

ONE TIP

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DR. DALE SCHUNK

Early in my professional career I often felt frazzled and sorry for myself—“too much to do and not enough time to do it.” One day I was preparing teaching notes for a class on motivation; the topic was goal setting. I planned to discuss theory, research, and applications relevant to several points: long-term goals; subdividing them into short-goal goals; goal properties of proximity, specificity, difficulty; how perception of goal progress maintains motivation.

And then it hit me. I realized that although I taught this, I didn’t practice it! So I put down

my notes and decided to apply goal setting to my life. I needed a system of long-term goals, subdivided into shorter-term goals and further broken down by time periods. Here is the system I devised, which I still use today. It incorporates what we know about effective goal-setting motivators.

Set Long-term Goals Each August before the academic year begins I write out my major professional goals for the year. These concern research projects, writing and revising manuscripts for journals and books, new course design, and the like. I revisit this list once a month to make changes as needed (e.g., when an article or chapter is published it goes off the list). On this listing I indicate the time periods when I plan to work on each project (e.g., October-

November). When I revisit the list I update these. Time periods help me focus my time.

Set Short-Term Goals Each Sunday I preview the upcoming week and list the major tasks I hope to accomplish. Where possible I schedule these for particular days. For example, if Wednesday looks like it will be a good writing day then I plan to do the hardest writing tasks then. Each evening I write out the major tasks I want to accomplish the following day.

Assess Goal Progress To stay motivated I need to know that I’m making progress. By dividing tasks into smaller parts it is easy to gauge progress. Thus, if a chapter will have four major sections and I’ve written two of them then I know that I’m half done.

Initially I went overboard and would list as daily goals such mundane things as “go to supermarket” and “take out trash!” But I stopped doing that and simply built time into my days for taking care of daily living.

In a recent *One Tip*, Anita Woolfolk discussed time management, which goal setting works hand in hand with. Even the best goals will not be accomplished unless time is managed well.

As a consequence of using goal setting more effectively I felt much less frazzled. I still have too much to do (and complain about it) but at least now I have a plan for how to handle it. And I moved “take out trash” back onto the daily goals list because I don’t want to experience the consequences of not doing it!

One Tip is published bi-monthly by the Membership Committee of APA Division 15 (Educational Psychology). In *One Tip*, senior scholars tell their stories and share insights for junior scholars. If you would like to contribute a piece, please contact Division 15 Membership Committee Chair, Serena Shim at sshim@bsu.edu.