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“Everything for the English Classroom!”

Free Lesson of the Month November, 2009

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Please feel free to share this lesson with all your colleagues. We hope that they find these classroom-proven lessons to be as useful as you do.

This month’s Free Lesson comes from *Succeeding: Overcoming the Odds* and includes short stories of inspiring people who defied economic, social, or physical handicaps to achieve success.

Included in the exercise:

- An introduction to the book including goal-setting exercises
- Four inspirational short stories
- Questions to check student understanding

Please feel free to browse through our complete list of [Past Free Lessons](#) or subscribe to the [Prestwick House Footnotes Newsletter](#).

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A Five Point Program for Setting Goals

Point #1 - Identifying long-range goals.

Look back at your dream list. Identify no more than two or three dreams that are really important to you. If, for example, one of your dreams was to be involved in a relationship with a kind, sensitive person, you might have written this: "I want to be involved with a kind, sensitive person." Now, turn this "wish" statement into a "goal" statement. "In 10 years, if I am in a relationship, it will be with a kind and sensitive person." Your long-range goals, however, must be big and worthwhile because it is only this type of goal that motivates us.

Point #2 - Identify the obstacles you must overcome.

Once you identify your long-range goals, you must then determine the steps you will have to climb to reach these goals. For someone whose career goal is to become a lawyer, for example, the steps might look like this:

Become a lawyer
Graduate from law school
Graduate from college
Be accepted to college
Pass 12th grade
Pass 11th grade
Pass 10th grade
Pass 9th grade

While there may be fewer steps for the career you have chosen as your goal, everyone's short-term goal must be to graduate from high school. To accomplish that goal, however, you must first pass this year. But to pass this year, you must first pass each one of the courses you are taking. These you should view as your immediate objectives.

Point #3 - Set deadlines for your goals.

The person who just says, “Someday, I will take a trip to Europe” will probably never get there. But the person who says, “Before August 1, 2005, I am going to go to Europe,” very probably will get there. He will get there simply because he planned and worked toward that end, while the first person only dreamed about doing it.

Point #4 - Develop an action plan.

In developing an action plan, it is all right to be general for ten years away. As you get closer to the present, however, try to be as specific as possible.

Diane, a senior in a vocational program, has the goal “to own her own beauty parlor.” Her plan calls for her to work for someone else for seven to eight years so she can save enough money and learn the business. Therefore, it is necessary that her goal is general at this point. Her immediate goals, however, are to graduate from school, get state certification, and find a job in a *good* beauty shop where she can learn a great deal about running a shop and save some money. Notice how specific she needs to be when creating these immediate goals.

Point #5 - What’s in it for me?

It is extremely important that you list what you expect to get from accomplishing your goals. The more concrete the reward, the better you can visualize it. The better you visualize the reward, the harder you will work to achieve it.

One motivational speaker urges his students to visualize the payoff as concretely as possible. If, for example, your goal is to be a successful, well-paid mechanic, you might visualize completing the work on an engine, and the customer counting out the money and paying you for the job.

Goals Are Achieved a Day or a Pound or an Inch at a Time

An actor who made it big in a movie was on a talk show last month. A woman in the audience stood up and asked him how it felt to be an overnight success. The actor explained that it took him seventeen years to be “an overnight success.” He pointed out that few people know that he had gone to hundreds of auditions, waited tables for years, washed out countless garbage cans, and sometimes had nothing to eat but ketchup sandwiches. In effect, he was telling her that he may be at the top of the hill now, but it took seventeen years of working, studying, and learning his craft to get there.

A number of studies confirm that this same principle applies to losing weight and keeping it off. If your goal is to lose twenty-six pounds in a year, you can't wait until the eleventh month before you begin a program of exercise and calorie cutting. Rather, a better strategy is for you to begin immediately and lose 1/2 pound per week.

This also applies to getting a passing grade in a subject. We all know students who say in September and October, “The weather is so nice, it's too early to start working.” Then they find one reason or another to continue postponing their work. In the last month of school, these students become either optimists or pessimists. The pessimist says, “It's too late now; I'll just have to fail the course.” The optimist says, “I'll work hard and pass this course yet.” Of course, both of them fail for the year. The realists, those who began to work the very first day and worked each and every day thereafter, were the ones who passed the course.

1. Since the start of this school year, how many days have you worked on passing this course?
2. Could you have done more?
3. If so, why didn't you do more?

Why Bother With Goals?

On a very practical level, goals get us to take action, and they keep us at the job when the going gets tough. Many people, for example, work at a second job. They don't particularly like doing this, but they do it so they can save enough money to put a down payment on a home.

Jack, an office worker during the day, worked nights on a loading dock. From six to ten, warm nights or cold, Jack loaded trucks. On some dark, winter nights, Jack was cold, hungry, and tired. Only the thought of "his house" kept him at the job. In short, a person with a realizable goal gets things done that a person without a goal does not.

More important, goals give us a purpose and direction in our lives. They also allow us to keep minor setbacks in perspective. Anna, a seventeen-year-old whose goals were to become a fashion designer and have a relationship with a kind, attractive man, was "dumped" by her boyfriend. This made her unhappy, but not *very* unhappy. With her eye on her goals, she knew that she still would be a designer and she still would have a relationship with a kind, attractive man. It just wasn't going to be with the one she had been dating.

Changing Directions

Change is an inescapable part of life. As a result, it is quite possible that you may change some of your goals, but to paraphrase the old saying, "It is better to have worked toward a goal and have changed it, than to never have had any goal at all." Whatever you have learned or accomplished in working toward that goal, you certainly will always be able to use in working toward a new goal. Daniel Inouye's goal was to become a surgeon. After he lost an arm in the war, however, he knew he had to find a new goal. Switching to law school and politics, though, was not difficult for him. The habits and attitudes he had developed earlier, he easily put to use in his new action plan.

Attitude

The tennis star Billie Jean King says that she knows which of her opponents will miss their serve. “When they stand at the line, ready to serve, you can see it in their face. They have, in their mind, pictured themselves hitting the ball into the net, and that is exactly what they do. When I stand at the line to serve, I picture myself hitting the ball squarely into their court. That is where it usually goes.”

If you want to succeed at something, picture yourself doing it successfully. The student who wishes to get better grades needs to visualize doing the work and getting papers back with 90s and 100s.

NEVER FORGET

ELIE WIESEL

IN 1986, ELIE WIESEL was awarded the world's most prestigious honor, *The Nobel Peace Prize*. In giving him the award, the committee said, "He is a spiritual leader and guide in this age marked by violence, repression and racism." The walk to the stage to receive this award, however, represented a long and tortuous trip through life—a journey that no one would ever take voluntarily.

Born in Romania, Elie's first sixteen years were quite unremarkable. Elie was verbally and physically abused by the town bullies because of his religion, as other Jews were at that time in Romania. He was generally able to avoid going to town, though, and he lived pretty much in his own world. He described himself as a dreamer but very religious. "I was trained that the wasting of time was the worst sin, for time was meant to be devoted to the study of the Talmud, to the Torah, to prayer."

Then, early in 1944, his life turned into one of horror. He, his family, and all the other Jews in his town were arrested by the Nazis. Jammed into cattle cars, they were all transported to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. His mother and younger sister died in the gas chamber. He did not learn that his two older sisters had survived Auschwitz until after the war's end. In the face of the advancing Russian army, the Germans sent Elie and his father to the Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. At Buchenwald, as in Auschwitz, they lived every day with unimaginable horrors. Fed barely enough to stay alive, people died every day from starvation and disease. Those who didn't die in this manner were frequently shot or clubbed to death by the guards. Forced to work every day as slave laborers, any sick or injured person who fell was executed on the spot. Under these conditions, Elie's father fell ill and died.

Elie, however, survived all the horrors, and when he was seventeen, the camp was liberated by the American army. Not wishing to return to his old home, but unable to go to Palestine, Elie was put on a train with 400 other

orphans. At the French border, the train was stopped. The children were asked if they wished to become French citizens. Elie did not understand the question, so he did not answer. As a result, he became a person without a country, but much later, he became a citizen of the U.S.A.

He gradually learned French and enrolled in school. After graduating, he worked at a series of newspaper jobs in France and the United States. Wiesel had a burning ambition to write of what he saw in the concentration camps. He believed that he survived when so many others died so he might bear witness to the horrors of the Holocaust. He made a promise to himself, though, that he would write nothing of his experience for ten years. "I didn't want to use the wrong words. I was afraid that words might betray it. I waited."

In 1956, he published his first book, *Night*. It is the story of a fifteen-year-old boy who feels guilty because he survived the horrors of the concentration camps while so many others died. Since that first book, Wiesel has gone on to publish almost two dozen more. As a teacher and writer in the United States, he says, "I try to use words...for human kind. Never to create anger but to reduce anger, not to separate people but to bring people together."

Comprehension Questions

1. What was Elie Wiesel's motivation for most of what he accomplished in life?
2. After being released from the camp, why do you suppose that the seventeen-year-old boy chose not to return to his home?
3. Another concentration camp survivor, Bruno Bettelheim, also wrote of his experiences. He observed that the difference between living and dying was sometimes nothing more than attitude. Those who were determined to survive, survived. While others, crushed by the violence and horror all around them, gave up the will to live. Write of an experience that you know of, where a person's attitude made all the difference.
4. In your own words, explain the significance of the title.