



Work hard. Persevere. Be flexible.

This thing that we call "failure" is not the falling down, but the staying down.

— Mary Pickford —

Understanding yourself, setting goals, and planning help build important foundations, but *action* is required to make your dreams come true. To take control of your life it is necessary to choose and take appropriate action. Take charge. Move forward (or at least move!). A pervasive drive for most people is a belief that they have control over important aspects of their lives. A belief in one's own academic ability, for example, is a reliable predictor of academic achievement.

Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act...[Self-efficacy] beliefs influence aspirations and strength of goal commitments, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity, quality of analytic thinking, causal attributes for successes and failures, and vulnerability to stress and depression. (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996, p. 1206).

In order to become more determined, motivated, and ambitious and to find the strength to work harder and persevere, we must believe that those efforts will pay off. How can we develop more positive self-efficacy beliefs?

Our expectations about our efficacy are derived from four sources of information—

performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). We can alter our self-efficacy beliefs by direct action, by the observation of others (role models), through the guidance of people (mentors) we respect who tell us that we can achieve, and through certain physical states such as relaxation.

Taking action always involves an element of risk. The importance of being willing to take a risk is reflected in this story:

I have a situation that is making me nervous. I am trying to apply for a job as a police records specialist for the city. These are people I have never worked with before and I do not know how accommodating they will be. This is also the first time I have filled out an application for employment, so I don't really know how to make it turn out right. Even if I get approved to take the examination, I do not know whether they will take the time to read the material to me or what will be on the test. If all goes well, I might be working for the city next term. I have had my insecurities when faced with new situations, but I have always been able to work around them, and it has almost always paid off. (college student who is blind)



E-Mentoring

Successful people need to advocate for themselves, work hard, and persevere.

Successful adults with disabilities demonstrate a willingness to take risks and are resilient when they encounter setbacks, keeping their eye on the ultimate goal. These individuals are also astute in selecting goals for themselves, choosing careers that capitalize on their strengths. They develop creative strategies and techniques to compensate for areas of weakness. Perhaps the most notable characteristics of this group of individuals are persistence and commitment to hard work.

The idea of working hard and long was not something to be applied occasionally but was simply a way of life. Additionally, persistence was emblematic of powerful resiliency, the ability to deal with failure by not giving up and trying again. (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1992, p. 15)

Young people need to take action in order to reach goals. They also need to learn from their experiences by reflecting on the outcomes of their actions. Through completing the following online activities, participants will learn the importance of

- working hard.
- taking risks.

- taking action.
- persevering.
- learning from experiences, both successes and setbacks.
- communicating effectively.
- anticipating conflict and criticism.
- using strategies to resolve conflicts in constructive ways.
- comparing the outcome of experiences with what was expected.
- reflecting on experiences in order to reach higher levels of success in the future.
- making adjustments and being flexible in order to find success.
- being resilient.

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





Mentor Tip: Actions to Achieve Goals

Send this message to the e-mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on actions to achieve goals

Below, people with disabilities share their thoughts about how caring adults like you can help young people with disabilities learn to take appropriate actions to achieve goals. Reflect on their thoughts as you mentor young people in our online community.

- The best way for anyone to teach anybody how to assert themselves is to let them do it. (college student with Tourette's Syndrome, Panic Disorder, and Epilepsy)
- Keep a positive attitude about the kids' goals, and encourage them to meet those goals. When children don't meet them the first time, stay positive and make sure they know that it's not over and they should keep trying. (high school student with a mobility impairment)
- Offer encouragement to kids, but let them sometimes fail to get their resiliency in shape before they are on their own in the real world. (college student who is blind)
- I think kids need to realize that everyone experiences failure.... It's how you deal with failure that is important. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- Create goals that have built-in flexibility, and allow room for some trial and error. For example, when I decided to pursue a Ph.D., I developed a backup plan just in case it didn't work out. I find having a Plan A and a Plan B (and sometimes a plan C) really helps me adjust when one goal is unattainable. Knowing that I have something to fall back on relieves a lot of anxiety while I'm working toward my original goal. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- Help your child learn to never give up. (high school student with a brain injury)
- Remind them of times when they have accomplished something and how good it felt. And help them figure out a way to complete the task by suggesting alternate strategies or asking them to come up with alternate methods. (Ph.D. candidate who is blind)

continued on next page



Mentor Tip: Actions to Achieve Goals (continued)

- Don't get over-protective—and do not let the disability color every expectation. (computer scientist who is blind)
- Help kids set realistic (but not easy!) goals. Help children with disabilities learn to do things independently in order to gain self-confidence. (college student who is deaf)
- Be optimistic, never doubt abilities, be positive, and challenge kids. Focus on the positive aspects, and help them set goals THEY want. NEVER, EVER assume they can't do something. (college student with speech and mobility impairments)
- I think the attitude of family, parents and grandparents, is very important for how a child approaches life. My family always assumed I could do a lot of things, and I've done quite a few. Basically, parents need to support their child, push their child some without forcing the child to do things that are counter to their own dreams, be available for their child to talk to when setbacks occur, and so on. These attitudes need to be present especially in social things because failures there tend to be much more painful and difficult to overcome. (college graduate who is blind)
- Parents can help their kids accept responsibility by taking responsibility for their own actions. (Ph.D. candidate who is blind)
- Responsibilities must be given and consequences must be felt. If responsibility isn't given, a child never learns how to handle it. (college graduate who is blind)
- Always support and advocate for your child, but don't ever let them think that it is not their problem. Include them in meetings you have with teachers, doctors, and other people. That will teach them to advocate for themselves. (high school student with a learning disability)
- I think a good way to help kids accept criticism better is to always present positive feedback first....then bring in the constructive criticism. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- Encourage children to get out and meet people. They have to make themselves known. Opportunity is much more likely to knock if it knows the address. (college student who is blind)



E-Community Activity: Working Hard

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

Subject: Working hard

Individuals with disabilities can expect at times to work harder to reach the same goals as their peers without disabilities. As reported by a successful high school student who is blind:

- I accepted the fact that I must work harder than other students to get the same grade. My grades started to grow gradually to an A average.

Learning to work hard can be an asset in life, as expressed by one successful high school student who is blind:

- Sometimes I think that all of us with disabilities have an advantage over those who have things come easier to them. Whatever it is we want, we have to want it and then work for it. That necessary desire promotes drive to accomplish, succeed, or achieve. Others around us may be content to float or do the minimum most of the time, but not us. For us, having what everybody else has is an accomplishment, and having tasted success we want to keep succeeding.

How would you explain to a child with a disability that they might have to work harder than other children to reach the same goals without making them feel discouraged?



E-Community Activity: Coping with Stress

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

Subject: Coping with stress

Stress motivates you to do things. However, it can have a negative impact on your physical and emotional health if you do not cope with it well.

Describe a situation that is stressful for you at school and the strategies you use to cope with it.



E-Community Activity: Being Flexible

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

Subject: Being flexible

Some adversities in life are beyond your capacity to change no matter how hard you try or how motivated you may be. As pointed out by a college student who is blind:

- The tough part about being disabled and keeping a positive attitude is to realize that there are things that you want to do that you will probably never get to do. This can take a toll on the mind and damage the self-esteem and positive attitude. The big issue for me when I turned sixteen, and even now, was that I could not drive because of my visual disability.

Once you have set a goal, it is important to be flexible regarding possible modifications to the goal itself as well as finding a path to reach the goal. Below, a person who is blind describes a situation where he needed to be flexible when starting a new job.

- I have had to make a lot of adjustments while getting settled into my new job as a technical support specialist. This job requires a lot of flexibility as to when the employees work and when they have time off. In my case, I have had also to make certain adjustments regarding transportation and equipment. For example, I was going to take the train to a nearby station and then catch a bus to my work area. The problem is that the bus lets off on the wrong side of the building and I would have to walk through a loading dock where there are a lot of trucks parked. Having to get around all those vehicles would make it difficult to stay on the path. I would need help from a sighted person. Instead, I resorted to using a shuttle provided by the company. It picks me up at the rail station and drops me off at the building where I work.

Give an example of a situation where you should be flexible and one where you should not.



E-Community Activity: Taking Risks

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

Subject: Taking risks

Taking risks requires that we accept the fact that we might fail. However, as stated by one student who is blind, "Life is nothing without risk. Risks can help a person be successful in the long run." In an electronic discussion, individuals with disabilities shared their risk-taking experiences.

- One risk I took when I was younger involved driving my wheelchair down a steep hill. It was crazy, but I was a daredevil at the time. Well, it cost me a scratch on my cheek, but it was fun until I reached the bottom. I think it's okay to take a risk as long as it doesn't risk other people's lives. (high school student with a mobility impairment)
- This summer I took one of the biggest risks in my life. I was given the opportunity to attend two educational camps, a computer camp and a camp to learn about government. I was afraid to attend the camps because they were geared for nondisabled students. The computer camp was the biggest concern because of getting accessible books and computers. The risk paid off. I learned a lot from both camps and made friends to boot! (college student who is blind)
- A very big risk that I took was my work at a museum. I have very poor people skills. It's obvious to whomever comes in contact with me. I am also wobbly mentally and physically—mentally in that I am unsure of myself and physically in that I can topple at any moment. I had to face the risks of dealing with people and tripping on something and ruining a fragile exhibit every day. The initial job was for class credit. I took the added risk of extending my job over the summer. That added the worry of transportation. I am happy to say that despite these risks I did the job and I did it well. I gained friends, experience, and something to put on a resume. (college student with mobility and health impairments)
- I keep going when people tell me I can't. I am not afraid to try things and I don't give up. My parents took me everywhere and I did everything like a normal kid. I have a good friend from kindergarten who is able bodied and she knows me so well that we do all sorts of stuff that people might not think I could do, but we come up with a flexible plan and we do it. (high school student with mobility and speech impairments)

Describe an experience where you took a risk to achieve something you wanted. What was the outcome? What did you learn from the experience?



E-Community Activity: Taking Action

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

Subject: Taking action

A group of successful individuals with disabilities offered the following advice to teens with disabilities about taking action to reach their goals. Read the list and then send a message to our group with a statement you would add to the list.

- Nothing worthwhile comes without risk. Without risk success cannot be achieved.
- Resiliency is key to success in life. Things will not always go the way you plan, but you have to bounce back from whatever difficulties you encounter and get back on track.
- Keep trying. Things don't always work out the first time around. Think of other options for achieving the same goal, or ask others (family members, friends, teachers, etc.) for ideas on how you can achieve your goal. Stretch yourself. Do things you never thought possible.
- Work at your own pace, keep positive, and you can do anything you set your mind to.
- Do not pity yourself for what cards you have been dealt. It happened....now move on.
- That moment of insecurity is worth the achievement in the end. It is important to keep that in mind throughout life.
- Keep on with life despite unfortunate responses from people. To let other people get you down and make you cease to be an active participant in your own life is to let them win. To live life passively is to deny one's full capability of existence. Parents and teachers can help, but this is something you have to find within.
- Be creative and flexible.
- It is important to develop networking skills. Almost anyone you meet can be a prospective resource. Learn how to make and capitalize on friendships and follow up. If you do use a person as a resource, call or send a letter to say thank you.
- DO IT.....DON'T QUIT.



E-Community Activity: Learning From Experiences

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

Subject: Learning from experiences

Successful people learn from their experiences. Once an action is taken, they evaluate the outcome, and, regardless of whether the outcome is positive or negative, they ask what they can learn from the experience that will increase opportunities for success in the future. A few strategies that contribute to successful learning from experiences are the following:

- Reflect on the experience and take with you those things that can help you reach higher levels of success in the future.
- Compare the outcome of the experience with what you expected. If they are different, analyze why. What can you learn? How will you move forward?
- Compare your performance to your expected performance. If they are different, analyze why. How can you continue to improve your performance in similar activities?
- Celebrate success internally and externally.
- Learn from both successes and failures/setbacks.
- Make adjustments in order to increase your chances for success in the future.

Select one of the strategies listed above and tell about how you have applied it or can apply it in the future.



E-Community Activity: Learning from Work Experiences

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

Subject: Learning from work experiences

Every experience in life offers opportunities to learn. For example, students enrolled in internships, cooperative education, volunteer work, and other work-based learning programs gain valuable experiences that can help them obtain and succeed in future jobs. In an online discussion, people with a variety of disabilities discussed the value of work-based learning experiences that occurred while they were still in school. Part of their dialogue follows.

- I had a project my senior year of college where I built and maintained a website for my church. I'm still maintaining it even after college. It let me gain experience. It is important for ANY student to do this, and it is especially beneficial to people with disabilities because they sometimes need more help to overcome employers' biases.
- Employers want education and experience.
- Working has given me motivation to return to school and do it well this time. For four years I've been working entry-level positions, and I now have a better understanding of where I want to be in life and the "direction" that I want to take. I also feel that I have a better understanding of the job market and how things work in a highly corporate environment. I wish everyone could feel the motivation and excitement to learn what I have after four years of poverty and \$5.50-an-hour jobs.
- Interpersonal skills, communication skills, and awareness of one's strengths and limits are just some benefits that can be gained through work-based experiences.
- I was an executive intern with a local meteorologist during my senior year in high school and then worked for two summers for the Assistant State Climatologist of Colorado. These experiences strengthened my desire to go into atmospheric science research. I also learned that connections can really help you get a job! And I practiced articulating my needs when necessary.

continued on next page



E-Community Activity: Learning From Work Experiences

(continued)

- I have some pretty strong viewpoints about work-based learning experiences. I did one last summer, and, even though it was frustrating, it taught me some lessons that I would not have learned otherwise. First of all, I learned that we need to be able to focus on more than one task at a time. Second, I learned that one can usually do something that one sets one's mind to.
- Work-based learning experiences give you a chance to practice and develop work skills that are not taught in the classroom (personal interaction with others, teamwork, learning how to take criticism, etc.).
- An internship gives students a chance to problem-solve how they will use or transfer an accommodation used in school to a work setting...in a nonthreatening environment. You learn what works for you, and you learn what doesn't work for you. You may have good experiences or bad experiences, but in my opinion...the bad experiences are sometimes more valuable than the good experiences. And it's fun!
- My senior year, I had an intern job at a local newspaper. My internship wasn't a paying one, but I got high school credit for it since I did it during school hours. If you get paid, great, extra cash won't hurt, but if not, it's still good to just have the experience.
- This year has been the first time I've been in a work-based learning opportunity. I was introduced into working in a corporate environment. I've learned to be more responsible and independent.

Describe a work experience you have had—paid or unpaid; long or short in length; at school, at home, at a company or job site—and tell what you learned from the experience.



E-Community Activity: Understanding the Value of Work Experiences

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

Subject: Understanding the value of work experiences

Work-based learning is an important part of a person's education. Below is a list of reasons why work experience is important. It was written by a successful person with a disability. Think about how what is said applies or does not apply to your life.

- It can help you figure out what you DON'T want to do. A lot of people go through their education with a romantic vision of what career they will pursue after graduation. They often picture themselves as prepared, having taken numerous courses within the occupation's subject area. They are often very disappointed. You may not always enjoy the "practice" as well as the "theory." I have met all sorts of people who hated their jobs but loved their major.
- It can help you determine which accommodations work best for you. The accommodations you use in school may not work at the work site. Your technology may not interface with the employer's. You need to become a master of your accommodations. Work-based learning gives you the opportunity to practice accommodating yourself....When you are applying for your "real job," you will know what accommodations you need, as well as where and how to get them.
- It offers a low-risk, nonthreatening opportunity to disclose your disability to an employer. Disclosure of disability can be a nerve-racking process for both the student and the employer. Interviews for internships and other experiences can help you try out ways of talking about your disability.
- You can apply what you're learning in school to a real-world situation. This makes learning fun and offers a whole new perspective on the subject area.
- It enables you to learn and practice skills not learned in a typical classroom. You can sometimes get academic credit for it. You can sometimes get paid for it. You can network with potential future employers. You can prove to an employer who has never had an employee with a disability that you are capable, thus creating a future position for yourself or opening the door for a friend.
- You might have the opportunity to work with state-of-the-art equipment not available on campus. Employers want education AND experience. Just a degree simply won't cut it. If you want a job when you graduate, this is the best way to get experience in your field.

Why do you feel it is important to have work experience before completing school?



E-Community Activity: Being Resilient

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

Subject: Being resilient

“Resiliency” is the ability to bounce back and keep trying after failures or other difficult situations. Successful people are resilient. They don’t let the small stuff get them down, and they don’t give up when faced with setbacks, failures, or other difficulties. They learn from both success and failure. Below, successful young people and adults describe how events and people in their lives helped them learn to be resilient.

- Whenever as a child I told my parents that I could not do something, they reminded me that I could do it as long as I believed in my ability to do it, and they usually were right. If I did not succeed, my parents pointed out alternate methods for achieving the goal. Now, I am motivated to continue to try something as long as I can think of other options for completing the task at hand. When I run out of options, it is sometimes tempting to give up, but I have also learned that new options sometimes open up with time. (Ph.D. candidate who is blind)
- There have always been things I’ve wanted, and I couldn’t get them if I didn’t try again once I failed. That was true throughout school. In math, I had to do many things by slower methods than other kids used. For example, in precalculus they all had graphing calculators, but I couldn’t use one. I did as much of the work as I could because I wanted to learn, I wanted good grades, and I wanted that class on my transcript for college. (college graduate who is blind)
- What helped me to be resilient was the need to survive. I didn’t attend school until the fifth grade due to numerous surgeries. The first few days in the classroom at the age of eleven were a shock. The physically and mentally handicapped soon learn to ignore the slings and arrows of misfortune. I lead a very normal life despite a birth defect in the lower spine. The people in my life who toughened me included my mother, my uncle, a doctor, and, from time to time, an understanding, compassionate teacher in high school and college. (retired counselor with mobility impairment)
- I was motivated to reach for higher standards when I lost my sight four years ago. It made me try harder and forced me not to pity myself. My vision teacher pushed me to give it my all. He made me

continued on next page



E-Community Activity: Being Resilient (continued)

believe in my abilities and myself. He raised my self-esteem and pushed me into taking the specialized high school exam. Without him, I would not be in the position I am now. He played an integral part in my higher standards being reached. (college student who is blind)

- Joining and participating in the DO-IT program was probably the most helpful. They did more than just teach me about online communications, etc. They have also helped me solve problems that were college- and career-related. (college student who is blind)
- Say what you will about spite; it's a great emotion. My parents never believed in me (I'm sure that they'd say otherwise, but they would be lying). They don't trust me, and they really don't care what I do, so long as it meets their preconceived notions of who I am. So I decided to succeed, no matter what, just to spite them. (college student with mobility impairment)
- The primary source of any resilience in me is extreme hope for the future and a sense of mission. In this, my father played a large part. When he gets going, I doubt there is anyone capable of more passion and exuberance. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- Beginning with catechism and my mother's insistence on reading Bible stories to me and my brother, I fast developed a theological grounding for subsequent resilience. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- Adults taught me that life is full of obstacles and hurdles. Sometimes I make it over the hurdle the first time around, sometimes I don't. I learned to accept failure and to learn from my mistakes. I use what I learned to help me get over the hurdle the next time. I learned that failure is not always a bad thing. In fact, that's how we develop, by learning what works and what doesn't. (graduate student with a hearing impairment)
- One source of resilience, the joy of discovery, I inherited from both my parents. Early in my childhood I was continuously encouraged to learn. And as a quirk in their generally traditional parenting style, they never pressured me or my brother to achieve high grades in school. Thus I developed this joy intrinsically, from the inside out—something that is extremely important. (college student with a mobility impairment)

How have parents, siblings, friends, mentors, teachers, or other people in your life helped you (or NOT helped you) learn to be resilient?



E-Community Activity: Affirming Success

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

Subject: Affirming success

Successful people learn from their experiences. Below, successful people with disabilities share advice on learning from their experiences as they work toward achieving goals.

- Find something that you do well, and use that as a stepping stone to succeed in other areas.
- Never, ever give up on your dreams and goals, no matter what happens. Like they say, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!" Just because you don't make it the first or second or third time doesn't mean you will never make it. Every time you don't make it will make you a stronger person and will make you want to reach your goals even more.

Read each of the following affirmations of successful individuals and reflect on whether it applies to you now.

- I am resilient.
- I can handle things that happen to me in a positive way.
- I compare outcomes to what I expected.
- I compare my performance to what I expected.
- I make adjustments based on outcomes.

Select one of the statements that is not always true for you now and describe one example of what you can do to make this statement stronger in your life.