

Setting Goals and Making a Schedule

BRETT STEWART: As Andrea mentioned, I'm Brett Stewart. I am a master's student at WSU. In my freshman year-- I was actually just explaining this-- my freshman year was at WSU, but it was back in 2008. I spent my freshman year there, and then I joined the Air Force, and I returned back in 2017 to finish my undergraduate in kinesiology.

And then I had aspirations for physical therapy. I didn't get in my first round, which, let me tell you, is a humbling experience when you don't get into something that you've spent a lot of time working towards. So then I kind of was left bereft. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and had some trouble with motivation, had some trouble with figuring out what do I do now?

So I wanted to make myself a more attractive candidate. I wanted to better myself in a way. And so I talked to my research advisor, because I had done some research in the gait and biomechanics lab here. And I talked to my research advisor, and he's like, well, we're starting up a master's program. And so I was like, all right, let's shift my goals, and let's go do it that way.

So I've been doing the master's program now, and I have actually shifted my goals quite a bit. Now I'm pursuing-- my aspiration is to pursue a goal in academia. And so I'm going to move on, get my PhD, and then hopefully, go back to teaching, because I've learned that that's something that I actually really enjoy doing.

So the predicate of my talk today is-- as mentioned, it's just setting your goals, making a schedule, and more. That's something that I've struggled with quite a bit, wondering what motivates me? Where should I aim? What are my goals?

I have no idea most of the time what to do, or I did. And I didn't really have a feasible schedule. I never followed it. I didn't know what to do. So I did a lot of research, and I got to the bottom of some things, at least as far as I could tell. And I wanted to share what I learned about, how do you set up goals?

How do you find your motivation? How do we break that down so you can make small steps to make that change? So why don't we just get started?

All right. So one of the best predictors for lifetime success is conscientiousness, which, roughly speaking, is just wanting to do your work well and thoroughly. Also, one of the two aspects of conscientiousness is orderliness and industriousness. And people who are industrious are achievement oriented, self-disciplined, efficient, purposeful, competent, and so the better predictor of those two is industriousness.

So the question is, well, what can you do about your industriousness? And the answer to that is, well-- and that's rough, too, because there's a strong genetic component, but you can work on micro habits with regards to your conscientiousness. And I think that the best thing you can do in regards to that is to set up some aims for yourself and goals that you actually value. And so the question is something like, well, all

right, you're going to have to put in some effort into your life, and you need to be motivated to do that. And so what are the potential sources of motivation?

And I think it's important to kind of figure out, where does the term motivation come from? Because you talk about motivation to people, and it's almost like this invisible force that sort of comes down upon you whenever it wants to. But actually motivation-- that's where motive gets the word from, so you have to have a reason, a motive to work, to move forward. So yeah, what are some of the potential sources of motivation?

And so you can think of these in the Big Five personality aspects. So you know, if you're extroverted, you want friends. If you're agreeable, you want to have an intimate relationship. If you're disagreeable, you might want to win competitions.

If you're open, you might want to engage in creative activities. And if you are neurotic, then you want security. OK, so those are all the sources of motivation that you could draw upon and that you can tailor to your own personality. But then there are some dimensions that you might want to consider your life across.

So if you could have your life the way you wanted it in like three to five years, if you were taking care of yourself properly, what would you want that-- from your friendships? What would you want from your intimate relationship? How would you like to structure your family?

What do you want for your career? Well, how are you going to use your time outside of your job? And how are you going to regulate your mental and physical health? OK, and so then you develop a vision for your life and what would you like your life to be?

And that's associated with the goal that-- once the goal is established, and then you can break it down into the microprocesses that you could actually implement. And these micro processes become rewarding in proportion or in relation to their causal association with the goal. So basically how that works is it tangles in your incentive reward system-- so that's your dopaminergic incentive reward system. And that's one of the things that keeps you moving forward. And the way it works is that it works better if it produces positive emotion when you can see-- when it can see you moving towards a valued goal.

OK, so what's the implication of that? You better have a valued goal, because otherwise you can't get any positive motivation working out. And so the more the valuable-- excuse me-- the more valuable the goal, in principle, the more micro processes associated with that goal. They start to take on a positive charge. So it's breaking down the subcomponents of that goal into micro processes.

And the more you get to achieve those subcomponents, the more they take on a positive charge and increase your positive affect and positive emotion to increase that positive feedback loop, which will-- I'll go over in the second. So basically-- and so what that means is that you get up in the morning, and you're excited, and you're ready to go.

And as far as I can tell, what you do is specify your long term ideal. And so maybe you also specify a place where you just want to stay the hell away from so that you're terrified to fail, but you're also excited to succeed. And you have to have both, because it's also useful that you specify your goal. And you do that in some ways-- in some sense as a unique individual. You want to specify goals that make you say, oh, if that could happen as a consequence of my efforts, well, then that would clearly be worthwhile.

Because the question is always, why do something? Because doing nothing is easy. You just sit there, and you don't have to do anything because it's really easy. The question is, why would you ever do anything? And the answer is-- it has to be because you determined that, by some means, it's worthwhile.

OK, so the next question would be, well, where should you look for worthwhile things? And just as I mentioned earlier, one way would be to consult your own temperament. But the other would be is like, well, you look at how-- at what it is that people accrue that is valuable across a lifespan. And what you do is just a structural analysis of the subcomponents of human existence, and that's just these pillars of life.

You need a family. You need friends. And you don't need all of these things, but you better have some of them. You better have most of them. You have family, friends, career, educational goals, plans for time outside of work, as I mentioned, and your mental and physical health, because that's what life is about. So you take your temperament, take your proclivity for your temperament, add that to these pillars of life. And that's how you can consult your own motivation.

So once you get set up and you set up that goal structure, let's say-- and that's really, in many ways, what you actually should be doing at university. In fact, that's exactly what you should be doing-- is trying to figure out who it is that you're trying to be and what you aim at. So once you get your goal structure set up and you think, OK, if I could have this life that looks like that might be worth living despite the fact that it's going to be rife with anxiety, and it's going to be threatening, and there's going to be some suffering and loss involved, and all of that, and that's obvious-- but the goal is to have a vision for your life such that, all things considered, that justifies your effort.

So then what you do-- well, you turn down to those micro routines, and this is what I'm aiming at. And how does that instantiate itself day to day, week to week, month to month, year to year, and so on? And that's where something like a schedule can be unbelievably useful. Breaking down your goal into those subroutines, placing them into a structure that moves into a schedule.

OK, so I've got tomorrow. And if I were to set it up so that it's the best day that I could-- the best day that I could have practically speaking, what would it look like? And so, well, then you schedule that, and obviously there's a bit of responsibility that's going to go along with that, because if you have any sense, one of the things that you're going to insist upon is that, at the end of the day, you're not in worse shape than when you were at the beginning of the day, right? Because that's just a stupid day. If you have a bunch of those days in a row, you know you didn't take care of yourself, and then you just end up burying yourself in a hole. And sorry, that's not a good strategy. That's a bad strategy.

So maybe 20% of your day is a responsibility and obligation, or maybe it's more than that depending on how far behind you are. But even then you can ask yourself, OK, well, I've got these responsibilities. I have to schedule the damn things in. So what is the right ratio of responsibility to reward?

And you can actually ask yourself that like you might be negotiating with somebody who's working for you. It's like, OK, so I've got to work tomorrow. And so I want you to work tomorrow. And you might say, well, OK, what are you going to do for me that makes it likely that I'll work for you?

Maybe you have like an hour of responsibility, and then you go play video games, play out in the yard, or do whatever for 50 minutes. Whatever revs your engine, man. But you know you have to negotiate with yourself, and not tyrannize yourself. And I want to say that again. You have to negotiate with yourself, and not tyrannize yourself.

OK, so the problem with this is now you've set up your conditions for success, but you're probably only going to hit it with, at best, 70% accuracy. But that just beats the hell out of 0. So, right. And sometimes you might even hit it with 50% accuracy. So the rule is that, even if you're hitting it at 50% accuracy, well, then aim at 51%, or 50.5%, as long as you're making incremental-- excuse me-- as long as you're making incremental increases, then you're going to have that same positive feedback loop, because you're going to hit that position where things loop back positively and spiral you upward. So that's what a positive feedback loop is.

So you kind of hear this with microphone noise and that feedback noise, where the microphone picks up the input from your voice. The speakers amplify it, and then the sound goes back into the microphone, and it just creates this positive feedback loop, and it creates that deafening noise. But if that goes on long enough, it blows the whole system up because it just keeps reinforcing that same amplification. So that's what a positive feedback loop is.

And so that's one way you can kind of work on your conscientiousness that we mentioned. You're someone that you have to negotiate with. And I think that's something that people don't consider is-- we tend to treat ourselves not so nicely. And people don't like themselves that much sometimes, and they just crack the whip, and then get lazy, and then crack the whip, and then get lazy. And that's just-- it's a bad mid to long term structure.

All right. So basically what you want to do is just present-- you want to present yourself an opportunity of having a good life, and that's hard for people. I would say you probably waste about six hours a day, around there, and that's usually just on people's own perception of waste. If you look at surveys and just asking people, how much time do you waste on your own definition? It's usually about six hours a day, usually at a minimum.

But so let's just do an economic calculation about how much-- excuse me-- how much your time is worth. So you're probably worth about \$50 an hour, or something like that. I mean, you're not-- you may not be getting paid that now, but you may be young, and so this is the time to invest. And what you do now is you have to-- you're going to multiply the effects in the future. So let's say \$50 an hour, which is, I think,

pretty reasonable-- I mean, and if you waste six hours a day, then you're probably wasting what, \$2,000 a week, which is \$100,000 a year?

So and even if it's not \$50, it's maybe \$30 bucks an hour, or even \$100 an hour, but it's somewhere in that range. So if you think about it, wasting that many hours a day is a huge economic burden. And one of the things you should be asking yourself is, when you spend an hour, was that-- well, if I paid somebody to do that hour, would that be worth \$50? And if the answer is no, well, then maybe you should think about something else to do with your time.

So now, anyways, as far as I can tell, that's how you improve your conscientiousness. I would say the minimal precondition for a successful negotiation is that you don't walk away resentful and angry. And so that's how you also know you have something to say is that-- excuse me-- so because the rule has to be, if you're going to walk away resentful and angry, then you probably have something to say. And that doesn't mean you're right. It just means that you have something to say. And I know it's a low bar, but if you want to live with yourself, then maybe we should talk about how we walk away from our mutual negotiations, even with yourself or your loved ones. And you want to walk away from them thrilled, and not resentful and bitter.

So what about negotiating with your boss in your career? And I've done this many times in my career, especially outside the Air Force, because you can actually negotiate your salary outside of the Air Force, which is nice. You might want to think, OK, so I have this job. And so how much would I be paid so that I would be super excited to go to work that I can hardly stand it?

And well, you can at least know that-- what that number is. And then you could go there and say, well, look, you have to have me around-- and I've been doing some thinking, and if you paid me this money, then I'd be so thrilled to work then you can't even hardly keep me away from there. And your boss probably thinks, OK, well, I actually might really like an employee that would like to be around and be so thrilled to work that I can't get rid of them. So maybe they say, OK, I can't give you everything, but I'll give you 70%. And then we can renegotiate that in a year.

So your boss might think, yeah, I may not be able to give you that, but I'll give you 75%, and then you can negotiate in a year. Or you can go into that negotiation. You can whine, and complain, and walk away barely able to tolerate the outcome of the negotiation. There's two outcomes.

So it's like I would recommend that you have the life that you want, and we're going to think about this strategically. So you're making like, let's say, \$50,000 a year. Now, maybe you want to be making \$150,000 in three years. And they think, well, that can't happen, but it's like, no, not with that attitude. That's the first thing that it's like, no, that's not going to happen. Not with that attitude.

OK, back to networking. So there's another big deal of one of the advantages that older people have than younger people is that, for example, now that I'm in my 30s I've had a-- I know a bunch of other people that are really pretty well positioned in whatever competence hierarchy that we're in, kind of like in the university, for example. And they know all sorts of people.

And so when I go to one of them and say, hey, can we do x, or can we do y? They say, no, but I know somebody that can. And so that basically is trying to-- basically, what that is is a huge advantage. So another thing that you want to think about is, as you move through life, this is what you want to-- this is-- excuse me. This is that-- this is using that ability to network properly.

And that doesn't mean schmooze, and that doesn't mean go out and try to impress people, because that's just rubbish. It means you try to surround yourself with people who are competent, and in multiple different dimensions, and that you maintain your relationships with them. And it's basically just like a trading relationship. And it involves a huge amount of reciprocity.

And that's a huge advantage to your social network. It's a huge advantage. And that's something that extroverted people usually have a really-- a bigger hand in, because you know that they have all that social ability and that-- and that goes along with the ability to sell and things like that. So another place that you can pick up the powers-- and I mean power in the best possible sense for the right thing is to consciously develop and maintain your social networks. And so that means developing good friendships.

And here's how you know if someone is your friend. I know I only have one bullet going here, but this is something that sort of hits close to home for me-- is here's how you know you have a good friend. A, you can tell them bad news, and they won't tell you you're stupid, and walk away, and that's a bad thing that happens to you, and something-- and how something worse happened to them. And it just derails the whole conversation. And you actually can tell them bad news, and they'll listen. And that's a good thing.

And then this is a kind of a weirder thing, but you can actually tell your friends good things, and they'll help you celebrate. And that's a really good way of deciding who you want and who you should have around you, because if you have someone that you tell somebody-- excuse me-- if you have somebody around you, and something good happens, you're afraid to even admit it because you know, once you admit something good happens to you, then you know that thing will probably go away immediately.

But you know you need to go away from that person when you know you can't tell them good news, and you know you can't tell them bad news. And so basically this is-- it's acceptable and desirable to try to surround yourself with people who are facilitating your development. You might say that, well, I've got people around, and I know them-- I know them well, and you know that they're not going to do-- excuse me-- you're not-- trying to put this in the best way. It's basically you just want to surround yourself with people that want the best for you. And I think that's what this boils down to most-- is that you're not an atomized individual. You really aren't.

And when we're talking about making goals, setting up a schedule, and trying to network yourself, the best way to achieve goals is to surround yourself with people that actually want the best for you. If only we could just do all of this by ourselves, it's untenable. So you want to have professional relationships, as I mentioned earlier. You want to develop reciprocity with people that are competent in other dimensions that you may not be.

Your friendships-- you want to have friendships, and even intimate relationships, where not only are the fundamental processes of that relationship based on honesty, but they're based on mutual desire to want the best for one another.

And I found that in my own life, where your friends really aren't your friends. I mean, because you know that I won't be able to tell them this, or I shouldn't tell them that. And I've learned in myself that you surround yourself with people that truly want the best for you. And gosh, we seriously don't know the upper limits of that. And if everyone were to do that, well, then everyone else would see that, and it would be just that-- like that ripple effect.

OK, last thing I want to talk about-- I know we're wrapping up a little early, but another thing that you can do if you want to increase your probability of success is that, every time you have an opportunity-- to take an opportunity that would provide you with a new skill, do it right. Learn to program. Learn to write. Learn to read. Read new things.

Learn the public speak. Learn introduce yourself to people. Learn how to social network. Learn how to talk to your boss in a manner that's the right way.

The rule to take an opportunity is if it will teach you something that you can use for other opportunities. So it's not that you want to say yes to every opportunity. It's just, will that opportunity help me to compound other opportunities in the future? Because even if that fails, then you probably-- then that probably won't matter because you've accrued something of value and that you can bring forward to the next situation.

And so that's actually what-- that is actually what wealth is. Wealth is what you have when you don't have money. So you develop yourself in a way that you have skills, and opportunities, and connections, and friendships, and intimate relationships, and all those pillars we talked about. And that's what true wealth is.

Oh, my goodness. This went a lot quicker than what I wanted. But I really appreciate you all listening, and I hope you understand that one of the best ways to develop a goal is to understand your own motivation.

Look to yourself. What's your temperament? What's your personality? How does that fit into the subcomponents of life? And how can you actually put that into subroutines that you can put into a schedule so that you can take aim?

And even if your aim isn't that good, the small incremental changes that you make will create this positive feedback loop, and then you'll learn to move forward, and you'll get better at moving forward. So your aim may go from 50% to 60% to 70%. Now all of a sudden, you have all these skills because you've taken new opportunities, because you've made social connections, because you've surrounded yourself with friends, and family members, and people that truly want the best for you.

This is something that's been really of inestimable value to me-- learning these things. And I'm still learning it. I'd say my aim is probably less than 50% at this point, but I don't let it overwhelm me. Once I

get these subroutines in place, I don't get overwhelmed. I'm way more productive, and I'd say, as a grad student, that's really helpful.