



Set personal, academic, and career goals. Keep your expectations high.

It is today that we create the world of the future.

— Eleanor Roosevelt —

When seventy-one adults with specific learning disabilities who had achieved success in their careers were interviewed, researchers found patterns to their success (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1992). The success factors were divided into two categories:

- internal decisions
- external manifestations

Successful adults exhibited a powerful *desire to succeed* and were *goal-oriented*. A strong motivator was a desire to gain control of their lives. They recognized that their disabilities presented them with significant challenges that require determination and hard work to overcome.

Adults can play important roles in helping young people with disabilities set their goals and *keep their expectations high*. As pointed out by a special education teacher who has Dyslexia:

A combination of people and events has helped me maintain high standards. This all started during the summer months when my mother and neighbor friend pushed me to improve my academic skills. At the time it wasn't high standards that I was working for but rather escaping embarrassment. I wanted no one to know I had a disability and would

have done most anything to hide it. These summer study sessions provided a stepping stone for future success in high school and college. Success builds itself. This was my start to expecting to do well in school.



Dreaming has a bad reputation because it's associated with doing nothing rather than seen as an important part of a process. For an individual, dreaming can serve the same function as brainstorming serves for a group—getting creative ideas on the table without dismissing them too quickly.

Adults sometimes worry about the “unrealistic” dreams of young people with disabilities, perhaps because of their desire to protect them from failure. Once, I was having lunch with a second-grader whom I was teaching to use a computer. He has no



use of his arms and legs as a result of a birth defect and uses his mouth alone to control the computer. Someone at our table asked the standard kid question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Without hesitation, he said, “A fireman.” The adults were noticeably silent. I asked why he wanted to be a fireman. He responded in the I-can’t-believe-how-dumb-adults-are way that only kids know how to do: “Because I want to put out fires.” The next day one of the women who had been at the table approached me privately to say, “Wasn’t that sad when he said he wanted to be a fireman?” I asked what she meant and she said, “Because, obviously, he will never be one.” I said, “Most kids who want to be firemen don’t become firemen—he’s just like the rest of them.” The only difference is that we adults get more concerned when children with disabilities dream of things that may not come to pass than we do when children without disabilities do the same thing. My little friend and I did talk about this topic again—several times. He concluded, among other things, that the fire engine would need to be wheelchair-accessible and someone would need to help him hold the hose. Finally, he decided that all of his accommodations would take away a lot of the fun of being a fireman. By

that time he learned that there was the job of dispatcher—he would do that! (Another dream that he did not ultimately pursue, even though this job was entirely within his reach.)

The acts of dreaming and then thinking through the steps to reaching that dream are key to leading a fulfilling life. All children, including those with disabilities, need to dream—dream big.

Completing the following online activities will help young people:

- set personal, academic, and career goals;
- plan for success; and
- keep their expectations high.

The electronic mentoring community administrator can select appropriate messages from the following examples and send the *E-Mentor Tip* messages to the mentors only and the *E-Community Activity* messages to the entire online mentoring community. Use these examples to stimulate other ideas for online discussions. It is desirable that, ultimately, most discussion topics come from the mentors and protégés.





Mentor Tip: Goals

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on goals

You can help young people set and reach goals. Consider the following recommendations from successful people with disabilities:

- If a goal can't be reached, help the child modify the goal in a way that makes it more attainable. (adult with a mobility impairment)
- One of the main reasons people do not set high expectations is fear of failure. In my opinion, fear is more "disabling" than any other disability. To address this, adults can start by setting achievable goals that are not long-term. The more success is experienced, the higher or longer the adults should help the young person set the next goal. Build on each success and make each goal a little higher. Think of it as a metaphorical high jump. You cannot set the bar too high in the beginning or you just set yourself up for failure. (adult with hearing and mobility impairments)
- The first is not to focus on the disability at all. I'm certain that being mainstreamed all of my life kept me in touch with what other minds, disabled and non-, knew. The second is almost Zen-like. Let the young person find the path they want to follow. Everyone has talents. When this occurs, do your utmost to make opportunities for success available. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- Don't discourage them with your own doubts. Believe in them, and know that they can do it, even if it takes extra time. Don't try to do stuff for us that you know we should do for ourselves. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- Don't stop young people from what they want to achieve, but support them and definitely be there with them. Help them along the way. When I water-skied and rock climbed, my husband was right there beside me....and just as concerned as everyone else, but he encouraged me. I think encouragement is key, and supporting young people is very important. (college student who had a stroke)



Mentor Tip: Goal Setting

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on goal setting

In the following statements successful people with disabilities share how they have set goals and developed high expectations for themselves. These quotations may serve to prepare you for helping teens set high yet achievable goals for themselves.

- As for personal goals, I had a saying after I became disabled: "Once I am able to water-ski again, I'll know I can do anything, because water-skiing takes strength, endurance, and balance, three things that I lacked. When I can water-ski, I'll know I have these three things again." Well, I am proud to say that this past summer I not only water-skied again, but I got up on my first try!!! So, although reality says that I may not be capable of doing ANYTHING, I know that I can accomplish a lot more now that I came up on the skis! (college student who had a stroke)
- I'm just stubborn and I refuse to lower my expectations. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- Very early on, I became the stubborn guy I am today. "Can't" wasn't in my vocabulary, which was helped by parents who offered me opportunities to do most of the things everyone else did and encouraged me to set high standards. By now, I realize that everyone has a path in life that their unique set of talents and lack thereof give them. I will never be mistaken for an athlete. However, knowing what talents I do have, I press myself to be the best historian/philosopher/writer that I can be. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- I am still in the process of learning to "stretch," but I start by identifying what I can already do—what I am comfortable doing and feel good at. Then I say to myself (sometimes in writing), I can do more. I can do better; what is it BEYOND what I already can do that I want to be able to do? Then I write down goals and make efforts to "stretch" myself. (adult with hearing and mobility impairments)



E-Community Activity: Setting Goals

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Setting goals

Successful people set high yet achievable goals for themselves. What advice would you give to parents, teachers, and mentors as they try to help young people with disabilities set goals and keep their expectations high?



Mentor Tip: Promoting High Expectations

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Promoting high expectations

Sometimes students with disabilities and those who work with them set academic and career goals too low. Sometimes this is because of their lack of knowledge of empowering tools that can be used by people with disabilities in careers in which they have been historically underrepresented.

For more information about the accessibility of careers for people with disabilities, consult the AccessCAREERS searchable Knowledge Base and related resources at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Careers/>.

For a better understanding of tools and strategies that help people with disabilities pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, consult the AccessSTEM searchable Knowledge Base and related resources at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Stem/>.



Mentor Tip: Getting Help with Setting Goals

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on getting help with setting goals

In my next message to the electronic community I will ask members to share experiences about setting high standards for themselves. Please share your experiences. To stimulate ideas, consider the following statements made by successful people with disabilities.

- My parents....taught me never to say "I can't" at anything I try. That's why I'm where I am and who I am today. (high school student with a mobility impairment)
- My mobility teacher made me confident in my ability to learn, which has helped me maintain high expectations. (college student who is blind)
- My parents actively sought help for my hearing impairment in the forms of speech therapists, audiologists, and teachers to make sure that I had an equal chance in public schools. (college student who is deaf)
- I was not treated differently than my brother and sister in any way because I could not see. They expected me to perform as well as I would have if I could see. This did not just include academic performance; it included everything, such as personal grooming and communication skills. (computer scientist who is blind)
- Three factors were of primary importance in setting my internal standards for performance and achievement.
 1. My mother always thought that I was a little better than most at whatever I undertook, even when she was wrong. Her attitude taught me that I could undertake anything that I was willing to set my mind to, even when I was mediocre. In school, every time I got lazy and did poor work, I got told that I was working "way below my abilities."
 2. I was very competitive, for grades in school and in the athletic activity of my choosing—fencing.

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Mentor Tip: Getting Help with Setting Goals (continued)

3. A friend of mine who I met fencing had polio when he was three years old and had severe motor loss in both legs, but he still fenced, making up for his limited mobility with an incredibly fast and strong hand and arm. He was quite successful in competition. Therefore, when I got polio at twenty-five years of age, I knew that it wasn't the end of the world and that I could do anything anybody else could as long as I could sit down to do it. (adult with a mobility impairment)



E-Community Activity: Getting Help to Maintain High Expectations

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Getting help to set high expectations

What people (parents, siblings, friends, mentors, teachers) in your life have helped you maintain high standards for yourself? You can also share stories about how people have made it difficult for you to maintain high expectations for yourself.



E-Community Activity: Matching Academic Interests with Careers

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Matching academic interests with careers

It is fun to explore the careers pursuing your academic interests might lead to. To find out what careers specific college studies might prepare you for, access at least one of the websites with the following addresses:

<http://www.uncw.edu/stuaff/career/Majors/>

<http://content.monstertrak.monster.com/tools/careerconverter/>

Enter different major fields of study at the site, and explore careers to which completing college degrees in those majors might lead.

Reply to this message and tell us what you learned about pursuing careers that interest you.



Mentor Tip: People with Disabilities and STEM

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: People with disabilities and STEM

People with disabilities are underrepresented in challenging careers such as those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Students with disabilities are not often encouraged to pursue these fields. DO-IT maintains a collection of resources to encourage these students to pursue STEM and to help educators make reasonable accommodations for them. Check out the *AccessSTEM* website that is linked from <http://www.washington.edu/doi/>. Explore the "Knowledge Base" of questions and answers, case studies, and promising practices and select the "Resources" button to read publications, view videos online, and address issues related to STEM access for students with disabilities. This exploration will prepare you for discussion of the questions I present to the e-community in my next message.



E-Community Activity: Pursuing STEM

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Pursuing STEM

Students with disabilities are often discouraged from pursuing challenging careers such as those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Why do you think this is the case? Do you think students with disabilities should be discouraged from pursuing these fields? Have you been encouraged or discouraged in STEM areas of study?



E-Community Activity: Considering College Options

Send this email message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Considering college options

Consider college options for reaching a specific career goal. For example, if you decide that you would like to have a career as an electrical engineer, you should consider the academic programs at various schools that will provide you with the training you will need. Funding options are also important to consider.

Access the website at

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/>

Select "AccessCollege."

Select "The Student Lounge."

Select "Colleges, Universities and Financial Aid."

Explore at least one of the listed websites, and tell us what you learn.



E-Community Activity: Making Plans

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Making plans

If you want to succeed at something, you need to plan for success. Break down big, long-term goals into smaller, achievable steps. Review at least one of the following websites:

Career Planning Process

http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/career/students/planning_process.html

The Person-Centered Planning Education Site

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/tsal/Enable/>

Planning a Career

<http://mapping-your-future.org/planning/>

Tell us about a goal you have regarding recreation, school, or employment. List at least three things you need to do to reach this goal, and identify at least one thing you can do right now to move closer to your goal.



E-Community Activity: Affirming Success

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Affirming success

Listed below are some affirmations of individuals with disabilities who have achieved success. Read each statement and think about whether it applies to you now.

- I have high expectations for myself.
- I set goals for myself.
- I can identify steps to reach my goals.
- I anticipate results.
- I am motivated to succeed.
- I like to do things myself.
- I like to learn new things.
- I work hard in school.
- I am creative.
- I have a sense of direction.
- I plan ahead and make choices carefully.

Tell us what you can do to make one of these statements stronger in your life within the next month. Tell how a parent, guardian, teacher, or someone else you know could help you make this statement stronger in your life.

