



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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The ABCs of Student Goal Setting

Frequently, students have asked me to help them construct a career plan or even serve as a career mentor. I am aware that career planning requires students to set clear, measurable, achievable goals; and for many students, this would be a new experience. Hence, the time required to provide this help could pose a major logistical problem.

With the amount of material to cover in classes these days, periods do not allow much creative time for developing individual career plans. Class periods or advisement time, of an hour or less, limit the amount of time to complete a task as definitively creative and typically unique as designing a set of career goals for a student or even a class full of freshman business students—where career planning fits appropriately. (It works in other courses, too!)

Furthermore, the creative task of career planning can induce paralysis on the part of a student who fears failure or lacks self confidence. The less one knows about the future, the more one fears the goal setting activity; the deeper the fear, the stronger the reluctance to set goals. It's what I call *Quentin's Condition*. It can be overcome by allowing everybody in the class to get involved!

While the idea of getting everyone involved simultaneously appears unwieldy, I have found that applying the technique of ABC goal setting makes the activity possible, even with an overcrowded schedule. Though the process sounds euphemistically as simple as ABC, it requires some preparation on the part of the instructor prior to class in case the *Cioffi Syndrome* develops—that's where everybody in the class contracts *Quentin's Condition*, and the instructor must initiate the ABC process by priming the pump with suggested career alternatives.

The Process

Usually a short discussion about jobs in today's explosive service sector will serve as a catalyst to drive the ABC process. First, you might list a few service industries and ask students to volunteer names/titles of "known" jobs. For instance, hospitality services, business and financial services, health services, social or governmental services, amusement and recreation

services, communication, transportation, and public utilities are areas where job growth exists. Have students avoid the McJob services. Those jobs customarily pay low at entry-level, and you want students to think about a college education moving them beyond low-paying, entry-level jobs. The students should not have too much difficulty thinking of jobs, but come prepared with the U.S. Department of Labor *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, just in case.

Next, ask the students to provide you with (1) a short-range, two-year goal, and (2) a long-range, 10-year goal linked, preferably, but not necessarily, to developing a career. [The goal statements should be made anonymously; more students are likely to respond.]

If you have trouble getting students to think of career goals that appeal to them, try using *career anchors* or *self-concepts* that guide people's careers and that provide meaningful, personal standards for career success. Edgar Schein (1978) specifies five *career anchors*: technical competence, managerial skills requiring analysis and interpersonal relations, long-term job security, autonomy or independence on a job, and creative accomplishment and self-expression through entrepreneurial ownership. Using *self-concepts* gets students to think in terms of their lives: family and personal goals, business and job goals, or self-improvement goals. Using goals included in the course syllabus is effective, as well. Most students can link themselves to a career anchor, background experience, and/or a course goal.

Next, list all of the short-range goals on one side of the board and the long-range goals on the other. Have students recommend three or more measurable objectives for, or clearly identifiable paths to, each goal: e.g., get A's in chemistry and algebra, work in a drugstore, get a 3.5 overall GPA to get into pharmacy school. Another set of measurable objectives for the goal of, for example, Assistant Store Manager, might include work experience, two years of college, respectable references, interview skills, leadership training, and a good resumé. Each of these objectives could have objectives of their own. For example, the last objective might include: no job-hopping, documented self-employment, or contrac-



tual work for periods in the career that show no relevant employment.

Then have the students rank each objective, using the following criteria: "A"—absolutely vital to the attainment of the goal; "B"—better than nothing; or "C"—could do without the objective in order to achieve the goal. (The students usually have to start with the A's or C's prior to determining the B-level objectives.)

Have all the students help with the ranking process. In this way, the anonymous author of the goal receives the benefits of others' viewpoints about the career path.

A conscientiously created set of objectives offers the student the opportunity to see how information from the course may contribute to personal goal achievement. Career planning also reduces ambiguity—which offsets anxiety or *Quentin's Condition*, clarifies course expectations, and strengthens student commitment.

Even with limited instructional or advisement time, goal setting is a management process that can be accomplished in one class time. It works especially well for students at the beginning of the term when you discuss class policy and communicate course goals. It also fills the time on the first day with something that most students find interesting *and* personal. Effective goal setting in a class full of students lusting for the right direction in life can be accomplished as quickly as ABC.

Reference: Schein, W. (1978). *Career Dynamics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

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Celebrate!

Preliminary programs for NISOD's International Conference on Teaching Excellence and Conference of Administrators are available and can be obtained by writing or calling the NISOD office.

Plan to attend the celebration on May 20-23 in Austin!

Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

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