

Responsibility: Older Students

You are more likely to have the future you want if you start making goals and working toward them now.

You probably already have some goals for your future floating around in your mind. For example:

- I want to earn a lot of money
- I want to live in a place I love
- I'd like to fall in love and get married
- I'm going to be driving a Bugatti!
- I think I want to have kids
- I want to have a job that I enjoy

I find that “thinking about the future” often starts out with my daydreams. Identifying some goals like these is an important first step toward getting where you'd like to be. The second step is turning your abstract goals into “SMART” goals. “SMART” is an acronym that stands for:

Specific

Measureable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-bound

Please watch this 4 minute video to learn more:

[How to set SMART goals](#)

Let's practice this concept by turning the abstract future goal of “**I want to earn a lot of money**” into a SMART goal.

SPECIFIC: Earning a lot of money starts with getting a good job. What are three jobs that appeal to you that pay well? What training or education is needed to enter into this field?

MEASURABLE: How much money do you consider to be “a lot of money”?

ACHIEVABLE: Did you define “a lot of money” as \$500,000 per year? That would mean you want to earn more than 99% of the population. What is a more realistic number?

RELEVANT: How does your income level impact your larger goals? For example, do you hope your income will increase your happiness? Decrease your stress? Allow you to take care of a large family?

TIME-BOUND: By what date would you like to be earning this amount of money? Most people don't begin their careers at the top of the pay scale.

Your SMART goal might be something like this: "I want to obtain a job with a starting pay of at least \$50,000. This salary would provide a living wage so I won't be constantly worrying about money. The three career options I've identified that meet this goal are plumber, general contractor, and electrician. I would like to begin my training immediately after high school."

A final note: a critical component of reaching any goal is to break it down into small pieces, and to reward yourself for progress along the way. Here's my shameless self-disclosure example:

I used to be about 5-10 minutes late to *everything*. I knew this drove the people around me crazy. Some people took it as a sign of disrespect, and this made me feel guilty.

I took a psychology class on behaviorism one fall, and I learned how important rewards and consequences are in shaping behavior. For example, if you want to teach your dog to go outside to go to the bathroom, you have two main ways to teach him:

1. Reward him when he does what you want him to do. You could tell him what a good dog he is or give him a treat when he successfully goes outside.
2. Punish him when he has an "accident" in the house. Examples of punishment include scolding him or (gulp) spanking him.

Whether you're dealing with a dog or a human, rewards **always** work better than punishment.

Our professor told us that our final assignment was to use the behavioral techniques we'd learned to change something we didn't like about ourselves. I wanted to stop being late. I came up with a plan to reward myself when I hit my target behavior. Every time I was on time to a class or to meet up with someone, I gave myself a piece of my favorite cinnamon gum. (Yes, I know I could have had gum whenever I wanted, but I enjoyed it more when I earned it). Once I'd been on time for five events, I gave myself the bigger reward of frozen yogurt. I celebrated my success with chocolate and peanut butter cups.

I was skeptical about the assignment, but it honestly changed my lateness pattern permanently. I'll spare you all of the technical details, but the point is that **you need to reward yourself for your own good behavior if you want the good behavior to continue**. I know that the idea of rewarding yourself sounds weird, but it works. If you struggle with completing assignments, for example, try giving yourself 30 minutes of video game time after each successfully completed task. If your goal is to get good grades this semester, you could give yourself a small reward each time you get 80% or

better on an assignment (I recommend cinnamon gum, but maybe your thing is kombucha. I'll try not to judge).

If you set up a reward system for yourself and it feels like it isn't working, it probably needs to be adjusted. Working with a therapist who specializes in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can help. You already have access to free counseling services through Forest Charter's Counseling Department! Please call/ text me (Emily) at (530)559-0101, or email me at egallup@forestcharter.com.

ASSIGNMENT: What is something you'd like to accomplish this year? Turn this idea into a SMART goal. How can you reward yourself for progress you're making along the way toward your goal?