

**Juniors**  
**May 3, 2016**

**Objective:** Students are exposed to a process through which students set goals, identify obstacles to those goals, and identify steps to overcome those obstacles. This is particularly important as they start work on their EA project.

**Resources Needed for this Activity:**

- Paper copies [**3 Ways to Think About Goals Worksheet**]

**Assignment(s):**

Assignment	Standard(s)	Points	Assigned	Due
3 Way to Think About Goals	<b>CS.PS.05</b> Develop a plan to implement the selected course of action.	5	5/3/16	5/3/16

Students learn and practice a goal-setting technique that new psychological research is demonstrating helps to improve persistence toward and the attainment of goals.

**Note to advisors:** This advisory series builds upon new psychological research on self-regulation that holds tremendous promise for improving academic success and increasing college/career readiness. The following passage from an article by several of the most prominent scholars conducting this research captures that promise:

“...the present investigation suggests that adolescents can learn relatively simple self-regulations strategies that dramatically improve their ability to attain long-term academic goals. Teachers and schools may therefore consider whether their missions should extend to modeling and instructing students directly in optimal self-regulatory strategies, as well as offering structured opportunities to practice them. Much more work is needed, of course, to develop curricula around these aims. The potential benefits, particularly in terms of improving academic performance, recommend energetic efforts in this direction.”

-- Duckworth, A. L.; Grant, H.; Loew, B.; Oettingen, G. and Gollwitzer, P. (2011). Self-regulation strategies improve self-discipline in adolescents: Benefits of mental contrasting and implementation intentions. *Educational Psychology*, 31(1), 17-26. First published on: 14 September 2010.

Other sources for this advisory series include:

Duckworth, A. L., Kirby, T. A., Gollwitzer, A., & Oettingen, G. (in press)(2013). From fantasy to action: Mental contrasting with implementation intentions (MCII) improves academic performance in children. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Oettingen, G. (2012): Future thought and behavior change. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 23(1), 1-63.

**Opening: 2 minutes** - The advisor opens the session and the series by reminding students that at multiple times during their high school, they have learned about good ways to set goals and make decisions. The advisor reminds students that those tasks will be especially critical as students start EA projects and start to prepare to leave high school.

**Activity: 25 minutes** - The advisor will give students a mini-lecture that summarizes some recent research on setting good goals and then ask students to use the new knowledge to think about how each of the three groups identified in the research can impact their EA project planning process.

A group of psychologists who study how people think and behave have spent a lot of time learning about how people set goals and work toward those goals. They have learned that, in fact, the way you set goals has a big effect on whether or not you achieve them.

The goals these psychologists have studied are the kind of realistic goals we have talked about before in Ramp-Up to Readiness. The goals they have studied are not ones that are unrealistic for the people who set them, like someone who is a slow runner setting a goal of competing in the Olympics.

One of the psychologists who studies these things is named Gabriele Oettingen and she works at New York University. She has said that there are basically three ways that people think about their goals for the future.

1. The first group focuses only on the good things that could happen in the future if they reach their goals, and they do not focus on the obstacles that could keep them from achieving those goals. We will call this group the Benefits Group because they focus on the benefits of reaching a goal.
2. The second group focuses only on the problems that are in the way of achieving their goals and does not focus on the good things that reaching their goals will do for them. We will call this group the Obstacles Group because they focus on the obstacles of reaching a goal.
3. The third group focuses on both the good things that could happen if they attain their goals *and* the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving them. We will call this group the Benefits and Obstacles Group because they focus on both the benefits and the obstacles of reaching a goal.

For example, if the goal is to get an A in math, a student from the Benefits Group might focus on how getting an A in math would lead to being praised by teachers and parents and how proud he or she would feel.

A student who thinks like students in the Obstacles Groups might think only of the classmate in his or her math class that makes it hard to concentrate and how that could keep him or her from getting an A.

A student who thinks like students in the Benefits and Obstacles Group might think about both the benefits of getting an A in math (being praised by parents) and the obstacles to achieving that goal (the distracting classmate).

Studies by Oettingen and others have studied children and adults in these three groups and they have found that students who think like the ones in the Benefits and Obstacles Group are much more likely to achieve their goals.

Why do you think that is the case?

After learning about the three groups, the advisor should then ask students to discuss why they think that students in the Benefits *and* Obstacles group do better achieving their goals than students in the other two groups.

During the group's discussion of this question, the advisor should be sure that students suggest a major finding of research by Oettingen and others, which is that setting a goal and identifying obstacles to it increases the person's desire to work through the obstacles and stick to the goal.

In contrast, a person who thinks only about the benefits of a goal and doesn't consider the obstacles is more likely to abandon the goal when he or she encounters those obstacles.

Similarly, a person who only thinks about the obstacles to achieving the goal is much less likely to seriously start working toward the goal in the first place.

The advisor should pass out the worksheet and ask students to get into pairs and discuss and record how each of the groups would see each of the goals listed. The handout restates the three types of groups and then provides the following table to be completed by the pairs of students.

**How do you think each of the three groups would see the following goals?**

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Benefits Group</b>	<b>Obstacles Group</b>	<b>Benefits <i>and</i> Obstacles Group</b>
<b>Asking someone to prom</b>			
<b>Participating in a new sport or activity</b>			
<b>Getting a summer job</b>			
<b>Going to college</b>			
<b>Completing their EA project on time</b>			

**Closure: 3 minutes** – The advisor should close the session by collecting the sheets to review them and tell the students that in the next couple of advisory sessions, they will practice setting goals using the “Benefits and Obstacles” technique.