

Weekly Tip for Mar. 2, 2021

Review your goals daily

Have you experienced something like the following in the past? You have your kick-off meeting for the year to plan your goals with your supervisor. All went great, and it motivated you to take them on and kick it out of the park!

Then you get back to work and emails, meetings, updates of projects and so on, that dominate your work life. Some months later you get reminded to fill-in your half-year review of your goals and you realize that you neither pushed them forward nor did you really remember them. Maybe they are even obsolete by now. In particular, the development goals for yourself fell completely off the table.

Why did this happen? There is a “simple” solution to it. Review your goals daily! Now this may sound straightforward but building habits like this is surely not. We all have made commitments just to find out that we cannot maintain them, be it about diet, exercise or business. If you don’t have your goals in front of you, you cannot direct your daily actions. And your daily actions bring you closer to your goals. Only the daily actions!

We achieve our goals not by one big giant leap but by many little things we do consistently over a long period. It is setting up the next meeting to get things organized; and following up on a dropped ball to keep the project moving. Summarize your actions and determine what the next steps are, and then get the first one done. All these little steps don’t seem to be important, but the sum of them surely is. As the old Depeche Mode song says, “Everything counts, in large amounts”.

My key trick for making me look into my goals was to make them obvious. I don’t have them hidden away somewhere in an electronic HR folder, which is impossible to find: I have them written in my paper journal. This paper planner (I use the full-focus-planner by Michael Hyatt) sits in front of me on my desk all day. I take notes there and track my important to-dos in there, but most importantly I have my goals written there. Thus, I just need to open it in the morning while I start my laptop.

Make tracking your goals easy and obvious to you, too. Do you want to print out your goals and put the printout in your cubicle or on the wall next to your desk? Do you want to use them as a screensaver or as the wallpaper for the desktop on your screen? Build your habit to review them daily and then take actions to reach your goals!

Ciao, Alexander

This week’s tip was contributed by Alexander Schacht, PhD. Alexander helps statisticians and data scientists to be more effective in their work with his The Effective Statistician podcast, a leadership program, and free webinars. He’s also leading the department of statisticians at UCB responsible for launch and commercialization. Learn more from Alexander on The Effective Statistician podcast. Find it on any podcast app, Youtube, Spotify or listen here in your browser <http://theeffectivestatistician.com/>.

Weekly Tip for Apr. 6, 2021

How to listen actively and create a real connection

Have you been in a situation when you were discussing a topic with others and you were thinking about your next argument, while the others were talking? This is a common habit for many of us, but it limits us from understanding deeply where the other person is coming from. It is the opposite of active listening and we can easily be trapped in this – especially in more heated discussions.

When you actively listen to another person, you focus completely on what they are saying and how they are saying it. You try to get all the nuances, both of the verbal and non-verbal communication. Is the other person smiling or leaning back? Are the arms crossed? Do the legs show in the direction of the door as if they want to escape as fast as possible?

Asking follow-up questions instead of coming back with an answer also belongs to actively listening. I'm practicing this skill a lot during my podcast interviews to more deeply understand the other person's view or the details of the topic. Paraphrasing the information helps also to improve your understanding of other viewpoints and to show that you really want to understand them. You can start such paraphrasing with "Do I understand correctly, that".

Summarizing a longer conversation also helps to ensure that you got the most important points. As with noting the follow-up actions at the end of a meeting, you can check what you have understood thus far with the other person during a 1:1.

To actively listen to the person, you need to skip any judgments or advice. This is more easily said than done, as statisticians and data scientists are trained to look for solutions. To come up with suitable solutions, you need to understand the problem first.

Don't be too hard on yourself when you practice active listening. When you recognize you are falling back into old patterns, just accept it and get back to active listening.

Get to action in your next 1:1 conversation! It may surprise you what will happen.

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