

Importance of Goal Setting

Learning Outcomes - On completion of this activity the student will be able to:

- Summarise the importance of setting goals.
- Define the law of precession.

Estimated Time – The time estimated for this activity is 30 minutes

Introduction – Goal setting is seen as an important part of personal development. By setting and achieving goals we can develop skills and become more effective and aspirational learners.

Instructions to Students – Discovering the Importance of Setting Goals

You should now read the following excerpt adapted from Chapter 4 of a book called "*Being Happy*" by Andrew Matthews. Read through it quickly the first time then take a second read highlighting or underlining the main points. You can then summarise the excerpt.

"Goals are what keep us going. How often do we hear of someone retiring after forty years and dropping dead within a few short months? Once we lose our momentum, once we lose our direction, we are in trouble. Have you noticed that you have generally been happiest when in the middle of a project, and not at the end of it? Have you ever found that as soon as you finish a project, you look around for something else?

Let's recognise two major points here. It is in our nature to have goals. We can't live without them, or at least not for very long. Therefore, if you don't have yourself a list right now, you need one. It is not so important what the goal is, as long as you have one. Some people manage to continually postpone doing what they think they might like to do with their life. They are unsure as to whether the goal they have in mind is the perfect one for them, so they never do anything.

Take Bill Smith who is thinking about going back to college and getting a degree. He is just not quite sure whether it is the right thing for him. The trouble is, he has been making up his mind for the last thirty years and he is now fifty seven. He doesn't have much time left.

If Bill goes back to his studies and finds it is not for him, then that is wonderful. Now, at last he knows. You see, people often say, "What a tragedy it will be if I choose the wrong direction!" "What if I choose a goal and it turns out to be the wrong one, and it doesn't make me happy?" Actually, it is wonderful. They have now eliminated an additional possibility and they know more about what will make them happy and what will not.

Here we return to the issue where successful people see a wrong direction as a valuable learning experience while unsuccessful, unhappy people see a wrong direction as a failure.

The Law of Precession

"Precession" is the principle which always ensures that we gain many things in addition to the actual goal itself. In fact, the most important thing is not the reaching of the goal but what we learn and how much we grow along the way.

Fred may say, "I spent six years at university just to get this bit of paper!" What he is failing to acknowledge is that he also met a lot of people, learned a lot about himself and had a lot of experiences that he otherwise would not have had. It is not the bit of paper that is important but the journey he took.

If you decide that you are going to walk across Europe or own a Ferrari sports car or start your own business, the important thing is not the walk or the car or the business, but what kind of person you need to become in order to achieve your end.

What you get in pursuit of your goals is of lesser importance. The real question is, "What will you become?" When setting out for a goal, it is worthwhile remembering the way things work on this planet. Nothing travels in straight lines. No goals are achieved without setbacks.

When the tide comes in, it comes in a bit and goes out a bit, but gradually it makes its way in. When a tree grows, it loses leaves from time to time, and each time it grows a few extra to compensate for the losses. The net result is that the tree gets bigger but it does not do without some loss and some struggle. The way things work on this planet is that setbacks are a part of the plan of things.

Unfortunately, some people have the idea that their own personal progress should defy all the laws of the universe. Therefore Mary starts on her lose weight programme, and finding that her progress is up and down, decides that losing weight for her is too hard or impossible, and spends the rest of her life as a fat girl. Fred starts a saving programme, and after one or two unforeseen expenses, concludes that it is impossible to save money and abandons all hope of ever achieving financial independence.

Successful people are not that brilliant or talented or unique. They simply have a grasp of the way things work and realise that their own progress will be in accordance with the principles that govern everything else around them.

They realise that we reach our goals by continually correcting. We get off course, correct, and get back on course again. Ships do it, rockets and missiles do it. Correct, correct, correct.

If you have some definite goals in mind, your thoughts will help to take you there as you will tend to be dwelling on your goals. If you have no goals, your thoughts will take you towards what you think about most."