

APA DIVISION 15 PRESENTS

# ▶ ONE TIP

FEBRUARY 2021 ISSUE:  
"LOOKING BACK TO HELP YOU  
LOOK AHEAD"

Edited by Stephen Tonks & Rayne Sperling

By Allan Wigfield, Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland

*"If we look back on our past life we shall see that one of its most usual experiences is that we have been helped by our mistakes and injured by our most sagacious decisions."*

- Winston Churchill, 1931

Transitions are a time of reflection, and I certainly am doing so following my retirement in summer 2020. What things in my career went right? What do I wish I could do over? I hope sharing some of these reflections may help you through your own transitions. I agree with Churchill that one's mistakes often are more helpful than one's successes, and so I will start there.

## If I Could Go Back & Do It All Again:

**Believing in Oneself and Overcoming the Imposter Syndrome:** During grad school, my post-doc, and early career I suffered from the dual whammies of lacking confidence and being anxious. This occurred despite “objective” indicators that I was doing well. Obviously, this was not the best way to approach one’s work and led to a form of Imposter Syndrome: Do I really deserve to be a post-doc at Michigan? Why would Jacquie Eccles want to work with ME? This all occurred despite Jacquie’s warm welcome and our immediately burgeoning collaboration. Eventually, Bandura’s (1977) points about performance and encouragement by others (hey, eminent senior collaborators and others WANT to work with me) finally sunk in. My main regret is that it took too long. To avoid that happening to you, if there is evidence that you are doing well (acceptance into good schools/post-docs; landing a good position; having junior AND senior colleagues wanting to work with you) then use such indicators to tell yourself “Yes, I do belong here”. The sooner you do that the better!

**Forgetting the Most Important Reasons for Doing Your Work:** In his 2018 “One Tip” article Dale Schunk wrote that he taught his students about setting different kinds of goals to help them succeed yet still felt overwhelmed himself with all he had to do. He realized he was not practicing what he was teaching, and so began his own goal-setting program that he still uses!

At different times I forgot aspects of expectancy-value theory: I neglected attainment value, personal identity growth and interest in my work and focused too much on utility value/extrinsic reasons for my work. That focus and the “push” for promotions left me for a time both exhausted and somewhat disillusioned: What is the meaning of all this? I remained as department chair too long to keep the 12-month salary, even though I was burned out. I forgot the reasons why I

started in the field originally. Eventually I did rediscover my own love of learning, doing research, and teaching, and that made my work much more enjoyable again. So, occasionally ask yourself, “Why am I doing these activities”?

## Things I Got Right:

**Family-Work Balance:** I tried hard to keep a family-work balance throughout my career, especially when our kids were young. I was helped considerably in this because my wife worked part time and at home, which meant she had more time for childcare. But even during major “crunch” times I found time for family activities—coaching sports teams, school volunteering, and not working evenings and weekends, especially early on. Although there probably was a “cost” to this in publication numbers and involvement in other work activities, the family memories, and the close relationships we have, more than outweigh those costs and also contributed to my own well-being in many ways. What is your work-life balance, and if you are not happy with it, what can you change?

**It's Better than Working Alone:** Collaborating with Jacquie Eccles and our group at Michigan, and then John Guthrie and our CORI team at Maryland, remain the highlights of much of my career, Jacquie and I continue to collaborate – 40-years and going strong! More recently I developed collaborations with colleagues at German universities and also junior colleagues at UMD and other U. S. universities.

These new collaborations re-invigorated my energy for research and took my work in exciting new directions, such as our work on grit, and doing motivation intervention studies. The last few years were some of the most productive and happy of my career. Collaborations produce much better, and much more satisfying work, than going it alone. But you need to choose them wisely! For more advice on how to choose, send me an e-mail!



### ALLAN WIGFIELD, PH.D.

is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology, Distinguished Scholar-Teacher, and University Honors Faculty Fellow at the University of Maryland. His research focuses on how children's motivation develops across the school years in different areas, and also on developing interventions to improve children's motivation. Dr. Wigfield has authored more than 150 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on students' motivation and other topics.

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If you would like to contribute a piece, please contact Division 15 Membership Committee Chair, Rayne Sperling, at [rsd7@psu.edu](mailto:rsd7@psu.edu).