic of your next writing assignment in this course? _____

What score do you predict you will get? _____

Have you told anyone your prediction? YES / NO

How much time do you have to prepare? _____

What are you going to do to make your prediction a reality? _____

Review your score

What score did you get? _____