

Goal Setting, Planning, and Time Management

The article provides a comprehensive set of suggestions. However, to begin with, it is essential to begin with a few simple ones that you think are important for you and do not take much time. Try these for a week or two. After seeing these beneficial results, you may like to include some more.

The tragedy in human life is the unhappy pursuit of success and the inability to translate potential into performance.

We need to know what we want, success with stress and unhappiness with the conventional approach or a new approach to practicing happiness that enhances success chances. We must understand the different cause-and-effect relationships between the two.

Stephan Covey says that inside victory is essential for outside victory. He further states that you are the programmer of your destiny and must take responsibility for writing your code.

A prerequisite to goal setting, planning, and time management is joyful, positive attitude because It is the source of willpower, motivation, and discipline.

Goals are simply desires or dreams. A plan is a road map of how to get there. These are like steps in the computer algorithm. Time management is the efficient execution of the plan.

All high performers have been excellent dreamers.

What are goals, and why are those important?

Goals are targets that bring in focus, meaning, and purpose, allowing you to take control of your life. It provides motivation and improves self-confidence.

You can't hit a target you can't see; hence goals are essential.

With maturity and experience, goal modification or changes are perfectly normal. There is no need to be emotionally attached to the goals.

Challenges and failures are part of the evolution journey to make you a better person.

A Japanese proverb says that: Vision without action is a daydream, and action without vision is a nightmare.

Before we attempt to set professional and other types of goals, we must understand our Life Goals.

Life Goals:

Since being continuously joyful is what we all want, doing our best joyfully in everything we do in every moment is our life goal.

Joyfulness is an inner quality independent of external circumstances, the behavior of other persons, and the results of our actions. It is a satisfaction of always doing our best.

Practicing long-term values like love, respect, integrity, perseverance, and discipline is crucial. Many highly successful persons are not ethical and are not driven by the above-mentioned long-term values. They pay a considerable price in stress, worries, bad relationships, and bad health. On the contrary, joyful and successful persons are most ethical and long-term values-driven.

The present philosophy is to go through painful work to have transient happiness of achieving a series of milestones in life like a good rank/score in JEE/GATE/CAT/GMAT/GRE, or a good job, spouse, house, car, and so on. The milestones change, but the painful process remains.

Because of such a flawed approach, many achievers have midlife burnout. Celebrities like Andre Aggasi and Michael Phelps had depression at the peak of their careers because they lacked life balance.

The new philosophy is based upon research showing that practicing being joyful in everything we do improves chances of success.

Other Professional and Personal Goals:

For knowing your goals, self-awareness is essential. For this, we need to understand our strengths, weaknesses, passions, aspirations, fears, and frustrations. We need to ask questions to ourselves regularly and systematically write down questions and answers. One needs to be very patient during this phase. Emotional Intelligence(EI) is now considered an essential ingredient of success and intelligence.

The next step is to have an integrated view of our long-term, medium-term, and short-term goals. These all must be in sync with each other. The medium and short-term goals are just sub-goals and a part of a road map leading to the long-term goals.

Long Term Goals:

These could be for 10-15 years, then be broken down to 1-5 years. You can dream of what you would like to be after this time frame in an ideal scenario. Do not worry at this stage about how you would get there. You must do this for all areas of life like professional, health and fitness, family and social relations, and personal hobbies and spiritual.

These take a long time to evolve. And we need to be very patient and persistent. It is important to note that these can generally change with more information and maturity. Having broad-based goals is very important. One must enjoy the whole process of goal setting.

Since these take a long time to evolve, one must not wait to set medium and short-term goals that are relatively easier. The last one is the easiest. For example, a Semester study goal could be to get a certain SGPA and gain some in-depth knowledge of some courses you feel are essential.

The goal in IIT could be to understand best learning practices, academic knowledge, and personality development. It is essential to realize that CGPA opens one door, whereas the above factors continuously open many.

It is extremely important to understand that all these goals must sync with your life and personality goals. More important than what you want to achieve, you must think of what you want to be as a person. For example, in our pursuit of success or power, one may be tempted to employ various unethical shortcuts

leading to stress. Even if you don't use shortcuts, a complete focus on results, comparison, and competition will rise to stress. These are, however, against our life goal of joyfulness.

IIT Goal: To learn how best to learn, develop analytical and problem-solving capability, good academic knowledge, hands-on practical knowledge, and develop a confident and pleasant personality.

Process of Goal Setting:

SMART goal setting strategy. The goals must be specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and time-bound.

It is essential to keep a separate diary for this very important job. One can use a PC/Laptop/smartphone and have multiple copies for easy access and monitoring.

You may keep some time daily for developing or reviewing short-term plans. It is better to use weekends and holidays for medium and long-term goals. Vacations or semester breaks are best for developing long-term plans.

Take up goals in each area, one at a time. Explore multiple options for the same. This process can be confusing and daunting for beginners because of a lack of experience. Don't worry if you don't get an answer immediately. Keep on trying. You must take the help of joyful and successful seniors in this. Slowly clarity will emerge, and you will start enjoying the process.

Saying that you want to have a great job, or become rich, or do well in studies or a specific course, be slim and fit are examples of vague goals. Be specific about the type of job, salary package, position, and time frame to achieve the same. Decide what CGPA, SGPA, and specific course grades you want to achieve. Also, decide what level of knowledge you want in every course: Design, problem-solving, or just exposure. For health, decide about what level of fitness, weight you want to have in a given period.

In all this exercise, be realistic about the plans keeping in view where you are and your capabilities and constraints (like health, etc.). It is best to look for continuous, incremental improvements rather than ambitious ones. The latter invariably leads to pain.

Check motivation for each goal. Why is it important, and how much is it important. What would you feel about completing the same, and how will it impact your life.

Uncertainty in a database available for goal setting increases with the time frame. Accept this as a fact of life. Remember that imperfect plans are better than having no plans. Plans tend to get better with experience and improved wisdom.

The research was done on the following four types of persons in goal setting and eventual achievement. The first group only thought about the goals, whereas the second group also wrote down the goals. The 3rd group shared the goals with positive friends and relatives; the 4th group did all this and monitored the goal setting and progress during the execution. It was found that the results of the 4th group were the best.

Medium and Short Term Goals:

Break down the larger, long-term goals into smaller, manageable chunks. These create a road map of short-term milestones towards the larger goal. These provide complete clarity about the process, resources and efforts required. Moreover, these smaller sub-goals appear doable, improving confidence. Integrating long-term goals into medium and short-term ones allows us to check the harmony between the three.

In doing the above, monthly, weekly, daily, and hourly to-do lists get created. Completing smaller goals feels rewarding, improves confidence, and builds momentum for the process.

Timeline: One must put down strict deadlines to implement goals, which helps in strict implementation through monitoring and feedback.

Focus on Effort, not Outcome: One must make the process effort specific and not outcome specific because only the former is under your control and not the latter which depends on several other complex factors. Outcome goals are only to show what we are seriously aiming at. Otherwise, things could be too vague.

Avoid Action Paralysis: One must avoid too much goal setting and planning and minimal action. There must be a balance between the two. Don't aim to create an ideal or perfect plan. Begin with an imperfect plan, take small steps, overcome inertia, learn from experience, and plan better.

Keep Going: Challenges and obstacles are inevitable in the whole process. One must persevere, take help when necessary, relax and rest if tired, and try a different strategy if the previous one is not working.

Celebrate: Develop a habit of celebrating appropriately after the completion of goals. Even a pat on your back or putting a tick or cross against an item completed can do for smaller goals. You can celebrate with a treat, dinner, or a movie for bigger goals. Decide what works best for you. Mentioning the rewards in the plan itself is a good idea because it provides a psychological boost.

Review Performance versus Goals: On a daily/weekly/monthly basis, check the deviation of outcome from the planned one. Analyze and write comments for the possible reasons for the same and what could be done for course correction.

Major Review: After completing major goals, review the planning and execution. Check out whether the plans were too ambitious or too easy so that you can improve the planning process. Likewise, in implementation, list out the reasons for deviation so that deficiencies can be improved upon. Sometimes, one may discard some goals fully or partially.

In the process of goal setting, first set the simpler ones which you believe in. Since there is no resistance, progress is better on these. You can take up difficult ones progressively after completing the simpler ones.

Go with the flow: It is crucial to keep the balance of enjoying the process of working while keeping an eye on the goal. One may modify the goal as well if required. The idea is to be firm and yet flexible.

As mentioned earlier, attaching too many emotions to goal achievement is detrimental due to fear and stress.

Semester Planning:

It allows linking semester, monthly, weekly, and daily study plans. It ensures optimum planning and allows makeup cushion for slippages by incremental redistribution of lost hours over a longer duration. It obviates the need to panic.

The first step is finding out the total semester study effort through forecasting, which improves through experience. To begin with, it is just a rough estimate.

List all academic workload in the semester: Number of theory courses, labs, assignments, projects, etc.

For every theory course, find out the number of chapters and topics. Then, list study hours for each topic(reading, notes preparation-detailed, and one page). Consult good seniors if you need help in this.

For problem-solving, do a similar exercise for every chapter in every course. Find out the number of problems to be solved from the tutorial sheet and/or books and the average time required. For this, you must consult teachers, TAs, and seniors.

For every lab, find out the number of lab reports you have to prepare, quizzes and tests, and the time required.

For some courses, you may have no assignments (individual or group). Find out the time required for each one.

Similarly, if you have projects (group), find out your workload and the period it will come.

After getting the above total semester effort, divide it into blocks before each exam (Minors). You must remember that the last leg of the semester is very heavy due to too many completion activities coming in that period. The most common mistake students make waking up late. Instead, if you work in a planned manner, you can avoid too much accumulation of workload towards the end.

After this, divide the monthly load into weekly study requirements. Then, divide it into the daily load (weekdays and weekends, and holidays).

Now list all other activity time requirements: Relationships, meditation, exercise, sports and games, hobbies, clubs, competition, recreation, social media, phone calls/chats. Do not miss out on any activity which needs time.

Think of the minimum and the maximum time you require for each activity on a daily/weekly basis.

Availability Analysis:

For a week, write down your utilization of free time daily. It gives us an idea of good or bad habits.

Now begin to jot down occupied hours every day, including sleep, morning chores, breakfast, lunch, dinner, classes (lectures, labs, tutorials), transit time (both ways) for classes. These are primarily nonnegotiable. You may add a cushion time of one hour per day on weekdays and 3 hours on weekends or holidays for contingencies. After subtracting these hours from the total hours, we know the number of hours available for our planned activities.

Final Planning:

Now add a minimum number of hours for planned activities other than study. You can list desirable hours for some of these activities if you wish. Subtracting these from available hours tells you the total hours of study every day.

You will notice that the required study hours were decided earlier, and the available hours do not match. Now start adjusting study hours per day with available ones. If you feel comfortable with the time availability, you can go to the maximum hours in some passionate activities. But it is important to remember that you are making a conscious choice about the tradeoff between activities based on your priorities.

Be extremely careful in allocating time for activities like clubs, positions of responsibility, special relations, and competitions and events. Balance is essential in this. Value-based priority ordering helps you in this regard. It is the cornerstone of planning and time management. One must also guard against the false notion of CV enrichment by just adding many good-looking things without actually being good in these. It is better to focus on a few things to show some expertise.

Generally, the number of available study hours is lesser than the contemplated ones.

A tradeoff between different study components and courses needs to be seen. It depends on the individual comfort level for each one. All courses and topics are not equally difficult, likewise for other components like problem solving, assignments, and projects.

Multiple iterations are required for arriving at a satisfactory plan for execution. Although, this also changes with experience and contingencies.

It is essential to never violate the minimum number of hours for each component, not just academic, and even try to go towards desirable hours for each to the extent possible.

For a person used to doing things in the usual free bird fashion, this exercise may appear to be depressing and even intimidating. However, things become progressively better once you start doing it when you see the massive payoffs. It is essential to understand that you don't have to become an expert in this planning. Every incremental step in this planning and time management process always helps.

When you see fewer hours available for study components, you have to learn to be more efficient. You also understand how to juggle time between essential and not-so-important activities. Understanding this need and developing the capacity for the same are the most significant benefits that serve you lifelong.

Detailed Daily Planning:

Finally, you have to allocate the time available for a day into the different components (academic or otherwise). For academic ones, it is essential to break down activities into 15-minute block allocations. You must list specific tasks for each block and keep resources (books, notes) ready well before the commencement of that time slot.

Execution:

As the day progresses, you see the slippages in different components. Depending on the urgency and importance, one can decide which ones to include in the cushion hours.

As the week progresses, you may see accumulating slippages. Check whether it can be accommodated during the weekend cushion hours. If not, you may have to accommodate the same by re-planning the remaining days of the week.

When you see time not enough for a given planned activity, it is essential not to propagate to other time blocks; otherwise, the whole planning goes haywire. It may mean lesser time for theory study or a lesser number of problems to solve.

Handling Contingencies:

Sicknesses, unplanned home visits, or some such things are sometimes inevitable. Accommodation in cushion hours is generally not feasible. Depending on the slippages, re-planning for the remaining days of a week, weeks, or a month may be required the moment it occurs. This ability to redistribute the slippages to a longer time frame allows minimum disturbance to the daily plans without panic. This way, you always feel that things are under control, improving confidence and efficiency.

You will see that daily, weekly, or monthly plans are rarely executed perfectly; because both planning and execution are not ideal, and several things are beyond our control. However, never give up. With this approach, you remain on track by gaining valuable feedback. If you don't plan anything, things will be far more chaotic.

Making Hours Count:

Difference in Hours: Evening 8-11 and morning 4-6. In the former, you feel progressively tired towards the end of the day. In the latter, you are freshest. Noise and environmental pollution are highest in the former and least in the latter. The possibility of distraction by persons, phone calls, social media, etc., are highest in the former and least in the latter. Because of these, efficiency and concentration are best in the latter. Hence, you should experiment with swapping a few hours in the former with those in the latter. Start with just ½ an hour and increase if you like it.

Power Hours: During the daily cycle, every individual has some hours in which he/she is most energetic and efficient. For better productivity, one must identify these and use these for difficult and complex tasks. Usually, these are morning hours up to 11, afternoon hours 3-5, and evening hours 8-10.

Managing Energy Levels: Body and Mind Recharge to Improve Production Capability

Sadhguru: We study operating manuals of any gadget to use it efficiently. The human being is the most complex gadget on earth. However, we are completely unaware of how to use it most efficiently. Then how can we be efficient? A major part of the problem is that there is no operating manual. However, sages like Patanjali have given guidelines for the same. However, these are not available in a form that is simple to use by an ordinary person.

We worry about charging a mobile because we know the consequences of not charging. But do we know how best to charge ourselves? Lack of knowledge of this results in our partial charging and considerably reduced efficiency.

The study requires significant mind and brain activity which requires considerable energy and a peaceful mind. Depleting energy and stress leads to tiredness, boredom, reduced efficiency, and reduced willpower.

Healthy food and fluid intake throughout the day are essential. Avoiding junk food to the extent is also essential.

Physical exercise and yoga improve physical health, strength, stamina, and immunity. These are also excellent stress busters improving mental well-being. Foods, fluids, and exercise provide body recharge.

Meditation makes you peaceful, alert, and efficient. It provides mind recharge. Read the main articles to know more about meditation.

After every half an hour of study, take a 2-minute break. Just get up from the chair, stretch your arms and legs. Take a minute of deep breaths. And make one or two prayers or affirmations which seem appropriate for the moment. These are very good for improving the brain and mental efficiency. However, you must not use this break for your phone, laptop, and social media.

After every 2 hours of continuous study, take a 10 minutes' break. It can be used for a washroom break, checking essential calls or messages. However, you must respond to calls only if it is extremely urgent, otherwise manage with short message responses. You can do 2-3 minutes of deep breathing and a minute for prayer and affirmations.

A short nap of 15-20 minutes after lunch is extremely refreshing, but extending it beyond this makes you feel drowsy. At other times, if you feel tired, you can have 5-7 minutes of nap to feel refreshed.

Moments before sleep and waking up are crucial for setting the tone of your peaceful sleep and improving efficiency the next day. Meditation, prayers, affirmations, gratitude, positive self-talk and visualization, and remember three good things that happened in the day help a lot.

Sleep deprivation due to inadequate or improper sleep hours is very common in the younger generation. Sleeping very late is considered to be not only cool but also essential for improving output. However, the harmful effects of this pattern are not noticed by them. It results in inefficient body and mind charging and increases stress and irritability, reducing happiness and inefficiency. It also reduces immunity to ailments and diseases, the significant effects of which are seen in middle age.

Study Efficiency Tips: On the Web page, articles about how to attend classes, study, and prepare for the exam. These are very important for best integrated Time Management.

Joyful Mood-An Efficiency Game Changer:

Suppose you have read the main articles “Be Joyful to be Successful” and “Joyfulness Practice.” In that case, you will know that practicing joyfulness makes you positive, peaceful, alert, and creative, improving efficiency in thoughts and action. It also enhances body and mind health. It improves confidence,

personality, courage, and resilience. Small or big setbacks due to complex reasons can always occur. However, joyfulness practice allows you to recover quickly and become stronger and wiser. These factors are significant for time management.

Joyfulness practice reduces stress and worries. You also avoid comparison and competition, which brings more harmony with others. Then you help each other everywhere, improving efficiency.

Love and passion make the activity effortless, a master key to better productivity and success.