

Why are goals important in an ABE Classroom? How can we help ABE students set reasonable and attainable goals? How can we help the students reach their goals?

Adults who enroll in ABE classes have diverse reasons for wanting to improve their academic skills. Their goals typically include obtaining a promotion or a better job, preparing for the GED, handling personal finances, or becoming better able to assist with their children's homework. Initially these reasons act as a positive motivating force for students. For some students, however, a sense of urgency in attaining their goals can cause disillusionment when aims are not immediately met. Many students fail to realize that many small steps will need to be taken before the end result of their studies can be seen. This impatience, as well as possible stress from home and other factors unfortunately leads many students not to stay in a program long enough to make level gains or reach the goals they set for themselves.

How can the ABE teacher help students persist and stay in school? Recent studies indicate that adult students need **supports** in order to **persist**. Three of the supports that can be provided in the classroom are: **goal setting**, **teacher assistance**, and **self-esteem builders**. The teacher is instrumental in providing these supports in the classroom.

Goal Setting: Long-term vs. Short-term

In addition to helping adult students make level gains on standardized tests, the ABE teacher should

also help them reach their goals. To assist students in achieving their goals, teachers should provide information and support on the goal setting process. Research has shown that people who use goal setting effectively are better able to concentrate and perform. They also experience less stress and anxiety, show more self-confidence, and are more satisfied. There are several factors to consider in learning to set goals effectively.

First, the student must recognize the difference between long-term and short-term goals. A possible long-term goal is to attain a GED. In that case, the student will have to set certain short term goals, such as first acquiring the necessary skills in reading, math, and language-arts and later acquiring the necessary knowledge in science and social studies. Another possible long-term goal is employment or promotion. In this case, the student would first need to achieve the short-term goal of completing the nine standards of the ABE Workplace Readiness component. In both cases, achieving short-term goals can ultimately lead to attaining a long-term goal.

Setting Goals Effectively

Since *effective* means having an expected outcome, setting effective goals means choosing aims that are designed to produce a desired effect. Such goals should have the following five characteristics.

- **Be realistic:** Begin from an actual starting place. Ex: Have the prerequisite math skills needed to start learning fractions.
- **Be specific:** Describe in detail exactly what is to be accomplished with a positive statement. Ex: I will learn to add, subtract, multiply, and divide fractions.
- **Be measurable:** Describe in terms that can be clearly evaluated. Ex: I will check my progress with post tests in each skill area.
- **Be relevant:** Pertain to the goal at hand. Ex: This is a skill I need to work toward my long-term goal.
- **Be time based:** Specify target completion dates. Ex: Attending class at least three times a week and taking math sheets home for practice, I will complete this goal in two weeks.

Important Factors in Goal Setting

- **Write down the goals:** This process creates a set of instructions for the subconscious to carryout.
- **Keep goals small:** If the goals are small, they will be more achievable.
- **Set priorities:** If there are several small goals involved, set priorities. For example, if the goals include computing whole numbers, fractions, and decimals, do them one at a time in the appropriate order.

- **Review the goals:** Check in with what the goals are from time to time. Goals made need to be revised.
- **Give rewards:** Everyone likes a treat, so have rewards for students who complete their goals. Even a small candy bar will do the trick. Encourage the students to choose a way to reward themselves as well.

Results of Goal Setting

Success begets success. Students who set clearly defined goals can measure and take pride in the achievement of those goals which can in turn spur them on to the next steps and be able to see forward progress. Students will: improve performance, achieve more, take pride in their achievements, improve their self-confidence, and eliminate negative attitudes that were previously holding them back.

Use of the Study Plan

If the ABE class structure already involves the use of some form of study plan or prescription, such work can also function as a written form of a student's goals. Students' individual diagnostic profiles that follow the TABE guidelines will be specific, measurable, realistic, and relevant. To convert these plans to serve as goal-setting agenda, only target completion dates would have to be determined and added. They will include skills which can also be considered short-term goals. Acquiring the skills listed in the study plan will allow the students to progress through their short term goals.

Teacher Assistance

It is a known fact that adults have some internal motivation when they become students in an ABE classroom such as wanting to improve skills and acquire more knowledge, and achieve the satisfaction that comes with success. However, internal motivation

alone is not enough; external motivation is also necessary, which is where the teacher becomes an essential element of the learning process.

In one study, students were asked, "What motivates you to learn and achieve?" Most of their responses were teacher-related. They stated that they were motivated by having teachers who:

- cared about them,
- were interested in them,
- paid attention to them,
- never gave up on them,
- explained things well so they could understand everything,
- greeted them by name every school day,
- gave them feedback on their skill practice, and
- reviewed their work with them on a regular basis.

Such responses make the teacher's importance quite clear. Equally important to goal-setting, it seems is establishing a strong student-teacher relationship. Finding out students' expectations will help the teacher develop a good rapport with students.

Self-Esteem Builders

Maintaining one's sense of self-esteem is a strong motivator for tackling new learning experiences. In Maslow's five levels of human needs, *Esteem Needs* rank as number four. After the basic needs are satisfied, people have need for achievement, respect, recognition, competence, independence, and appreciation.

Self-esteem is based on a person's attitude to his or her,

- value as a person,
- purpose in life,
- achievements,
- potential for success,
- strengths and weaknesses,
- social status, and
- abilities.

High self-esteem is the cornerstone of a positive attitude toward living. In the classroom, the teacher can help students have a better self-image by:

- Encouraging them with positive words,
- Listening to them when they speak,
- Helping them achieve their goals,
- Complimenting them when it is appropriate, and
- Being friendly toward them.

Achieving goals and attaining high self-esteem go hand-in-hand. If students set goals effectively and receive strong teacher support, their self-esteem will improve, and they will have the confidence to meet new challenges in their everyday lives.

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