

Eyes on the Prize

A self-help tool

Introduction

At any one point you've probably got lots of different things you want to achieve in your life. There will be all the ordinary things you need to do (shopping, cooking working / studying) as well as developmental goals, like learning a new skill, planning a holiday, or getting promoted. The standard advice is to make a plan. And that is crucial. But what if you've got lots of plans on the go at the same time? How can you progress them all equally? After all, there's only so many hours in the day. So, this guide is about how you can be successful, by focusing on the goals which are most important for you.

It is based on advice that Warren Buffett, one world's most successful business leaders, gave one day to his long-time friend and pilot of his personal jet on how to be successful. The story (according to James Clear) goes like this.

“Step 1: Buffett started by asking Flint ...[his personal airline pilot] ... to write down his top 25 career goals...

Step 2: Then, Buffett asked Flint to review his list and circle his top 5 goals. ... Flint took some time, made his way through the list, and eventually decided on his 5 most important goals...

Step 3: At this point, Flint had two lists. The 5 items he had circled were List A and the 20 items he had not circled were List B.

Flint confirmed that he would start working on his top 5 goals right away. And that's when Buffett asked him about the second list, “And what about the ones you didn't circle?”

Flint replied, “Well, the top 5 are my primary focus, but the other 20 come in a close second. They are still important so I'll work on those intermittently as I see fit. They are not as urgent, but I still plan to give them a dedicated effort.”

To which Buffett replied, “No. You've got it wrong, Mike. Everything you didn't circle just became your Avoid-At-All-Cost list. No matter what, these things get no attention from you until you've succeeded with your top 5.”

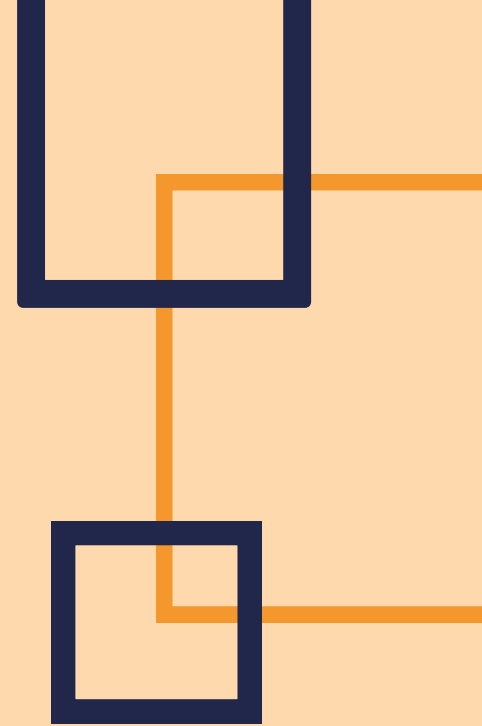
While planning is important, making choices where to focus your energy can be equally important. As the writer and Psychiatrist, T. I. Rubin (1993) put it: “an option becomes a decision through the process of our dedicating ourselves to it ... It is almost always the decision-maker and not the particular choice that makes the decision work.” (p. 77).

This tool is designed to...

- Help you focus on the most important goals.
- Help you achieve your most important goals.
- Help you identify and de-priorities other potentially distracting goals.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Have multiple (career / life) goals.
- Don't have enough time or energy to progress all your goals effectively.
- Need to prioritise your commitments.



How to use this tool

First, sort your goals into order of importance.

If you have 9 (or less) the 'Diamond 9' method works well. For this, write each goal on a separate piece of paper or post-it note. Do something to put yourself in a positive frame of mind. For example, listen to a piece of uplifting music you really like, or watch a few short comedy clips on YouTube or Tik Tok. This need only take a few minutes and helps both to distract your conscious mind and makes it easier to tap into your intuition. Then quickly sort the pieces of paper into the shape of a diamond, with one at the top, two in the next row, three in the middle row, two in the penultimate row and one at the bottom.

The more important a goal is the higher up it goes.

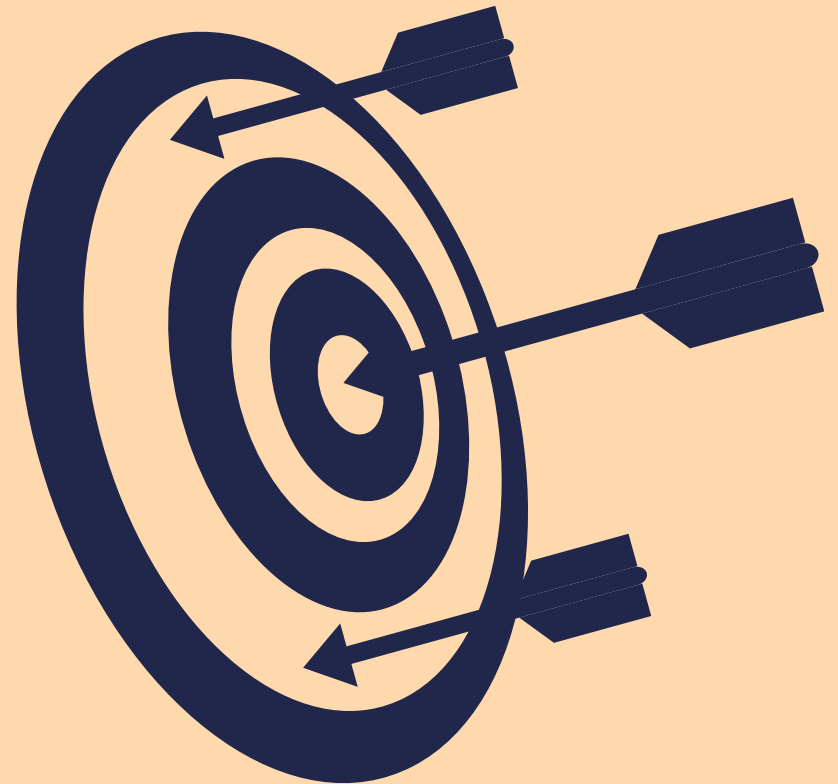
- Which goals have come out on top?
- How committed are you to each on a scale of 1-10 where 10 is high?
- Is your level of commitment enough?
- What will you need to do to move your commitments up to where you'd like it to be?



Second, decide which ones you will prioritise.

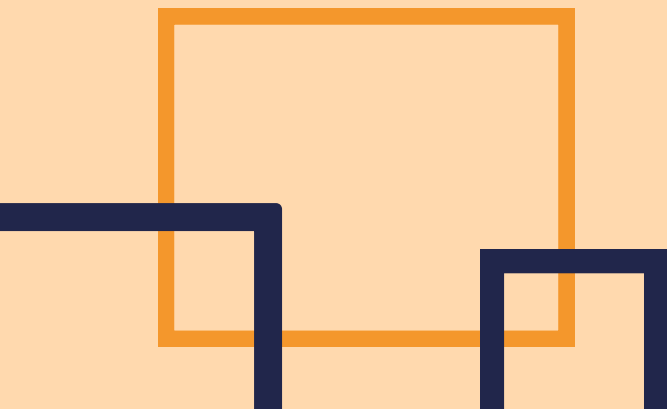
For instance, will it be just the one at the top that makes up your 'A' list? Will it be the top three?

- Which goals will you have to pause?
- What will you need to do to pause progress with these goals to buy yourself sometime? For instance: will you need to discuss with your manager the timescale for delivering your projects? Or, perhaps you'll need to talk through changing plans with your family.



Third, 'park' the rest.

Because these goals are all important to you, you don't need to lose them, but probably do need to park – that is - pause them. You can always come back to them later, when you've accomplished your key goals. As the saying goes 'first things first.' James Clear concludes by saying: 'Every behavior has a cost. Even neutral behaviors aren't really neutral. They take up time, energy, and space that could be put toward better behaviors or more important tasks. We are often spinning in motion instead of taking action...Spending time on secondary priorities is the reason you have 20 half-finished projects instead of 5 completed ones. Eliminate ruthlessly. Force yourself to focus. Complete a task or kill it. The most dangerous distractions are the ones you love, but that don't love you back.'



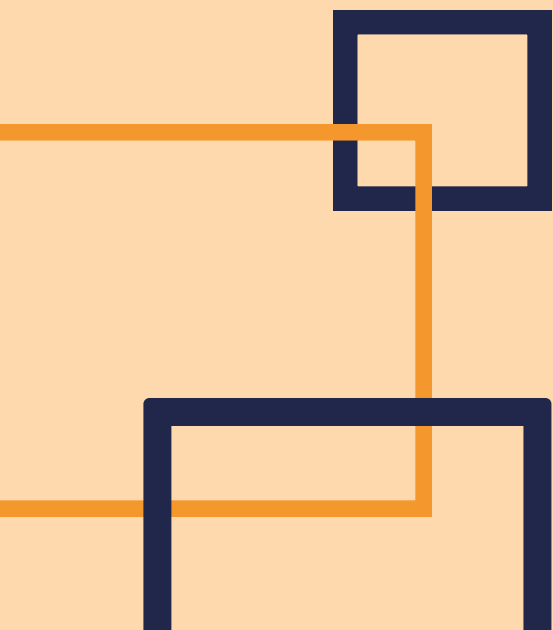
Pause, Reflect, Act

- What are the key insights you've learnt?
- What does keeping your eyes on the prize look like for you?
- What practically do you want to do now to take forward the insights from this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Which other self-help tools would you like to look at next?

NB: Because everyone is different and no one solution on its own is necessarily a magic bullet, please look at our other self-help tools as well and use the ones that work best for you.

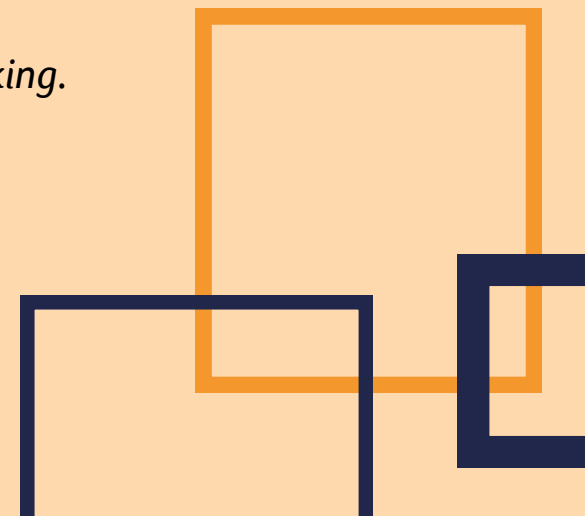
Other tools which may help with goal focus include:

- **Wheel of Life** – seeing how far different parts of your life match your values?
- **Scaled-Up Plans** – like SMART plans but better!
- **Bridge of Reasons** – reminding yourself why you want to make a change and how it will benefit you.
- **Cartesian Logic** – weighing the gains and losses of doing X compared to not doing X.



References and Resources

- Clear, J. (n.d). *Warren Buffett's '2 List Strategy': How to maximise your focus and master your priorities.* JamesClear.com. Retrieved 3rd June 2023 from <https://jamesclear.com/buffett-focus>
- Roth, B. (2015). *The Achievement Habit. Stop Wishing, Start Doing and Take Command of your Life.* Harper Business.
- Rubin, T, I. (1993). *Overcoming Indecisiveness: The eight stages of effective decision-making.* Mandarin.



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.