

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 235

CE 079 982

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 TITLE Developing an Intense Goal-Setting Portion of Student Orientation. Helping Students To Focus on Their Goals and Remain with GPLC Until Those Goals Are Achieved. Action Research Monograph.
 PUB DATE 1999-00-00
 NOTE 26p.; In: Action Research Monographs. Complete Set. Pennsylvania Action Research Network, 1998-99. A Section 353 Project of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education. A Learning from Practice Project; see CE 079 962.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Adult Basic Education; Adult Literacy; Adult Students; Aspiration; *Goal Orientation; Literacy Education; Outcomes of Education; *Program Development; *Program Effectiveness; *Student Educational Objectives; *Student Motivation; Teaching Methods; *Values Clarification
 IDENTIFIERS *Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council PA; Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh); 353 Project

ABSTRACT

The Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) conducts an urban, volunteer-based literacy tutoring program for adults that emphasizes goal setting. The council believes that students entering the literacy program should understand why they are there, what GPLC can do for them, and how they can apply themselves to get the maximum benefit from their tutoring sessions. Following interviews with 15 randomly-selected students about the council's orientation program, a new orientation segment dedicated to goal setting was developed. The new segment included more in-depth handouts and an interactive section. During the 2 months during which this segment was developed, notes were taken on students' reactions; and 37 randomly-chosen students were asked five questions each about goal setting during their initial interview as they entered the program. It was determined that although many students already had made their mind up as to what goals they should pursue, an overwhelming number of students found the handouts to be very helpful in deciding what their goals were going to be. As a result, the goal-setting portion of the orientation will be retained and emphasized, and new handouts will be added occasionally to keep the program fresh. (KC)

Action Research Monograph

PENNSYLVANIA ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK
1998-99

Monograph Title:

**Developing An Intense Goal-Setting Portion of Student Orientation:
Helping Students to Focus on Their Goals and Remain With GPLC
Until Those Goals Are Achieved**

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A Section 353 Project of the
Pennsylvania Department of Education,
Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education

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PRODUCT

“Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers”

Project Number 099-99-9010
July 1998-June 1999

Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Pennsylvania Action Research Monograph

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940's. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) is an urban, volunteer-based literacy program which concentrates on helping adults improve their reading, writing, and math skills. Being volunteer-based, we do not have scheduled classes, rather we tutor when the student is available. Ours is a goal driven program. Students entering the literacy program should understand why they are there, what GPLC can do for them, and how they can apply themselves to get the maximum benefit from their tutoring sessions. This is why the new student orientation was developed. Realizing that goal setting is extremely important to a student's success, I randomly chose 15 students to be interviewed about the contents of the orientation. The interview included questions about the handouts and their effectiveness. I then began work on a new segment dedicated to goal setting which included more in-depth handouts and even an interactive section. Over the two months that I concentrated on this effort, I kept notes on reactions from the students. With the cooperation of the neighborhood coordinators, 37 randomly chosen students were asked 5 questions about goal setting during their initial interview as they entered the program. What I found out was that although many students already had made their mind up as to what goals they should pursue, an overwhelming amount of students did find the handouts very helpful in deciding what their goals were going to be. These results have given me reason to permanently keep this portion of the orientation intact, keep it fresh by occasionally adding new handouts, and continue to stress the correlation between thoughtful goal setting and achieving one's goal.

II. PROBLEM

Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) is a non-profit adult-based literacy program which offers instruction in basic literacy skills, ABE/GED, English as a second language (ESL), workplace literacy, and family literacy. It now also offers students the services of a computer learning center where adult learners may advance their knowledge in technology. Serving the greater Pittsburgh area with one main office and eight neighborhood offices, GPLC serves its students by addressing their learning needs and teaching to their goals.

My job as Student/Tutor Support Coordinator includes delivering to prospective students a 1 and V2 hour informational orientation session about the program. During this time, I try to allay any fears and answer all questions students might have about the program. Since I began

delivering this orientation about two years ago I became concerned with two factors which I felt were intertwined. First was the time factor and second was what I felt was an increasing need to further develop an in-depth piece on goal setting to stress its importance to the students' success in the program. As I watched prospective students become increasingly fidgety or fall asleep during my presentation, I realized something had to be done. I wanted to reduce the time the orientation took, but I also wanted to insert a new piece on goal setting. What I decided to do was to develop a new segment on goal setting while combining several other parts of the orientation. In this way, I was able to include the new material without sacrificing the integrity of the rest of the presentation.

Students who come to the orientation are not automatically entered into the program. That is a decision they make when the orientation is over. By revamping the presentation, I had hoped to add enough of an upbeat attitude about goal setting and success that more students would indeed enter our program and eventually stick with it until they had accomplished all of their goals. I felt that by stressing the importance of thorough, realistic, and measurable goal setting, the students would be entering the program with their eyes wide open. This would benefit not only the student, but his/her tutor as well, as there would be a mutual understanding of what the student wanted to accomplish and why. I hoped that by realistically addressing their goals, students would concentrate more on those goals and less on the time it would take to accomplish them.

III. PLANNING

My intervention plan included writing a new goal setting piece to include in the orientation. I began in November 1998 to develop a telephone questionnaire that would ask former students their opinions about the orientation. I was anxious as to what they would have to say about the time factor and if they were using any of the handouts. I enlisted the help of some Literacy AmeriCorps members to do the phoning. I randomly choose 15 students who had previously attended the orientation. They were asked a series of 10 questions (Appendix A). While the calls were being made, I was investigating where I could get some interesting handouts pertaining to goal setting. I collected materials such as daily affirmations, materials from Laubach Literacy Action, and some things that I made up myself, until the end of the year. I unveiled my new presentation beginning with the orientations in January and decided to continue with it until the end of February. During that time, I began to collect field notes and keep a journal recording the

reactions from the students. I know each group is very different from the next and so I was anxious to compare reactions to the new segment.

It made sense to enlist the help of several Literacy AmeriCorps members to get honest answers from the former orientation attendees. Since the AmeriCorps members were not familiar with the orientation, I had to coach them about what answers to expect from the students. At the beginning of the interview, the students were assured that we would not use their names, only their answers. Only two of the 15 students did not want to participate.

My baseline was taken from the responses I got from the telephone interviews. I was concerned with the fact that maybe the students found the orientation too long. If that were the case, and I was now planning to add new material, I had to be careful as to how I delivered the rest of the presentation. Sixty-two percent of those who answered said it was not too long, so that was encouraging. Although 47% of the students felt the handouts were useful, I found out that only 24% of the students interviewed used the goal setting handouts. Because I was about to spend so much time on writing and delivering this segment, I wanted to increase this number to 50% of the students using these handouts. I knew some students would forget what was said, but if they referred to the handouts, by reading them again before making a plan or just by filling them out before their first meeting with the area coordinator, maybe it could assist them in deciding how to accomplish their goal setting plan.

My criteria for success would be the results of another shorter questionnaire (Appendix H) that the neighborhood coordinators would help me with. At the students' initial entry interview, they were asked about the goal setting portion of the orientation. For my project to be a success, I wanted to know that at least 50% of those interviewed used the handouts given to them.

My problem statement is: Will adding new handouts focusing on the goal setting segment of the orientation help 50% more prospective students decide on their goals?

IV. ACTION

I decided to add the new segment on goal setting during the first orientation presented in January and kept it in until the end of February. I began with the piece I originally used (Appendix B) which started the student to think about long- and short-term goals. At this time, I passed out pencils assuring students that this would not be collected, but rather it was for their use only. I

wanted to reinforce the idea that if they wrote something down, it might be easier to commit to and remember. At this time, I also reminded them that a goal did not have to be a big undertaking, but rather something that would make them happy with themselves when they accomplished it.

In the new segment, I spent little time on Appendix B and went right to the ladders (Appendices C and D). In case there was still some confusion, I wanted to visually represent goals with the "step by step" approach of climbing a ladder. I asked the students to look at both ladders and decide which one best represented the goals they had for themselves. As I handed them out, I assured them that it did not matter which ladder they picked, explaining that some people, at first, have fewer goals than others. I pointed out to them that the message was the same for each handout, because the approach for success, long- or short-term was handled in the same manner. It was at this point that I would get the students to get involved verbally in the presentation. By using myself as an example, I always picked the short ladder. I liked it because it was cute and because my goal of losing weight was, hopefully, a short-term one. (Talking about weight and letting the students know I had a goal too made this segment real.) Almost all of the groups laughed at this comment, so I immediately pointed to someone and asked what their goal was, reminding them that it was to be something that made them happy and feel good about themselves. This interaction got the students to think more about why they were here in the first place and everyone at every session participated in this segment. My example of going first and then involving the group seemed to loosen everyone up. It set an informal tone for the rest of the orientation.

I do read a daily affirmation and, after explaining what an affirmation is, I pointed out that once again, we have the ladder concept tied to goal setting and achieving that goal. (Appendix E) When talking about success, it's not a bad idea to discuss failure. That's where the "Don't Be Afraid to Fail" (Appendix F) handout comes in. Students should know we don't expect them to be perfect and they won't be. They need to be reminded that sometimes they can learn more from their mistakes. The last handout, (Appendix G), comes from Toni Cordell at Laubach Literacy Action. This piece came across my desk last summer and it is meant to be distributed to students. What better place to get the point of prioritizing goals across than at a session like this? I tell each group that when I read the first paragraph I almost killed myself trying to get to a phone to call this bank because I was quite sure that I could spend \$86,400 a day! At least I wanted to give it a try! (Again, humor cuts into the heavy goal setting topic and brings everything into reality.) Prioritizing

is such an important part of goal setting and this handout puts everything in perspective. I don't go over the poem in this handout. I concentrate on how Toni tells the students to prioritize their goals. This handout also gives me a chance to explain what a New Reader is and how this woman is helping others just like herself better their lives.

I had no problems presenting this new segment. Even though it was always done in the same way, depending upon the involvement of the students, it sometimes went over the time limit I had imposed on it, but the other materials got covered because I was able to incorporate them into the presentation. In this way, I felt I didn't have to compromise the integrity of the presentation, while still covering all the necessary information the students needed.

V. RESULTS

Thirteen people were contacted for the initial phone interview, some of them gave more than one answer to the question asked and I counted each answer given in the results. In the same vein, some of the students contacted did not answer some of the questions asked, so I calculated the answers from the responses I received. Some of the most important information I gleaned from this interview is represented by the following tables.

Table 1
Question #4a: Were the handouts useful?

Yes	47%
No	15%
Didn't answer	38%

It was helpful for me to know that 47% of the students felt the handouts were useful. I did concentrate on finding and/or developing handouts that were not too complicated, yet were easy to read and zeroed in on the goal setting theme. It was my intent to make sure they would be used as future resources whenever the student decided which path to follow when planning his/her goal(s).

Table 2
Question #4b: Were there too many of them?

Too many	26%
Just enough	5%
Didn't look through them yet	5%
Didn't answer	64%

Even though 26% thought there were too many handouts, I was still encouraged. We did go over each handout during the orientation, so maybe the 5% who didn't look through them meant they were going to review what we had done.

Table 3
Question #5: Which handouts have you or will you used?

How to set goals	24%
Not sure	24%
Need to go through them	24%
Computer center	9%
Used more than half of them	9%
Used all of them	9%

After getting the information on the amount of handouts, I wanted to know which handouts they used, if any at all. I was encouraged that even 24% mentioned the goal setting handouts by name. I was even encouraged to see that 9% used all of them.

Table 4
Question #2: Was the session too long?

No	62%
Yes	38%

I was anxious to know how the students perceived the length of the presentation because I certainly didn't want to increase the time with the new segment. I was delighted to find out that 62% felt the session was not too long. It's always a concern that the integrity of some material might be compromised when revising or adding a new section to the presentation. Tables 4 and 5 helped me decide that I needed to incorporate information together so as to include all the pertinent information the prospective students needed.

Table 5
Question #3: What could have been taken out to make it shorter?

Nothing	60%
Less handouts	20%
Repeated too many things	20%

I thought it was interesting that 20% of the students thought I repeated too many things. At least if they felt I repeated too many things, maybe some of the information stayed with them.

Table 6
Question #11: Please give me your overall impression of the orientation.

Everything was explained well	30%
It was helpful and informative	20%
It was too long	20%
It was not long enough	20%
I wanted more information on learning	10%

It amused me that 20% thought the presentation was too long and 20% thought it was not long enough! It's difficult sometimes to gauge how the audience will react since there are different participants each time.

The questions that were asked of the students who completed the orientation in 1999, (Appendix H), were more geared to the goal setting portion of the presentation.

Table 7

**Question #1: Sue defined goals as "something that makes you feel good about yourself."
Once you heard that, was it easier for you to decide what your goals would be?**

Yes	49%
No	12%
Already Knew	30%
A Little	5%
No Difference	4%

The results of the first question that referred to how the students decided their goals surprised me in that 30% of the 39 people interviewed already knew what they wanted to do. I did not expect that such a low percentage of students came into the program sure of their goals.

Table 8

Question #3: What about the ladders? Which one do you think best describes your goals?

Longer ladder	53%
Short ladder	47%

In Question #3, "What about the ladders? Which one do you think best describes your goals?" I asked the students about the ladders because I wanted to see if they recognized the difference between long- and short-term goals. The long ladder represented long-term goals and for some of the students, many goals to be achieved. The short ladder not only represented short-term goals, but for some, goals that could be achieved quickly. I was encouraged to see that 53% described the long ladder as representing their goals because it meant that many of the students realized that this process would take time. I hope this means they will concentrate on the goal and not on how long it will take to achieve it.

There were many answers for Question #4, "Before the orientation, what were your goals?" 37% said they wanted to get their GED. The next highest was 10% who wanted to read

and write better. There were so many answers to this question that I cannot list them all, but one thing that did surprise me was that 7% of those questioned said they had no plans for the future. This seemed to be in stark contrast to the 30% of students who responded to Question #1, (Table 7), by answering that they already knew what they wanted to do before coming to the orientation. Some other answers to this question were:

- "To get my driver's license"
- "To read the newspaper"
- "To pass the civil service test"
- "To own my own business"
- "To do math better"
- "To get new skills"
- "To improve my life"
- "To learn more and more"

Table 9

Question #5: How did Sue's presentation help you decide what goals you want to work on?

I already knew what I wanted to do	29%
It inspired me to work	16%
It confirmed that GPLC could help me	13%
It gave me confidence	13%

Question #5, "How did Sue's presentation help you decide what goals you want to work on?" helped them decide what they wanted to do and is different from the first question on goal setting. This question was asked to see if after the entire presentation the student decided on a goal, decided on another goal, or just kept the goal(s) he/she came in with. Once again, 29% of the students who responded to this question already knew what they wanted to do and were determined to do it. Five percent of the students' plans stayed the same and 5% still didn't know what their goals were.

Some of the other varied answers were:

- "Gave me confidence"
- "Helped me to think about what to improve on first"
- "The video showed me that other people have my same problem with reading."
- "Sue was honest and down to earth during the presentation."

The most important question I asked was if the handouts helped. Here are the results:

Table 10
Did you find the handouts helpful in deciding what your goals were?

Yes	91%
No	6%
Kind of	3%

Table 10 definitely let me know that my project was a success. I only wanted 50% of the students to say the handouts were helpful, so when 91% indicated this, I was elated! This had to mean that the handouts were working and it proved to me that all the time I spent choosing what I had hoped were the right ones, actually were.

Looking over the results of these questions has led me to make the decision to keep this segment in the orientation. During the presentations, I have seen students following along with me and some of them go back to the first page to write down their long- and short-term goals when that segment concluded or before they left. Before I added this in-depth segment, I noticed that students just gathered the papers together and didn't bother to review them or even write on them. I feel successful, too, because many students are coming up to me and thanking me for the presentation. This is something I never experienced before. It's gratifying to know the students appreciated what I was trying to do for them.

VI. REFLECTION

The impact on my problem has been tremendous. I feel this has been a successful project and it has enabled me to conduct the orientation in a more informal way. I've always tried to use

humor to lighten up a heavy subject like goal setting. Now, when I use humor by relating to a personal experience which involves my own goals and personal convictions, it seems to encourage student participation. I used to see students come in and sit down and not look at anybody, but since I have added the interactive part, students are staying to talk to me and, more importantly, to each other. I think this project has enabled students to understand that they are not alone and everybody has to start with a good plan.

When I started to do this portion of the presentation, I wanted participation, but I never envisioned such success. Of course, every session was different because different people attended, but each session carried a similar feeling that brought the group together. As I mentioned before, not one person balked when I asked them what their goal was. While one person was speaking, I would glance around the group and I could see people paying attention to each other and eager to tell their goal. (Some didn't just stop at one goal. Some decided to tell stories about their triumphs and failures. That was all right. It was working!) I also felt it was important that I let them know I had goals too. I have been inspired by the people who came up to me after the orientation and thanked me for something I said or told me that they feel better about themselves now because of what they heard during the presentation. Many students still leave as soon as it's over, but more and more are staying just to talk to me or to another student. More importantly, students are staying to check current addresses and phone numbers so they won't miss the important call from their area coordinator to come in for that initial interview to begin the process of entering the program. I can see a determination on their faces and I am so proud to know I have been a part in helping them plan their goals.

I look upon the orientation as a process and a work in progress. I don't ever want it to stagnate. Because I deliver it so frequently, I want to keep it fresh and alive. I want to keep looking for new and interesting materials for the prospective students. I will definitely keep this segment in the presentation, but I will also keep looking for other handouts to supplement it. I want to do more involving the students.

The more the students can participate, the more they will take away with them, and the more they will remember. Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC) is a goal oriented program that, beginning with the orientation, encourages students to take an active part in their development. With this expanded interactive segment, I am able to reinforce this idea.

Last year's project dealt with the orientation process, as this one did. Next year, I still would like to further investigate my practice with another project where I would follow those students who came in with a specific goal and find out how they are progressing and if they are achieving the original goal they set out to accomplish. If I could pursue this project, I feel the results would be as beneficial to the students as they would be to me.

Questionnaire for Former Orientation Participants

I am calling on behalf of Sue Snider, the person who presented your orientation session. She wants to improve it and feels that by asking your opinion, she can do just that. Do you have about 5 minutes to answer a few questions? May we use your answers when collecting the information from all the interviews? I want to assure you that your name will not appear anywhere. We want you to be honest. Sue can only improve the orientation if you speak your mind and give honest answers.

1. What do you remember from the orientation?
(You should get answers like goal setting, anything about one-to-one tutoring, small group tutoring, places where tutor and student meet, Fellowship group, etc.)
2. Was the session too long?
3. What could have been taken out to make it shorter?
4. Were the handouts useful? Were there too many of them?
5. Which handouts have you or will you use?

6. Was enough time spent on goal setting? Do you understand the difference between a long-term and a short-term goal?
7. How about the video? Was it useful to see how those students were helped?
8. Was the room comfortable? Could you see and hear okay?
9. Have you looked at the handbook by yourself or with someone since the orientation?
10. Do you feel you were prepared for the interview with your coordinator or the volunteer interviewer because of the material covered at the orientation?
11. Please give me your overall impression of the orientation. (You should get responses like it was too long or it was interesting, etc.)

Thank you for taking your time to talk to me. If there is anything we can do for you, please call us at 661-7323.

Sample Goal Setting Worksheet

1. Long-term goal(s)

2. Short-term goal

Short-term goal

What do you need to do to get to this goal?

Ladder of Success

Remember:

Take it:

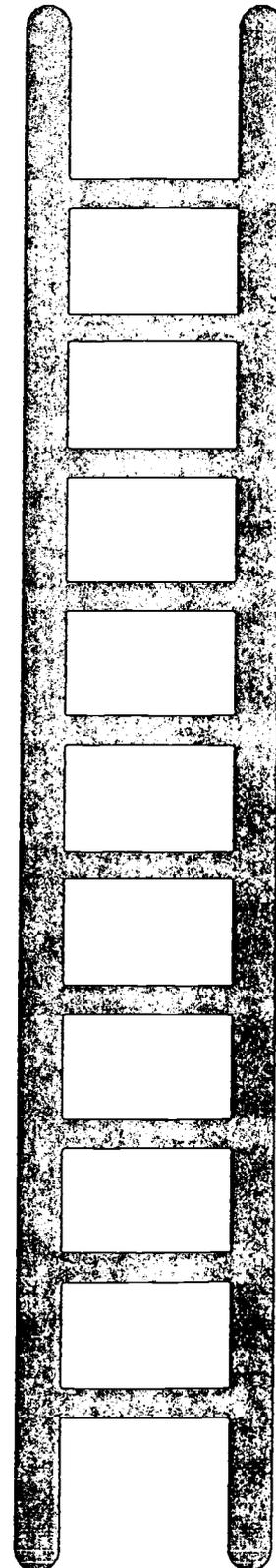
One step at a
time, one day
at a time.

Be:

reasonable
and
flexible.

Give yourself a
chance to
change and
have faith in
yourself.

Keep trying
and NEVER
give up!!



Ladder of Success

Remember:

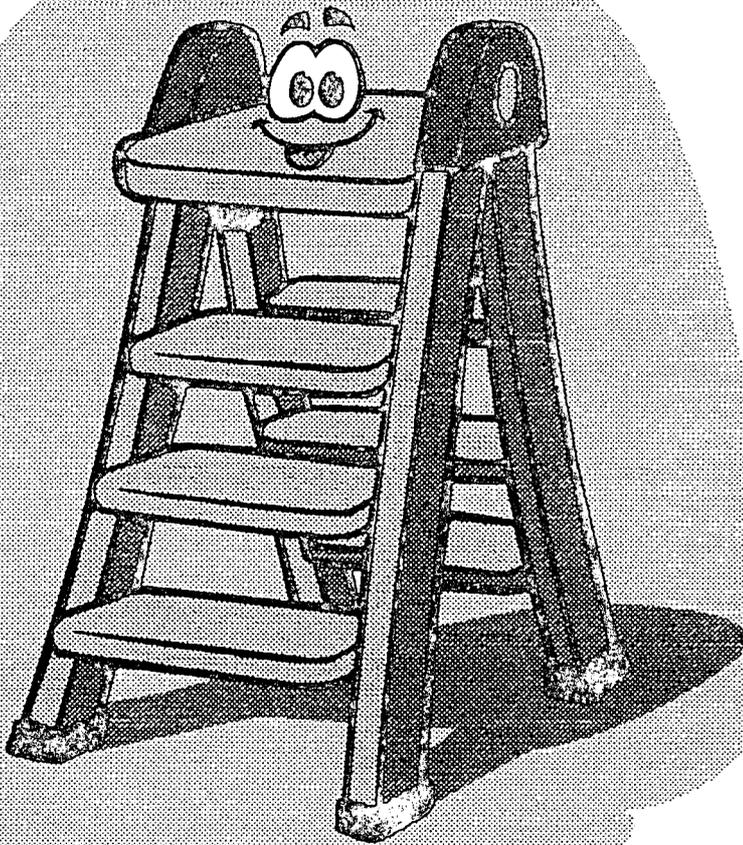
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December 27

Step after step the ladder is ascended.

—George Herbert

It's not uncommon to hold certain individuals in awe because they have turned some of our own long-held dreams into spectacular reality. We listen in amazement as a friend joyfully describes her latest triathlon. We secretly envy our co-worker's multilinguality. And we greatly admire a neighbor who has succeeded in a career we once dreamed of pursuing.

From our point of view, each of these achievements seems overwhelmingly difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, that is what has kept us from learning the new language or sport, or embarking on the new career.

But if we were to talk at length with those individuals we admire, we would find that the secret of their success is readily available. We would learn that virtually any large challenge can be broken down into a series of smaller ones. If we focus our energy on each step leading to the ultimate goal, we are likely to succeed. If, however, we focus on the overall "impossibility" of reaching our objective, we are bound to fail.

By approaching challenges step by step, just about anything we take on will become more manageable and enjoyable. We will make progress without realizing it and be amazed by our expanding capabilities.

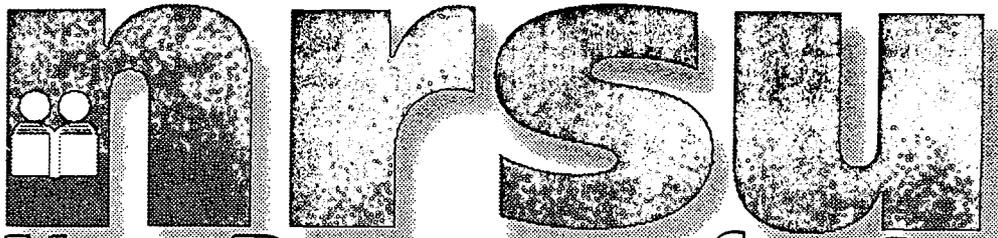
THOUGHT FOR TODAY: One step at a time, one day at a time, my goal is achievable.

From At My Best by J. B. W.

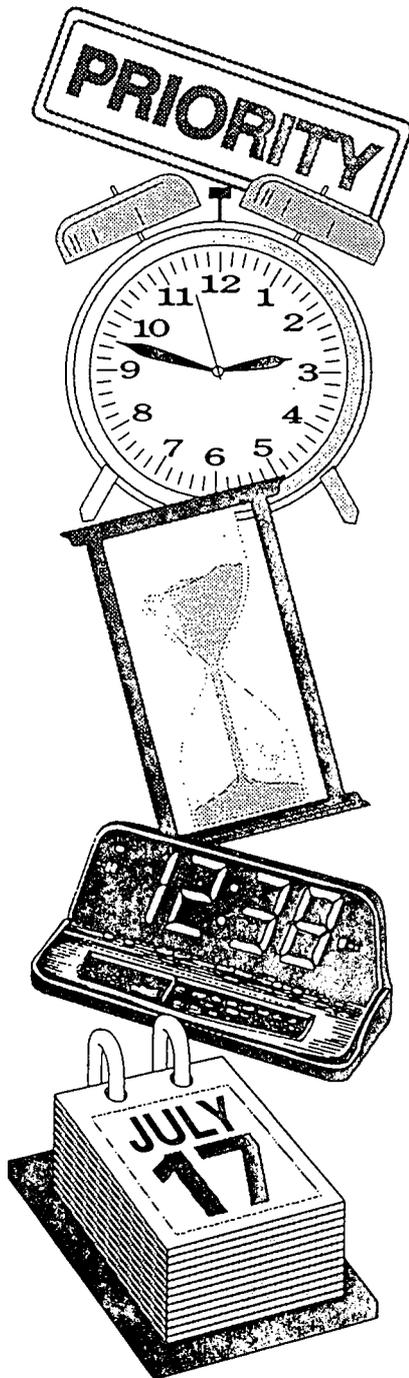
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Don't Be Afraid to Fail

- You've failed many times, although you may not remember.
- You fell down the first time you tried to walk.
- You almost drowned the first time you tried to swim, didn't you?
- Did you hit the ball the first time you swung the bat?
- Heavy hitters, the ones who hit the most home runs, also strike out a lot.
- R.H. Macy failed seven times before his store in NY caught on.
- English novelist John Creasey got 753 rejection slips before he published 564 books.
- Babe Ruth struck out 1,330 times, but also hit 714 home runs.
- **Don't worry about failure. Worry about the changes you miss when you don't even try.**



New Resources for Students' Use



Time and Time Again

by Toni Cordell, *New Reader Leadership Coordinator*

Imagine a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. This bank's rules are interesting. You must spend all of your money today. Anything you don't spend will not be there tomorrow.

What would you do if there really were a bank like that? You would draw out every cent, of course! Well, there really is a bank like that. It's called time.

Every morning you get a credit of 86,400 seconds. Every night the time you didn't use well is written off. This bank of time carries over no balance. It allows no overdrafts. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the records of the day.

How will you spend today's 86,400 seconds to get the most from your life? Each of us must choose which activities and people are the most important.

For example, my job is very important to me. But at the end of every day I race home to spend time with my husband. My heart feels best when I enjoy quality time with those I love.

Benjamin Franklin worked out a way to manage time in simple steps. The first step is to decide what goals are important to you. Next, list the goals in the order of their importance.

Here is my list of goals:

- Learn to love God.
- Love my family and friends.
- Do my job well.

- ❑ Keep healthy.
- ❑ Keep track of household tasks and family responsibilities.

What are your goals? Talk with your tutor or a friend or family member about them. Then make a list for yourself.

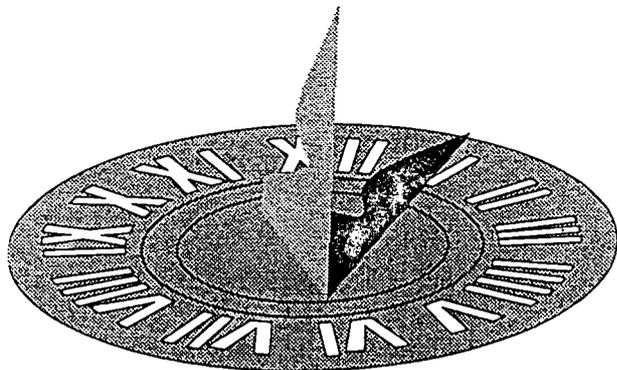
Every day, write down the things you need to do that day to meet each goal. Then list those things in three groups:

- ❑ very important (even urgent)
- ❑ important
- ❑ not very important (do if there is time)

Review your list of goals every few weeks or months. That way, you can always be sure that your daily activities reflect those goals.

You can drop or add goals. Best of all, you can check off the goals that you reach. Then it's time to celebrate!

A personal planning calendar can help you manage your time. Most office supply stores have a selection to choose from. You can also check your local library for books on time management.



The following untitled poem about time is adapted from Fran Bonardi, president of the Rotary Club of Charlottesville, Virginia.

To realize the value of ONE YEAR,

Ask a student who has failed a grade.

To realize the value of ONE MONTH,

Ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of ONE WEEK,

Ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of ONE DAY,

Ask a daily wage worker who has kids to feed.

To realize the value of ONE HOUR,

Ask two lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realize the value of ONE MINUTE,

Ask someone who has missed a train.

To realize the value of ONE SECOND,

Ask someone who has won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Treasure every moment you have!

And treasure it more because you shared it with someone special, special enough to have your time ... and remember, time waits for no one.

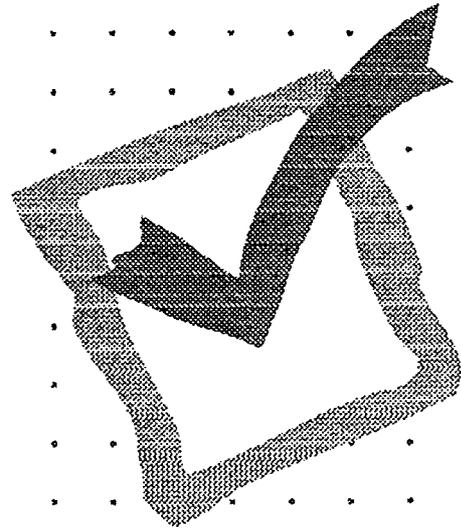
YESTERDAY IS HISTORY ...

TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY ...

TODAY IS A PRESENT ... THE PRESENT.

ENJOY YOUR GIFT!

Follow-up questions on goal setting



Please ask the following questions during the interview with your students who have completed orientations between 1/19/99 and 3/31/99. Thank you.

1. Sue defined goals as "something that makes you feel good about yourself." Once you heard that, was it easier for you to decide what your goals would be?
2. Did you find the handouts helpful in deciding what your goals were?
3. What about the ladders? Which one do you think best describes your goals? Why?
4. Before the orientation, what were your goals? (What made you decide to call GPLC?)
5. How did Sue's presentation help you decide what goals you want to work on?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Please return to Sue Snider no later than 4/2/99.



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