Appendix 7-C: Creating a Motivating Goal, Part 1

The following questions are intended to guide you in developing goals that are compatible with who you are and what you want.

Is your goal rooted in your own beliefs, values, and interests?

- *Beliefs*: What you accept as true or right; your strong opinion about something.
- *Value*: A strongly held belief about what is valuable, important, or acceptable.
- *Interest*: Something you enjoy doing or want to be involved with and learn more about.

Deep, personal commitment to goals is vital. Goals are meaningful only if they are rooted in your own beliefs, values, and interests.

Goals inspired by media coverage (e.g., I want to be a forensic pathologist like Dr. Temperance Brennan in *Bones*) or parental direction (e.g., my dad wants me to be a lawyer because it's the family business) can be less motivating in the long run because they are less likely to be tied to your own personal values.

Action Item: Do a gut check. Are your goals rooted in your own beliefs, values, and interests? If not, consider making adjustments so that your goals are aligned with your beliefs, values, and interests.

How is your self-efficacy (confidence) affecting your goals?

There are four sources of self-efficacy:

- *Past experiences with similar objectives*
- *Vicarious experiences*—knowing people who have had past experiences with similar objectives
- *Social persuasions*—the messages you receive from others about your competencies
- *Physiological states*—amount of sleep, quality/quantity of meals, amount of rest, degree of nervousness, etc.

Action Item: Are you developing goals only in areas that you already feel a high degree of confidence about? Push yourself to set some goals related to a least one thing for which your self-efficacy is still emerging. For example, consider achievements you admire that other people have accomplished in areas you don't have experience with. Can you set at least one goal related to these achievements you admire?

Are you focusing on things that are within your control?

- *Controllable*: Something you have the power to change if you wish to do so.
- *Uncontrollable*: Something you are unable to easily alter.

Goals that are directly under your control (*controllable*) are more likely to be achievable than goals that require others to think, feel, or act in a certain way (*uncontrollable*). For example, you can control how much time and effort you put into working to earn good grades in your classes, graduating from college, and achieving a desired career. Similarly, you can decide where to study, how long to work on an assignment, and which jobs to apply for.

You cannot, however, control whether someone will invite you to take part in an internship program, promote you, or be proud of your achievements. You should also avoid relying on luck—an incredibly uncontrollable factor—as a primary avenue to reaching your goal.

Action Item: Identify any uncontrollable elements in your goals and work to modify the goal so it focuses more on what you can control. For example, while you cannot control whether or not you are invited to participate in an internship program, you do have control over reaching out to the person in charge of the program and making a case for why you should be offered an opportunity to be part of the program.

<u>Are you pursuing the goal in order to master or learn something or in order to demonstrate what you know?</u>

- *Mastery (or learning):* Pursuing the goal in order to understand the process or the concept, for self-improvement, or for increased knowledge.

- *Performance*: Pursuing the goal strictly for the end result (e.g., getting good grades so others will think you are smart and admire you) or in order to avoid a negative consequence (e.g., looking incompetent in front of others).

While studies have found that students who have mastery goals as opposed to performance-related goals are not necessarily any smarter, they do tend to do better in school, in part because they are looking to increase knowledge and skill acquisition rather than focusing on what others think of them. Therefore, they stretch themselves further and keep trying because they know that mastery does not happen instantly—it takes time and practice.

Focusing primarily on performance goals can cause you to get discouraged more easily and become frustrated because, as discussed above, there is nothing you can do about how someone thinks, feels, or acts toward you.

Action Item: Analyze whether your goals are primarily focused on understanding the process or the concept (mastery) or more on demonstrating knowledge (performance). If they are performance based, decide whether it is most strategic to keep the performance goal and, if so, plan for how you will keep going if you face a challenge in completing that goal.

<u>How long will it take you to accomplish the goal?</u>

- *Short-term goal*: A desired objective that you plan to achieve in the near future, such as within a few days, weeks, or months.

- *Long-term goal*: A desired objective that you plan to achieve across a longer period of time, such as within a semester, a school year, a calendar year, or a few years.

- *Enabling goal:* A special kind of intermediate goal that incrementally moves you closer to achieving a long-term goal.

Long-term goals that are too distant and are not supported by short-term or enabling goals are typically less motivating. Long-term goals may feel too far into the future, or you may become overwhelmed because of how much work will need to go into achieving the goal. It can be hard to maintain motivation and focus for a challenging, long-term goal unless you are deeply committed to it and have a specific set of enabling goals.

That is why setting enabling goals can help you maintain your motivation. Enabling goals are like pit stops you might make to fill up the gas, take a rest, and eat when going on a long journey

by car. Setting goals for keeping up your GPA each semester (an enabling goal) in order to graduate on time with a specific GPA (a long-term, enabling goal) keeps you on track toward achieving your long-term career goal and gives you something measurable to work toward on a shorter term basis.

Action Item: Identify whether your goals are short-term or long-term. If a goal is short-term, does enable a long-term goal? If it is a long-term goal, does it enable another long-term goal? Try to create a shorter term, enabling goal you can pursue within the next few months to move you closer to achieving the long-term goal.