

BUT I WAS DOING EXTRA CREDIT?

In college, my roommate was a pharmacy major. He wanted to be top of his class, and his work ethic reflected that. He'd be up all hours of the night rummaging through biology books and had notebooks filled with numbers and equations. For all the hours he put in, I had assumed that some of the classes were a challenge and required all the extra study time.

It turns out I was wrong. One evening I encountered him in the floor lounge where he was tutoring a table full of people from his class. It turns out it was quite easy, and he was constantly reading ahead of the material and doing extra credit that was assigned.

When we got our mid-term grades, I was sure he had aced all his classes. If you can breeze through the information in some of those pharmacy courses, what could you possibly struggle within any of the others?

When I asked how he did, he was disappointed. He was getting a C in his philosophy class which would derail his plans for making the Dean's list and being top of his class.

I suggested that maybe he ask for an extra credit assignment like he had done for his biology class. He said that there were extra credit assignments but that he spent his time doing the biology ones because they were easier for him.

MORAL OF THE STORY

When we work without clear goals, we will often fall into the trap of doing what is easiest for us. Creating vague goals will lead to neglecting the things that deserve our attention and will contribute to our progress. You don't need to do the extra credit if you are already getting an "A."

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ESTABLISHING CLEAR GOALS:

There is no vision for where you want to go.

Working without defined goals means we don't even know what we are working towards. We are more likely to waste time and rely on luck than to put effort into achieving success.

There is no progress to track.

If we can't see how we are improving, we never know what needs to be corrected, changed, or is and isn't working.

Concrete plans can't be made.

If we simply state we want to do something but don't have an endpoint in place, we end up working in a disorganized manner. We don't really know if we are doing what we need to be doing to accomplish that goal because it isn't specific enough.

HOW TO GET RID OF THIS HABIT:

Step 1: Evaluate the most important areas of your life.

Family, career, finances, health, spirituality, and personal development are areas of your life that you want to establish goals for. Write down what you would like each of these areas to look like. What would your end goals be? These goals don't

have to be short term; many will require long-term efforts, but they will be able to be broken down into small action steps. These action steps will be what you will do on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

Step 2: Be SMART

You are ten times more likely to achieve your goals if you establish SMART goals (Tracy, n.d.). SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant goals that you give a time-frame for completing. These types of goals require you to be clear about the details of why you want to accomplish something and how significant achieving these goals will be in your life. Simply stating you want to own your own business or pass a class doesn't tell you what you need to do or what exactly you are striving for. Stating your desire to open your own Etsy shop selling motivation t-shirts so you can be your own boss and inspire the world tells you what you want to do and why. When you start with a clearly defined goal, you can create the appropriate action plan that will encourage you to take action.

Step 3: Focus on the things you can control.

You control your own actions and discipline. You can't control other people's actions or opinions. What often happens when we don't have clear goals in mind or an action plan to follow is we get caught up in doing the wrong things. If we can't focus on improving the skills we need to develop to move forward, we will instead waste time trying to sway someone else's opinions. The results you seek in your own personal and professional development requires you to take action on things in your control. If you want to get an 'A' on your final exam, then you need to study and not waste time trying to track down a copy of the test or suck up to the professor. Do you want to get promoted at work? Look at the skills and

experience you need to make those advancements. Simply buying your boss coffee and doughnuts every morning isn't going to prove to them that you can lead a team.