Vicki Haigh

St Brendan's Sixth Form College

Progress to success Session 1: Organisation, prioritisation & study planning

**Activity 1: The Wiseman Five**

This activity is taken from Professor Richard Wiseman’s book 59 Seconds.

It’s such a clear and straightforward way of illustrating which methods of motivating goal-setting are proven to work, and which ones are recommended even though there’s no scientific proof to support them.

***It’s so crucial to have a vision - a clear sense of what you want your grades to be and why***.

This activity will help you keep the vision alive by supporting and strengthening it during the challenging exam season to come.

Start by recording your vision for your results:

The grades I would like to achieve this summer are: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Now take Wiseman’s questionnaire. As he himself says, “Don’t spend too long thinking about each statement, and answer as honestly as possible.”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***When aiming for certain grades in my summer exams I will…*** | **Tick** |
| **Yes** | **No** |
| 1  | Make a step-by-step plan for what to do  |  |  |
| 2  | Motivate myself by focussing on a role model I admire  |  |  |
| 3  | Tell other people about my goals  |  |  |
| 4  | Visualise the bad things that will happen if I fail to achieve the grades I want  |  |  |
| 5  | Often remind myself about why I’m working hard and what my purpose is  |  |  |
| 6  | Try to suppress or ignore unhelpful temptations or thoughts  |  |  |
| 7  | Reward myself each time I work hard and make progress towards my grades  |  |  |
| 8  | Rely on my willpower  |  |  |
| 9  | Record the progress I’m making on a chart or in a journal  |  |  |
| 10  | Fantasise about how wonderful it will be if I get the grades I want  |  |  |



Once you’ve got your two scores, have a look at what Wiseman’s studies showed. He tracked 5,000 participants from around the world as they tried to achieve certain personal goals.

Here’s what he found:

“…**participants who endorsed the even numbered items in the questionnaire were unlikely to achieve their goals.**” Oh dear. However, Wiseman goes on to point out that “…a different story emerged when we examined the data from the **people using the techniques that have an odd number in the questionnaire. Each of these five tools significantly increased the likelihood of people successfully achieving their aims**.”

Now that you know about Wiseman’s findings, have a look again at the odd-numbered techniques. Use the space below to choose three that you think you can commit to, and plan out what you’re going to do.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Technique***Make a note here of three odd-numbered techniques you think you could benefit from trying* | **How and when?***Make a note here of how you’re going to begin the process, and commit to a time and date to force yourself to do it!* |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Activity 2: Now vs Most**

This activity is taken from Nir Eyal a journalist and author who has studied and then written books on forming healthy habits and becoming indistractible.

The following activity seeks to help us look at all the things we want to do now and the impact these things may, or may not, be having on us achieving what we want the most.

**Step 1:** Write down all the things in life (be it now or later in life) that you want the most

|  |
| --- |
| **What you want most** |
|  |

**Step 2:** Now, write down all the things that you want now

**Step 3:** Assess these activities and give them regularity and damage scores….

**Step 4:** Multiply regularity x damage and calculate the total score

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What you want now** | **Regularity** | **Damage** | **Score** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

***Activities that score 6 or more present a challenge for you.*** You do them reasonably regularly, and they have a negative effect***.***

***These are the ones you need to take a closer look at and decide how you might begin to reduce their impact on you achieving what you want the most***

**Activity 3: The Energy Line**

Many students feel overwhelmed by the amount they have to do.

Some keep lists – scribbling down jobs and crossing them off when they’re done. And lists are good – they help you keep on top of what it is you’ve got to do. The drawback of a list is – it doesn’t tell you what to do first. A better tool to use for prioritising tasks is this one.

An energy line beats a to-do list any day of the week. It helps you put things in order according to how much effort you need to give them. Put things on the left hand side – ‘high’ or ‘extreme’ – if you need to work like mad on them. Put them on the right if you can kick back and leave it a bit. Attach dates for submission and you’re really getting there. Put the jobs on post-it notes and move them around, taking them off altogether when they’re done.



**Key advice:**

1. Make sure every task on every post-it begins with a verb – a doing word – like, ‘finish’, ‘write’, ‘speak to’, ‘research’, ‘find out about’, ‘do’. This way, you’ll never forget the action you need to take.
2. If there’s a task you’re dreading on one of your post-its, tear it up and bin it. Replace it with three post-its, breaking the task down until it seems more do-able. If three still feels horrible, try four or five.
3. 3. Try restricting the number of tasks you can put in each column. Extreme should only have a max of 2 jobs in it. High = 4 jobs. Medium = 8 jobs. Low = 4, and idle = 2.

On the next page you have a full page table. This will allow you to have a go in class and then experiment with using it over the next week to see if it has positive impact on your workflow and productivity.

5

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Extreme*** | ***High*** | ***Medium*** | ***Low*** | ***Idle*** |
| **2** | **4** | **8** | **4** | **2** |

6

**Activity 4: The bottom left (prioritisation grid)**

Sometimes the number of jobs you have to do is overwhelming. Teachers are making demands from all angles and it’s difficult to know where to start. As we know from last week, the trouble with listing jobs is that a list doesn’t allow you to see the bigger picture; you can’t assess the progress of whole projects, you can only pick off small, individual tasks.

Using a matrix or a grid helps you assess where entire subjects are up to. And once you’ve got a good sense of how an entire subject is going, you can use your time much more effectively, targeting your energy where it’s most needed.

**Step 1: Pick one of your subjects**

**Step 2: Put every topic you study in this subject onto this grid (considering the level of enjoyment and current understanding):**

**Enjoying a lot**

**Understanding well**

**Not understanding**

**Not enjoying**

Once you’ve made these decisions and placed these topics as dots or crosses on the grid, make notes under each dot explaining the reasons why you’ve positioned it there. Then, make a note **of one task you could do that will push the dot further right, and one task you could do which will push the dot further upwards**.

Good prioritisation means knowing why you’re doing what you’re doing – this task will help!

7

**Activity 5: Becoming indistractable**

Lecturer and consultant Nir Eyal has written a book, ‘Indistractable’, in which he explores why it is we find our lives controlled by tech giants thousands of miles away even when we have something important to do right in front of us. Often our time slips away in a haze of checking social media, sending text messages and looking at cat videos… and before we know it, we’ve spent two hours half-concentrating on something we could have finished in thirty minutes if we’d only been fully focussed.

We’ve found that for many students, the key to **increasing levels of effort** is **decreasing levels of distraction**.

Eyal suggests something we’ve found really useful. He argues we should recognise that discomfort (ie something feeling hard or boring) precedes distraction – so we need to be ready for it. We shouldn’t sit down to do an hour’s hard work without first admitting, “I’m going to feel uncomfortable and then I’ll look for distractions. I need to be ready.”

Once we’ve admitted this to ourselves, ***we can anticipate distraction.***

Where might it come from?

Eyal argues we need to keep our eyes on two places: the external triggers in the environment around us and the internal triggers we feel inside ourselves. Here are some examples:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***External triggers*** | ***Internal triggers*** |
| • Phone alerts for text messages, updates, likes, new videos… • The behaviour of those around you – people coming to chat, ask questions • TV in the background • Radio stations, music… **Others?*** **Nmfm**
* **n**
 | • Hunger • Thirst • Loneliness • Boredom • Insecurity • Negative self-talk (“What’s the point? Why do I even have to do it? This task is stupid!”) **Others?*** Bmnghm
 |
| ***A possible solution*** | ***A possible solution*** |
| Use ‘indistractable spaces’ | Use ‘indistractable routines’ |

8

***Indistractable spaces***

One of the solutions to our external triggers is to design indistractable spaces. These are spaces that are quiet and calm – spaces that promote concentration and feature none of the devices or people we associate with distraction.

**TASK: On your table, design or discover an indistractable space.**

* What might it look like?
* What might it contain?
* Where might it be?
* When might it be at its best for you?

Many of the most successful students we’ve worked with have ‘airplane settings’ as a feature of their indistractable space.

***Indistractable routines***

Eyal argues most internal triggers are sudden urges to do something else, and that these urges typically pass within ten minutes. Indistractable routines help with this.

**TASK: Design a study period, with breaks, that will maximise your chances of concentrating for the full period.**

* How long would it be, and how would the breaks work? (Twenty minutes of work with a five minute break? Thirty minutes on, then fifteen off?)
* Think about chunking the session so that you move through phases. (Could you do fifteen minutes note-taking then a fifteen minute exam question? Or twenty minutes preparation for a ten-minute test?)
* Finally, consider the rewards that might come with successful completion. (A ten-minute check of social? A walk and a chat? A cup of coffee?)

***Combining the Two***

Once you’ve got your indistractable space and your indistractable routine, put the two together.

**THIS WEEKS TASK** Schedule a study session for some time in the next day or two, and try it out.

You never know – it might mean you get way more done in less time!

