

## Setting Goals, Managing Time, and Maintaining Motivation

### Reflection 5.1

What does being “successful” mean to you?

Deep within them, most students have the passion to succeed, but they often may need a leader or mentor to help them discover their passion and transform it into action. As a peer leader and mentor, you can inspire students to reach high and keep climbing. Challenge them to set ambitious, yet realistic goals. Dare them to dream, but also encourage them to convert their dreams into specific goals, to create plans for achieving their goals, and to take action on the plans they create.

### Goal Setting and Success

The word *success* derives from the Latin root *successus*, meaning “to follow or come after,” as in the word *succession*. Thus, by definition, success involves an order or sequence of actions that lead to a desired outcome; the process starts with identifying an end (goal) and then finding a means (sequence of steps) to reach that goal. Studies consistently show that setting personal goals is a more effective self-motivational strategy than simply telling ourselves to “try hard” or “do our best” (Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000). Achieving success begins with setting goals; successful people set goals on a regular basis (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Effective goal setting involves two key processes: (1) self-awareness—insight into who we are, and (2) self-projection—a vision of whom we want to become. When students engage in both of these processes, they begin to see a clearer connection between where they are now and where they want to go in the future.

Remind students that setting goals and developing plans to reach them doesn’t mean that those plans can never be adjusted or modified. Goals can change as students change and develop, acquire new knowledge and skills, and discover new interests and talents. Setting goals doesn’t mean they are locking themselves into premature plans that limit their flexibility or options. Instead, goal setting simply supplies students with a map that (1) enables them to “see” the future they’d like to have for themselves, (2) provides a sense of direction about how to get there, and (3) starts them moving in the right direction. More specifically, effective goal setting involves a sequence of five key steps:

1. Awareness of self—insight into personal interests, abilities and talents, and values.
2. Awareness of goal options—knowledge of different goal options available to you.

*Student leaders breathe life into the hopes and dreams of others and enable them to see the exciting possibilities that the future holds.*

—Kouzes & Posner, *The Student Leadership Challenge*

*The tragedy of life doesn’t lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy of life lies in having no goal to reach.*

—Benjamin Mays, minister, scholar, activist, president of Morehouse College

3. **Awareness of the options that best fit you**—the particular goals that are most compatible with your personal abilities, interests, values, and needs.
4. **Awareness of the process**—the major steps that must be taken in order to reach your chosen goal.
5. **Awareness of a time frame**—a timeline for completing each of the major steps toward the goal.

What follows are specific strategies for helping students take each of these five steps in the goal-setting process.

## Step 1. Self-Awareness

Helping students succeed involves far more than sharing tips. Strategies are meaningless unless students know and believe in the “why”—i.e., when they develop a clear understanding of who they are, where they want to go, and why they want to get there.

The goals students choose to pursue say a lot about who they are and what they want from life. Thus, self-awareness is the critical first step in the process of goal setting. Students must know themselves before they can know what goals they want to pursue. While this may seem obvious, self-awareness and self-discovery are often overlooked aspects of the goal-setting process. By helping students deepen their self-awareness, you’ll put them in a better position to choose goals and to pursue a personal path that’s true to who they are and what they want to be.

*Know thyself.*

—Plato, ancient Greek philosopher

*To thine own self be true.*

—William Shakespeare in *Hamlet*

*Note well!*

Self-awareness is the first and most important step in the goal-setting process. Personally meaningful goals and good personal choices are built on a deep understanding of oneself.

*The unexamined life is not worth living.*

—Socrates, ancient Greek philosopher and a founding father of Western philosophy

*In order to succeed, you must know what you are doing, like what you are doing, and believe in what you are doing.*

—Will Rogers, Native American humorist and actor

As a peer leader, you can increase your students’ self-awareness by asking them self-examining questions that cause them to introspect and reflect on their inner qualities and personal priorities. Self-searching questioning can launch students on an inward search or quest for self-insight, self-discovery, and discovery of goals that are personally meaningful and significant. For instance, finding a gainful career is likely to be an important long-range goal for your students. You can help them launch their quest toward this goal by asking them self-examining questions related to their personal:

- **Interests**—what they *like* doing;
- **Abilities and talents**—what they’re *good* at doing; and
- **Values**—what they believe is *worth* doing.

For a personal goal to be attainable, the person has to possess the interest, ability, and passion to attain it. You can use the questions listed in Exercise 2.1 (p. 39) to get students thinking about their personal interests, talents, and values. After students answer these questions, have them reflect on their answers by posing this follow-up question: “Based on your responses to the preceding questions, what is one long-range goal you could pursue that would be *compatible (consistent)* with your *interests, talents, and values*?”

## Step 2. Awareness of Goal Options

The second critical step in the goal-setting process is for students to become aware of their options for long-range goals. For example, if a long-term goal for your students is a fulfilling future career, they need to be aware of what career options are available to them and have a realistic understanding of the types of work performance required by these careers. (To gain this knowledge, they'll need to capitalize on available resources, such as those provided by the career development office on campus.)

## Step 3. Awareness of Options That Provide the Best Personal "Match" or "Fit"

For instance, college students have multiple courses and majors from which to choose. To deepen their awareness of what majors or academic fields are a good fit for them, they could take a course in each field to test out how well it matches their interests, values, talents, and learning style. Ideally, they should select a field that closely taps into, or builds on, their strongest skills and talents because choosing a field that's compatible with their strongest abilities will enable them to master the skills required by that field more efficiently and successfully. Their success should, in turn, strengthen their self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal drive to continue their pursuit of that goal. You've probably heard of the proverb "if there's a will, there's a way"—i.e., when we're motivated to achieve something, we're more likely to achieve it. It's also true that "if there's a way, there's a will"—when we can do something well, we're motivated to continue doing it.

*Set yourself earnestly to discover what you are made to do, and then give yourself passionately to the doing of it.*

—Martin Luther King, Jr., American clergyman, prominent leader in the African American civil rights movement, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

### Reflection 5.2

Would you say that the leadership goals you're attempting to accomplish "fit" or "match" your talents and values?

If yes, why? If no, why not?

## Step 4. Awareness of the Characteristics of a Well-Designed Goal

Before students jump into the process of setting goals, they need to know what a well-designed goal looks like. The acronym SMART is a popular mnemonic device (memory strategy) for recalling all the key components of a well-designed goal (Doran, 1981; Meyer, 2003). Box 5.1 describes each component of a SMART goal.

## Box 5.1

## The SMART Method of Goal Setting

A **SMART** goal is one that is:

**Specific**—it states precisely what the goal is and what the person will do to achieve it.

*Example:* I'll achieve at least a "B" average this term by spending 25 hours per week on my course work outside of class and by using the effective learning strategies recommended to me by my peer mentor. (This is a much more specific goal than saying, "I'm really going to work hard this term.")

**Meaningful (and Measurable)**—the goal really matters to the person, and progress toward reaching the goal can be steadily measured or tracked.

*Example:* I'll achieve at least a "B" average this term because it will enable me to get into the major I want, and I'll measure my progress toward this goal by keeping track of the grades I'm earning in all my courses from beginning to end of the term.

**Actionable (i.e., Action-Oriented)**—it identifies the concrete actions or behaviors the person will engage in to reach the goal.

*Example:* I will achieve at least a "B" average this term by (1) attending all classes, (2) taking detailed notes in all my classes, (3) completing all reading assignments before their due dates, and (4) studying in advance for all my major exams (rather than cramming).

**Realistic**—the goal is attainable and the person is aware of the amount of time, effort, and skill it will take to attain it, as well as obstacles likely to be encountered along the way.

*Example:* Achieving a "B" average this term will be a realistic goal for me because my course load is manageable and I will be working at my part-time job for no more than 15 hours per week.

**Time-Framed**—the goal has a deadline and a timeline or timetable that includes a sequence of short-range, mid-range, and long-range steps.

*Example:* To achieve at least a "B" average this term, first I'll acquire the information I need to learn by taking complete notes in my classes and on my assigned readings (short-range step). Second, I'll study the information I've acquired from my notes and readings in short study sessions held in advance of major exams (mid-range step). Third, on the day before my exams, I'll hold a final review session for all information previously studied, and after my exams are returned, I'll review the results carefully to determine where I lost the most points; I'll use this information as feedback to improve my future performance and ensure that I maintain at least a "B" average (long-range step).

**Note:** The SMART process can be used to set goals for any aspect or dimension of one's life, including health-related goals such as losing weight, social goals such as meeting new people, fiscal goals such as saving money, or any element of self-development described in Chapter 7 (p. 176).

*Author's Experience* I intentionally and systematically lost 35 pounds in seven months. I wanted to get from 210 to about 175. My goal was:

**Specific**—I had a clear target to shoot for (175 pounds)

**Meaningful**—I wanted to improve my health (lower my cholesterol) and be a quicker basketball player, and **Measurable**—I could measure my progress in terms of pounds lost

**Actionable**—I exercised more and consumed fewer calories.

**Realistic**—175 pounds is a reasonable weight for someone of my height and body type, and

**Timed**—I set out to lose 1–2 pounds per week.

It worked!

*Greg Metz*

## Step 5. Awareness of All Major Steps Needed to Reach the Goal

Long-range goals are achieved in a sequence of steps, not a single leap. For example, the long-range goal of achieving a college degree requires completion of a series of courses in general education and a particular major. Students need to be aware of what these courses are. Similarly, if students have a long-range career goal, they need to know what majors lead to that career and be aware that some careers require a specific major, but other careers may be entered through a variety of different majors.

*Whoever wants to reach a distant goal must take many small steps.*

—Helmut Schmidt, former chancellor of West Germany

Note well!

Effective goal setting is a strategic process that could and should be applied to any goal we set for ourselves at any stage of our lives.

## Goal Setting and Time Management

Setting goals is one thing, but doing what needs to be done to reach those goals is quite another matter. Time is a critical personal resource; when we gain greater control of it, we gain greater control of our lives and our ability to reach our goals. If we are to have any realistic chance of achieving our goals, we need an intentional and strategic plan for spending our time in a way that aligns with and enables us to make steady progress toward our goals. Thus, setting goals, reaching goals, and managing time are interrelated skills.

Reaching goals requires managing time because it takes time to successfully complete the series of steps and tasks that leads to goal achievement. This time-and-task management process requires answers to the following questions: What is my long-range goal? How can that goal be broken into smaller, more manageable steps? What tasks do I need to do over time to reach each step? How much time is each step likely to take?

This process requires a timeline that identifies *when* each of the key steps toward your goal is to be completed. An effective goal-setting timeline should break down the process into the following components or stages:

- Long-range goals (e.g., tasks to be completed within the next five years);
- Mid-range goals (e.g., tasks to be completed by the end of the current academic term);
- Short-range goals (e.g., tasks to be performed during the next few weeks);
- Weekly goals (e.g., tasks to be completed by the end of the week); and
- Daily goals (e.g., to-do lists for tasks to be completed by the end of the day).

Long-term goals are important, but they're achieved through incremental efforts and accomplishments on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis. Each day, whether we are aware of it or not, we make decisions about *what* we will do that day. To reach our goals, we must be mindful about whether our daily actions move us in the direction of our personal goals. This practice of ongoing (daily) assessment of personal progress is a simple, yet powerful form of personal reflection that is associated with successful goal completion. Research on successful people reveals that they reflect regularly on their daily progress to ensure that they're on track and making steady progress toward their goals (Covey, 1990).

*Ultimately, a student (and all of us) should craft a 'dream' but the dream must be broken down into bite-size pieces.*

—Brad Johnson & Charles Ridley,  
*The Elements of Mentoring*



As a peer leader and mentor, one of your key roles is to help students design day-to-day strategies for achieving their long-range goals. Most college students will struggle to at least some extent with time management, particularly first-year students who are transitioning from the lockstep schedules of high school to the more unstructured “free time” associated with college course schedules. Personal time-management skills grow in importance when one’s time is less structured or controlled by others and more responsibility is placed on the individual to decide how personal time is spent.

Even for older first-year students who have lived on their own for some time, managing time remains a crucial skill because they’re likely to be juggling work and family responsibilities in addition to school. Thus, it’s not surprising that research points to time management as a skill that plays a crucial role in the success of all college students (Erickson, Peters, & Strommer, 2006; Light, 2001).

### Reflection 5.3

What do you think will be the biggest time-management challenge you’ll face in your peer leadership role or position?

## Strategies for Managing Tasks and Time

Effective task and time management involves three key processes:

1. **Itemizing**—listing all key tasks that need to be accomplished along the path toward that goal.
2. **Prioritizing**—attacking tasks in their order of their importance.
3. **Scheduling**—deciding when tasks are to be started and completed.

To help students complete these three key steps, share the following strategies with them. These strategies should help students open up more time in their schedules and discover ways to use their time more productively.

**To become more aware of how your time is being spent, break it down into smaller units.** How often have you heard someone say, “Where did all the time go?” or “I just can’t seem to find the time.”? One way to find out where our time goes and find the time to do what needs to be done is by taking a personal time inventory—analyzing how we spend our time by tracking what we do and when we do it. By mapping out how we spend time, we become more aware of how much total time we have and where it goes, including patches of wasted time during which we get little or nothing accomplished. Time analysis only has to be done for a week or two to give us a good idea of where our time is going and find better ways to use our time productively.

**Identify *what* tasks you need to accomplish and *when* you need to accomplish them.** When we want to be sure not to forget items we need at the grocery store or people we want to invite to a party, we make a list. This same list-making strategy can be used for goal-related tasks so we don’t forget to do them, or forget to do them on time. Studies of successful people show that they are list makers; they

write out lists not only for grocery items and wedding invitations, but also for things they want to accomplish each day (Covey, 2004).

Encourage your students to identify and itemize the tasks on their lists by using any of the following time-management tools:

- **Small, portable planner.** Students can use this device to list all their major assignments and exams for the term, along with their due dates. By pulling together all work tasks required in all courses and getting them in one place, it's easier to keep track of what they have to do and when they have to do it.
- **Large, stable calendar.** This should be posted in a place that's seen every day (e.g., bedroom or refrigerator). In the calendar's date boxes, students should record their major assignments for the academic term. If students consistently look at the things they have to do, they're less likely to overlook them, forget about them, or subconsciously push them out of their minds because they'd really prefer not to do them.
- **PDA or cell phone.** Students can use either of these devices to do more than just check social networking sites and send or receive text messages. They can use the calendar tools to record due dates and set up alert functions to remind them of deadlines.

Many PDAs and smartphones will also allow the user to set up task or "to-do" lists and to set priorities for each item entered.

A variety of other technological tools are now available that can be used to plan tasks and track time spent on tasks. Encourage your student to use them, but at the same time, keep in mind that planners do not plan time; people do. Effective planning of tasks and time must flow from a clear vision of whom the planner wants to become. Successful people manage their time and tasks in a way that's intentionally connected to their life goals.

#### Reflection 5.4

Do you have a calendar that you carry with you, or do you use the calendar tool on your PDA or cell phone?

If no, why not?

**Rank tasks in order of their importance.** Once work has been itemized by listing all tasks that need to be done, the next step is to *prioritize* these tasks—i.e., determine the order or sequence in which they'll be done. Prioritizing basically involves ranking tasks in terms of their importance, with the highest-priority tasks placed at the top of the list to ensure they're tackled first.

How do we determine which tasks are most important and should be ranked highest? Two criteria (standards of judgment) can be used to help determine which tasks should be our highest priorities:

- **Urgency.** Tasks that are closest to their deadline or due date should receive high priority. For example, finishing an assignment that's due tomorrow should receive higher priority than starting an assignment that's due next month.

*Things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least.*

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German poet, dramatist, and author of the epic *Faust*

- **Gravity.** Tasks that carry the heaviest weight (count the most) should receive highest priority. For example, if an assignment worth 100 points and another worth 10 points are due at the same time, the 100-point task should receive higher priority. We want to be sure to invest our work time in tasks that matter most. Just like investing money, we should invest our time in tasks that yield the greatest payoff.

One strategy you can suggest to students for prioritizing their tasks is to divide them into “A,” “B,” and “C” lists (Lakein, 1973; Morgenstern, 2004). The “A” list is reserved for *essential* tasks—what *must* be done now. The “B” list is for *important* tasks—what *should* be done soon. Finally, the “C” list is for *optional* tasks—what *could* or *might* be done if there’s time remaining after we’ve completed the more important tasks on the A and B lists. Organizing tasks and time in this fashion can help students decide how to divide their labor in a way that ensures they “put first things first.” They shouldn’t waste time doing unimportant things to deceive themselves into thinking that they’re “getting something done,” when, in reality, they’re just “keeping busy” and distracting themselves (and subtracting time) from doing the things they should be doing.

Note well!

Developing awareness about how our time is spent is more than a brainless, clerical activity. When it’s done well, it becomes an exercise in reflective thinking and values clarification—how we spend our time is a true test of what we really value.

## Developing a Time-Management Plan

*Time = Life. Therefore waste your time and waste your life, or master your time and master your life.*

—Alan Lakein, international expert on time management and author of the bestselling book *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*

Humans are creatures of habit. Routines help us organize our time and gain control of our lives. When we decide to spend our time by design, rather than leaving it to chance or accident, we take an important first step toward taking charge of our time (and our lives).

Make sure your students don’t fall for the myth that taking time to plan how they’ll spend their time is wasting time because they could spend that planning time actually working on things they need to get done. Time-management experts estimate that the amount of time we spend planning our work reduces our total work time by a factor of three, i.e., for every one unit of time we spend planning, we save three units of work time (Goldsmith, 2010; Lakein, 1973). For example, five minutes of planning time will typically save us 15 minutes of total work time, and 10 minutes of planning time will save us 30 minutes of work time. As the proverb goes, “A stitch in time saves nine.” Planning how to spend time represents the “stitch” (unit of time) that saves us nine additional stitches (units of time). Like successful chess players, successful time managers plan ahead and anticipate their upcoming moves.

By taking time to plan our tasks and time, we end up saving time in the long run because we’re left with a clearer picture of what needs to be done and the order of steps needed to get it done. This clearer sense of direction and progression reduces the likelihood that we’ll make “false starts”—starting off in the wrong (not most productive) direction. If we have no plan of attack, we run the risk of starting off on the wrong track and being forced to backtrack (and lose time).

*You’ve got to be careful if you don’t know where you’re going because you might not get there.*

—Yogi Berra, Hall of Fame baseball player



## Elements of a Comprehensive Time-Management Plan

Once your students have accepted the idea that taking time to plan their time will save them time in the long run, you're ready to help them design an effective time-management plan. Listed below are specific strategies you can share with students for creating a comprehensive, well-designed plan for managing their time.

**An effective time-management plan should include short-, mid-, and long-range goals.** For instance, a good time-management plan for the academic term should include:

1. A *long-range* goal (e.g., deadline dates for final exams, reports and papers to be completed by the end of the term);
2. A *mid-range* goal (e.g., tasks to be completed by midterm); and
3. A *short-range* goal (e.g., tasks to be completed by the next class session).

**A good time-management plan should balance work time with recreation (play) time.** Students shouldn't only plan to work; they should plan time to relax, refuel, and recharge. A time-management plan shouldn't turn us into robotic, obsessive-compulsive workaholics. Instead, it should represent a balanced blend of work and play, which includes planned activities that promote our mental and physical wellness, such as relaxation, recreation, and reflection. A good time-management plan works as a self-motivational plan when play time is scheduled to follow work time, thus allowing play activities to serve as a reward for completing our work activities.

An effective time-management plan also functions as an effective stress-management plan. It should help students stress less, learn more, and earn higher grades while reserving time for other things that are important to them, enabling them to attain and maintain balance in their lives.

*Note well!*

If our time-management plan includes the things we like to do, we're more likely to complete the things we have to do.

*From my perspective it's this: time management. It's about efficiently accomplishing the necessary things in the time you've got so that the free time you've allotted is stress free.*

—Peer leader

**A good time-management plan is one that gets transformed into an action plan.** Once we've planned the work, the next step is to work the plan. A time-management plan turns into an ongoing action plan by (1) previewing what we intend to do, (2) reviewing whether we actually did what we intended to do, and (3) closing the gap between our intentions and actions. We can begin to implement an action plan by constructing a daily to-do list, bringing that list with us as the day begins, and checking off items on the list as we get them done throughout the day. At the end of the day, the list should be reviewed to determine what got done and what still needs to be done. The uncompleted tasks then become high priorities for the following day's to-do list.

If, at the end of the day, students find many unchecked items still remaining on their daily to-do lists, this could mean that they're spreading themselves too thin by trying to do too many things in a day. They may need to be more realistic about the number of items they can accomplish per day by shortening their daily

to-do lists. Not being able to complete many of their intended daily tasks may also mean that they need to modify their time-management plans by adding more work time or subtracting activities that are drawing time and attention away from their work (e.g., responding to phone calls and text messages during their planned work times).

Encourage students to reflect on their daily to-do lists, and engage them in conversations about what they may have to sacrifice in order to achieve their daily goals (e.g., TV, video games, Facebook).

### Reflection 5.5

At the end of a typical day, how often do you find that you accomplished most of the important tasks you hoped to accomplish? (Circle one.)

never      seldom      often      almost always

If you circled "often" or "almost always," what personal strategies could you share with other students to help them do the same?

*Some people regard discipline as a chore. For me, it is a kind of order that sets me free to fly.*

—Julie Andrews, Academy Award-winning English actress who starred in the Broadway musicals *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*

**A good time-management plan should have some flexibility.** Students often get immediately turned off by the idea of developing a schedule and planning their time because they feel it over-structures their lives and limits their freedom. It's only natural for us to prize our personal freedom and resist anything that appears to restrict it in any way. However, a good time-management plan shouldn't limit freedom; it should preserve it by helping us get done what we must do to ensure that we have "free time" for us to do what we want and like to do.

Note  
well!

When you create a personal time-management plan, it's your plan—you own it and you run it. It shouldn't run you.

An effective time-management plan shouldn't be rigid; it should be malleable enough to allow us to occasionally bend it (without breaking it). Just as work commitments and family responsibilities can crop up unexpectedly, so, too, can opportunities for fun and enjoyable activities. Our time-management plan should allow us the freedom to occasionally modify our schedule so that we can take advantage of these spontaneous opportunities and experiences. However, we should plan to make up the work time that we traded for play time. In other words, we can "trade" work time for play time, but we shouldn't "steal" it. If we cancel work we planned to do, we should re-plan to do it at another time.

## Box 5.2

## Summary of Top Time-Management Tips to Share with Students

- Carry a portable device that can accurately and instantly tell you the time and date (e.g., watch, cell phone, or PDA). You can't even begin to manage time if you don't know what time it is, and you can't plan ahead if you don't know what date it is. (Try setting the time on your watch or cell phone slightly ahead of the actual time to help ensure that you arrive to class, work, or meetings on time.)
- Use an *organizational system* that helps you pull together, track, and follow through on your commitments (e.g., calendar, planner, and daily to-do lists).
- Carry a *small calendar, planner, or appointment book* at all times. This will enable you to record commitments and appointments made on the run during the day, as well as sudden recollections of things you need to do and creative ideas for doing them that may "pop" into your mind at unexpected times.
- Carry *portable work* with you that can be completed in any place at any time (e.g., carry material with you that you can read while sitting and waiting for appointments or transportation). This will enable you to take advantage of "dead time" during the day, "resurrect" this dead time, and transform it into "live" (productive) work time. Carrying portable work is not only a good time-management strategy, it's also a good stress-management strategy because it allows you to gain control of wait time rather than letting it control you and feeling frustrated, anxious, or bored while sitting and waiting.
- Find a partner—a time-management buddy—with whom you can discuss your daily progress and maintain commitment to your plan.

**Note:** In addition to passing on these tips to students, share and model time-management strategies that have worked well for you, and encourage your students to do the same.

Note  
well!

Time management is rooted in goal commitment. When these roots are strong, effective strategies can be learned and grow into lifelong habits.

## Helping Students Deal with Procrastination

A major enemy of effective time management is procrastination. Procrastinators don't abide by the proverb, "Why put off until tomorrow what can be done today?". In fact, their philosophy is just the opposite: "Why do today what can be put off until tomorrow?". Adopting this philosophy promotes a perpetual pattern of postponing what needs to be done until the last possible moment, forcing them to rush frantically to finish their work on time and turn in a product that's a far cry from their best work (or not turn in a finished product at all).

Research shows that 80% to 95% of college students procrastinate (Steel, 2007) and almost 50% report that they procrastinate consistently (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Procrastination is such a serious issue for college students that some campuses have opened "procrastination centers" to provide help exclusively for students experiencing problems with procrastination (Burka & Yuen, 2008). To help combat procrastination, here are five key strategies you could share with your students.

## Strategies for Preventing and Overcoming Procrastination

1. **Continue practicing effective time-management strategies.** When effective time-management practices (such as those cited in this chapter) are implemented consistently, they turn into regular habits. Research indicates that when procrastinators repeatedly practice effective time-management strategies with respect to tasks that they procrastinate on, their procrastination tendencies gradually fade and are replaced by good time-management habits (Ainslie, 1992; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994).
2. **Make the start of work as inviting or appealing as possible.** Getting started, or getting off the starting blocks, is often the major stumbling block for procrastinators. It's common for procrastinators to experience "start-up stress"—when they're about to start a task, they start to experience negative feelings about the task being unpleasant, difficult, or boring (Burka & Yuen, 2008). If your students have trouble starting their work, suggest that they may give themselves a "jump start" by ordering their work tasks in a way that allows them to start their work on tasks that they find more interesting or are more likely to succeed in. By getting started on these easier and more appealing tasks, they overcome inertia and initiate some momentum. They can then ride this initial momentum to attack other tasks they find less appealing and more daunting.

*The secret to getting ahead is getting started.*

—Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), American humorist and author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), a.k.a. "the Great American Novel."

*Did you ever dread doing something, then it turned out to take only about 20 minutes to do?*

—Conversation between two college students overheard in a coffee shop

*To eat an elephant, first cut it into small pieces.*

—Author unknown

Also, when they make some progress toward getting work done, their anxiety begins to subside, and when they encounter the work they dreaded, it often turns out not to be as difficult, boring, or time-consuming as they thought it would be. As with many experiences in life that are feared and avoided, the anticipation of the event turns out to be worse than the event itself. One study of college students who didn't start a project until just before it was due revealed that they experienced anxiety and guilt while they were procrastinating, but once they began working, these negative emotions subsided and were replaced by more positive feelings of progress and accomplishment (McCance & Pynchyl, 2003).

3. **Divide the work into manageable pieces.** Work becomes less overwhelming and stressful when it's handled in small chunks or segments. Students can conquer procrastination for large tasks by using a "divide and conquer" strategy: divide the large task into smaller, more manageable subtasks, and then attack and complete these subtasks one at a time.

Remind your students not to underestimate the power of short work sessions; they can be more effective than longer sessions because it's easier to maintain concentration and momentum for shorter periods of time. Dividing their work into short sessions will enable them to take quick jabs and poke small holes in it, reducing its overall size with each successive punch. By continuing to jab at a tall task in short strokes, students will experience the sense of satisfaction that comes from knowing that they're making progress and moving in the right direction, which reduces the pressure and anxiety associated with having to go for a big knockout punch right before the final bell (deadline).

4. **If students have difficulty maintaining or sustaining commitment to their work until it's finished,** suggest that they schedule easier and more interesting work tasks *in the middle or toward the end* of their planned work

time. While procrastinators often have difficulty starting work, they may also have difficulty continuing and completing the work they've started (Lay & Silverman, 1996). As previously mentioned, if students have trouble starting work, it might be best for them to first do tasks that they find most interesting or easiest. In contrast, if students tend to experience procrastination later in the work process, it might be better for them to take on tasks of greater interest and ease at a time later at their work session, which may serve to restore or revive their interest and energy. Also, doing the most enjoyable and easiest tasks last can provide an incentive or reward for students to complete their less enjoyable tasks first.

5. If students are close to completing a task, encourage them to “go for the kill”—urge them to finish it then and there, rather than stopping and attempting to finish it later. It's often harder to restart a task than it is to finish a task that we've already started because we've overcome the initial inertia needed to get started and we can ride the momentum we've created to finish what we started. Furthermore, finishing a task can give us a sense of *closure*—the feeling of personal accomplishment and self-satisfaction that comes from knowing that we “closed the deal.” Placing checkmarks next to completed tasks also serves as a visible form of positive reinforcement that can increase our motivation to keep going and complete the remaining tasks on our to-do list.

### Reflection 5.6

How often do you procrastinate? (Circle one.)

rarely      occasionally      frequently      consistently

If you procrastinate, what's the usual cause?

Have you developed any anti-procrastination strategies that have worked well for you that you could share with your students?

*I'm very good at starting things but often have trouble keeping a sustained effort.*

—First-year college student

## Helping Students Build Motivation and Maintain Progress toward Their Goals

Setting goals and managing time create the potential for success, but it takes motivation to turn this potential into reality by converting intention into action. The word *motivation* derives from the Latin *movere*, meaning “to move.” Thus, motivation involves overcoming inertia, initiating movement toward a goal, and maintaining that movement until a goal is reached.

Reaching a long-range or distant goal requires particularly strong motivation, perseverance, and resiliency. Listed below are strategies you can share with students to help them build a strong motivational foundation that will support and sustain their commitment to achieving their future goals.

**Encourage students to visualize reaching long-range goals.** Inspire students to visualize the goals that really matter to them and the future they want for themselves by creating mental images of future success. For example, if their goal is to achieve a college degree, they could visualize a crowd of cheering family, friends,



and faculty at their graduation and how they'll cherish this proud memory for the rest of their life. (They could add musical inspiration by playing a motivational song in their head to keep them going—e.g., “We Are the Champions” by Queen.) Ask them to imagine themselves in careers that their college degrees enabled them to enter and visualize a typical workday going something like this: they wake up in the morning and are excited about their upcoming day at work. When they're at work, time flies by, and before they know it, the day's over. When they go home that night and reflect on their day, they feel good about what they did and how well they did it.

**Advise students to put their goals in writing.** When we put our goals in writing, we're more likely to remain aware of them and remember to pursue them. Written goals can serve almost like a written contract that holds us accountable for following through on our commitments.

Encourage students to place their written goals where they can't help but see them on a daily basis (e.g., their laptop, refrigerator, or bathroom mirror). If they're constantly in sight, they'll be kept constantly in mind.

Note  
well!

The next best thing to accomplishing something that can't be accomplished right away is to write down our intention to do it.

**Encourage students to keep a record of their progress.** Research indicates that the mere act of monitoring and recording progress toward our goals can increase motivation to continue pursuing them (Locke & Latham, 2005; Matsui, Okada, & Inoshita, 1983). Keeping a regular record of personal progress increases motivation because it provides us with frequent feedback about whether we're on track and positive reinforcement for staying on track and moving toward our target (long-range goal) (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Schunk, 1995).

Encourage students to mark down their accomplishments in red on a calendar, or keep a journal of the short- and mid-range goals they've reached. These markings can serve as benchmarks, supplying them with concrete evidence of their progress. Students could also mark their progress on a chart or graph, which would provide them with a very visible display of their upward trends and patterns of progress. Suggest that they keep the chart or graph where they can see it on a daily basis and use it as an ongoing source of inspiration and motivation.

**Remind students to reward themselves for reaching milestones on the path toward their long-range goal.** Reward is already built into reaching a long-range goal because it represents the end of the trip; it lands us at our desired destination. However, short- and mid-range goals are often not self-rewarding ends in themselves because they're merely the means or steps needed to be taken to reach our long-range goal. Consequently, we need to intentionally reward ourselves for climbing the smaller stepping stones along the path to the mountain peak (ultimate goal). When your students achieve short- and mid-range goals, encourage them to check them off and reward themselves for their accomplishments (e.g., celebrate successful completion of midterms or finals by treating themselves to something they really enjoy).

Like any other behavior, persistence and perseverance through all the intermediate steps needed to reach a long-range goal is more likely to occur if it's fol-

lowed by reward (positive reinforcement). The process of setting small goals, recognizing that each stepping stone is a milestone along the path to our ultimate goal, and rewarding ourselves for successfully climbing each of these steps is a simple, but powerful self-motivational strategy. It helps us maintain momentum over an extended period of time, which is exactly what's required to reach our long-range goals.

**Urge students to capitalize on resources that can help them stay on track and moving toward their goal.** Research indicates that student success in college involves a combination of what students do for themselves (personal responsibility) and how well they capitalize on resources available to them (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Successful people are *resourceful*: they seek out and take advantage of resources to help them reach their goals. Remind and encourage students to use campus (and community) resources that can help them achieve their long-range goals (e.g., academic advising and career counseling).

**Encourage students to use their peers as a social resource for achieving their goals.** The power of social support groups for helping people achieve personal goals is well documented by research in different fields (Brissette, Cohen, & See-man, 2000; Ewell, 1997). Encourage students to ask, “Who can help me stick to my plan and complete the steps needed to reach my goal?”. Students can harness the power of social support by surrounding themselves with peers who are committed to successfully achieving their educational goals and by avoiding “toxic” people who are likely to poison their plans or dampen their dreams.

Advise them to find motivated peers with whom they can make mutually supportive “pacts” to help one another reach their goals. These mutual-support pacts may be viewed as “social contracts” signed by “co-witnesses” whose job is to help each other stay on track and moving toward their long-range goals. Studies show that making a public commitment to a goal increases our commitment to it, probably because it becomes a matter of personal pride that's seen not only through our own eyes but also through the eyes of someone else (Hollenbeck, Williams, & Klein, 1989; Locke, 2000).

**Inspire students to convert setbacks into comebacks.** After we experience a setback, our reaction to it will affect what action we subsequently take in response to it. For instance, students can react to a poor test grade by knocking themselves down with a self-putdown (“I’m a loser.”) or by building themselves back up with positive self-talk (“I’m going to learn from my mistakes on this test and rebound with a stronger performance on the next one.”).

The root of the word *failure* is *fallere*, meaning “to trip or fall,” and the root of the word *success* is *successus*, meaning “to follow or come after.” Thus, failing at something doesn’t mean we’ve been defeated; it just means we’ve stumbled and taken a spill. Success can still be achieved after the fall if we get up, don’t give up, and continue to take the succession of steps needed to successfully reach the goal. If students view poor academic performance and other setbacks (particularly those occurring early in their college experience) not as failures but as learning opportunities, they put themselves in a position to bounce back and transform their setbacks into comebacks.

It’s noteworthy that the word *problem* derives from the Greek root *proballein*, meaning “to throw forward,” which suggests that a problem is an opportunity to move ahead. You can help students take this approach to problems by having

*Develop an inner circle of close associations in which the mutual attraction is not sharing problems or needs. The mutual attraction should be values and goals.*

—Denis Waitley, former mental trainer for U.S. Olympic athletes and author of *Seeds of Greatness*

## Tale FROM THE Trenches

I gave the students a worksheet to write down their individual goals. They created academic, professional, and social goals, and they could have been short term or long term. I had them put their goals into an envelope and hand them to me. I chose this process because I would be able to have their goals with me and be able to keep up with them during meetings. We are going to have an evaluation of their goals during the middle of the term and near the end. I will be sending out emails to them to see how they are doing and always check in on them to see if they are working toward their goals.

—PEER MENTOR

*What happens is not as important as how you react to what happens.*

—Thaddeus Golas, *Lazy Man’s Guide to Enlightenment*

them reword or rephrase each problem in terms of a positive goal statement. (For example, “I’m flunking math” can be reframed as “My goal is to get a grade of C or better on the next exam to pull my overall course grade into passing territory.”)

### Reflection 5.7

What would you say is the biggest personal setback or obstacle you’ve overcome in your life?

How did you overcome it? (What action did you take to get past it or prevent it from holding you back?)

Do you think you learned something from this experience that you could share with your students to help them deal with their setbacks?

*You’ve got to think about ‘big things’ while you’re doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction.*

—Alvin Toffler, American futurologist and author who predicted the future effects of technology on our society

*Self-discipline is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought be done, whether you like it or not.*

—Thomas Henry Huxley, 19th-century English biologist

**Remind students to keep their eyes on the prize.** To be successful in the long run, we need to stay focused on the big picture—our dreams. At the same time, we need to focus on the little details—the due dates, to-do lists, and day-to-day duties that require perspiration but keep us on track and moving toward our goals. Setting meaningful life goals and steadily progressing toward them require two focus points. One involves a narrow-focus lens that allows us to focus in on the details immediately in front of us. The other is a wide-angle lens that gives us a big-picture view of what’s further ahead of us (our long-range goals). Achieving success requires alternating between these two perspectives so that we continually view our small, short-term chores and challenges (e.g., completing an assignment that’s due next week) in light of the larger, long-range picture (e.g., college graduation and a successful future).

Successful people think big but start small; they take all the small steps and diligently do all the little things that need to be done, which, in the long run, add up to a big accomplishment—achieving their long-range goal. They’re willing to tolerate short-term strain or pain for long-term gain. They maintain the self-control and self-restraint that’s needed to resist the impulse for instant gratification or the temptation to do what they feel like doing instead of what they need to do. They’re willing to sacrifice their immediate or short-sighted needs and desires to do what’s necessary to get them where they want to be in the long run.

*Note well!*

*Sometimes we’ve got to do what we have to do in order to get to do what we want to do.*

### Reflection 5.8

Think about something you do with great commitment, effort, and intensity.

Do you see ways in which you could apply the same approach to achieving your goals in college and as a peer leader?

**Provide students with motivating feedback.** Success in any endeavor requires continual assessment of the gap between our current level of performance and the performance level we need to achieve in order to reach our goals. Feedback is essential to this process because it provides students with the information they need to assess whether they're on track and moving in the direction of their ultimate goal. As a peer leader and mentor, you can help students by providing them with feedback related to the goals they've set for themselves. These goals are reference points or touchstones for the self-improvement process.

When you provide feedback to your students about their goals, keep the following six attributes of motivating feedback in mind.

**Box 5.3****Six Attributes of Motivating Feedback**

1. **Proactive**—it's delivered in the *early stages* of the goal-setting process while there's still time for students to make corrections and improvements before they veer too far off track or fall too far behind.
2. **Prompt**—it's delivered *soon after* key steps toward the goal are taken.
3. **Precise**—it focuses *exactly* on what needs to be *corrected or improved to stay on track* and overcome setbacks.
4. **Practical**—it provides suggestions for improvement that are *manageable*, targeting behaviors that can be *realistically* changed (without having to change the student's entire character).
5. **Persuasive**—it provides good reasons *why* improvement should be made, which serves to *motivate* students to take action on the feedback provided.
6. **Positive**—it begins and ends in a *warm, non-threatening* manner; it preserves students' self-esteem, recognizes their personal *accomplishments*, and reinforces their *progress*.

How can you deliver feedback that's positive yet challenging? How can you remain positive and optimistic, while at the same time being honest and realistic about things that your students need to change? One strategy for doing so is using the following “warm-cool-warm” sequence:

1. Warm (compliments)
2. Cool (challenges)
3. Warm (compliments)

Start with a positive comment (e.g., about the student's effort and progress), follow it with a challenging yet supportive suggestion (e.g., about what the student could do better), and end on a positive or optimistic note (e.g., remind the student about what he/she's doing well and express confidence that by considering your suggestions, he/she can do even better). By starting with positive feedback, a positive “first impression” is created that can defuse defensiveness and increase student receptivity to the constructive criticism that follows. Concluding the interchange on an optimistic note creates a positive “last impression” that can inspire the student to act on the feedback you've provided.

When is it hardest to stay upbeat, enthusiastic, and deliver positive feedback? When students are really “messing up”! Don't give up on students when they stumble, and don't give up as a leader when things do not go according to your hopes and plans. Keep in mind that each student's pace of development will be affected by his or her unique circumstances and degree of readiness for the college experience—academically, socially, and emotionally. Continue to challenge your students to commit to their goals and to behave in ways that are consistent

with their aspirations, but continue to do so by providing them with positive, empathetic, and effective feedback. Your leadership experiences will test your confidence and resilience; it's all about how you deal with it. Continue to believe in your students' potential to improve and continue to believe in your ability to make a difference.

### Reflection 5.9

What leadership challenges do you think will provide the strongest test of your confidence and resiliency as a peer leader?

Lastly, keep in mind that just as your students can improve their performance by receiving feedback from you, you can improve your own leadership performance by receiving feedback from them. Make it clear that you're receptive to their feedback and make the effort to seek it out. You can obtain feedback from your students through various methods, including personal conversations, short surveys, e-mails, and social networking. Use whatever methods supply you with the most honest, open, and useful feedback. Here are some open-ended questions you could use to solicit feedback from your students:

- How is this going for you?
- Is this helping you make progress on your goals?
- Is there anything I could be doing that I'm not doing?
- Do you have any needs or interests that I have not yet addressed?
- Do you have any questions of me?
- Do you have any suggestions for me?

You can share the feedback you receive with fellow student mentors and leaders, and ask them to do the same. You can begin by meeting regularly with a fellow student leader or small group of leaders you respect and trust. In these meetings, discuss your most difficult challenges and most successful practices, and ask for feedback on your own leadership self-assessment.

*Note well!*

Don't forget that a vital source of feedback for self-improvement is *YOU!* Take time to pause, reflect, assess, and use your self-assessment to continually improve your performance as a peer leader.

## Summary and Conclusion

As a peer leader and mentor, one of your roles is to inspire and challenge students to set ambitious, yet realistic goals. Studies consistently show that setting personal goals is a more effective self-motivational strategy than simply telling ourselves to "try hard" or "do our best." Achieving success begins with setting goals, and successful people set goals on a regular basis.

Remind students that setting goals and developing plans to reach them doesn't mean that those plans can never be adjusted or modified. Goals can change as students change and develop, acquire new knowledge and skills, and discover new interests and talents. Setting goals doesn't mean they are locking themselves into premature plans that limit their flexibility or options. Instead, goal setting simply supplies students with a map that (1) enables them to "see" the



future they'd like to have for themselves, (2) provides a sense of direction about how to get there, and (3) starts them moving in the right direction. More specifically, effective goal setting involves a sequence of five key steps:

1. **Awareness of self**—insight into personal interests, abilities and talents, and values.
2. **Awareness of goal options**—knowledge of different goal options available to you.
3. **Awareness of the options that best fit you**—the particular goals that are most compatible with your personal abilities, interests, values, and needs.
4. **Awareness of the process**—the major steps that must be taken in order to reach your chosen goal.
5. **Awareness of a time frame**—a timeline for completing each of the major steps toward the goal.

The acronym SMART is a popular mnemonic device (memory strategy) for recalling all the key components of a well-designed goal. A SMART goal is one that is:

**Specific**—it states precisely what the goal is and what the person will do to achieve it.

**Meaningful (and Measurable)**—the goal really matters to the person, and progress toward reaching the goal can be steadily measured or tracked.

**Actionable (or Action-Oriented)**—it identifies the concrete actions or behaviors the person will engage in to reach the goal.

**Realistic**—the goal is attainable and the person is aware of the amount of time, effort, and skill it will take to attain it, as well as obstacles likely to be encountered along the way.

**Time-Framed**—the goal has a deadline and a timeline or timetable that includes a sequence of short-range, mid-range, and long-range steps.

Goal setting gets students going, but time management is needed to get things done. Time is one of our most powerful personal resources; the better we manage it, the more likely we are to achieve our goals and gain control of our lives. Remind students that managing time effectively involves three key mental processes:

1. **Analysis**—breaking down time and becoming aware of how it's being spent;
2. **Itemization**—identifying the specific tasks that need to be accomplished and their due dates; and
3. **Prioritization**—tackling tasks in their order of importance.

Setting goals and managing time are the keys to igniting motivation, but maintaining motivation after it's been ignited requires use of effective self-motivational strategies. You can help your students maintain their motivation through such strategies as:

- Visualizing reaching their long-range goals;
- Putting their goals in writing;
- Creating a visual map of their goals;
- Keeping a record of their progress;
- Rewarding themselves for making progress toward their long-range goals;
- Converting their setbacks into comebacks by using positive self-talk and maintaining positive expectations;

- Keeping an eye on the long-term consequences of their short-term choices and decisions; and
- Providing students with motivating feedback.

Keep in mind that just as your students can improve their performance by receiving feedback from you, you can improve your own leadership performance by receiving feedback from them. Make it clear that you're receptive to their feedback and make the effort to seek it out.

Lastly, don't forget that a vital source of feedback for self-improvement is YOU! Take time to pause, reflect, assess, and use your self-assessment to continually improve your performance as a peer leader.

## **I**nternet Resources

For additional information related to the ideas discussed in this chapter, we recommend the following websites:

### *Goal Setting*

[www.siue.edu/SPIN/activity.html](http://www.siue.edu/SPIN/activity.html)

### *Self-Motivational Strategies*

[www.selfmotivationstrategies.com](http://www.selfmotivationstrategies.com)

### *Time-Management Strategies*

[www.pennstatelearning.psu.edu/resources/study-tips/time-mgt](http://www.pennstatelearning.psu.edu/resources/study-tips/time-mgt)

### *Beating Procrastination*

[www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)

## **E**xercise 5.1 *Helping Students Clarify Their Goals*

Take a moment to answer the following questions honestly. Ask your students to do the same.

1. What are my highest priorities?
2. What competing needs and priorities do I need to keep in check?
3. How will I maintain balance across different aspects of my life?
4. What am I willing or able to give up in order to achieve educational and personal success?
5. How can I maintain motivation on a day-to-day basis?
6. Whom can I collaborate with to reach my goals (and what will that collaboration involve)?

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## **E**xercise 5.2 *Prioritizing Important Life Goals*

Rank the following life goals in order of their priority for you (1 = highest; 5 = lowest):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Emotional well-being
- \_\_\_\_\_ Spiritual growth
- \_\_\_\_\_ Physical health
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_ Rewarding career

What were the primary reasons behind your first- and last-ranked choices?

Have you established any short- or mid-range goals for reaching your highest-ranked choice? If yes, what are they?  
If not, what could they be?

Ask your students to complete this exercise as well.



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**E****Exercise 5.3** *Setting Goals for Reducing the Gap between Your Ideal Future and Your Current Reality*

Think of an aspect of your life where there's a significant gap between what you'd like it to be (the ideal) and what it is (the reality). On the lines that follow, identify goals you could pursue to reduce this gap:

Long-range goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Mid-range goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Short-range goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the list below to identify strategies for reaching each of these three goals:

Long-range goal: \_\_\_\_\_

■ Actions to be taken:

■ Available resources:

■ Possible roadblocks:

■ Potential strategies for overcoming roadblocks:

Mid-range goal: \_\_\_\_\_

- Actions to be taken:

- Available resources:

- Possible roadblocks:

- Potential strategies for overcoming roadblocks:

Short-range goal: \_\_\_\_\_

- Actions to be taken:

- Available resources:

- Possible roadblocks:

- Potential strategies for overcoming roadblocks:

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## **E**xercise 5.4 *Designing a SMART Leadership Goal*

Think about a leadership goal that you'd like to reach this year, and apply the SMART method of goal setting (described on pp. 117–118) to create a plan for achieving it.

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