

Set yourself up for a great year

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Make this the year that you will remember for the rest of your life as the time you really set yourself on the pathway to success. There are several sure-fire ways to make this the best year so far.

1. Make friends with everyone you know

Parents, teachers, friends, everyone! One of the ways of reducing your stress levels is to set out to have as many positive friendships this year as you can.

2. Acknowledge your inner genius

You are much, much smarter than you know. If you practice doing your best in life you will succeed because very few people ever practice doing their best.

To do your best you have to get out of the habit of predicting that things won't go well for you. If you look for what's going to go wrong, you will always find it. If you look for what works, life just gets a lot easier.

Aim to develop at least one positive aspect of yourself this year. The easiest way to start this is to appreciate the quality you want to develop in yourself.

3. Know that geniuses make mistakes

People who achieve a lot know that you have to make mistakes to learn. In fact, learning often involves making a mistake and then figuring out what went wrong. If you get too scared to make a mistake, you will not do anything different or new in your life and that would be, well, a mistake!

3. Prepare yourself for learning

Thinking positively isn't enough for successfully achieving goals. You have to focus and do things differently. Concentration is hard to achieve and very easy to lose. Find ways to reduce distractions, at least while studying.

Not everyone in your life will be a well-wisher in your self-improvement and learning plans. They may discourage you from your goal. Surround yourself with people who encourage you. Take time to be an encourager of other people rather than being a critic.

4. Live up your life and get enough sleep

Sleep helps you to manage stress, stay happy and also increases your marks. The best way to protect yourself from being stressed or depressed is to get enough sleep. You need at least 8 hours and sometimes as much as 9 and quarter hours a night. If we don't get enough sleep we often become tired, moody, bored and boring.

5. Be healthy - eat breakfast

Some people skip breakfast, but you often learn best at school in the morning and it helps to have some protein in you to feed your brain. A lack of protein can actually cause headaches, concentration problems and low energy.

6. Do the most important things first

Get into the habit of being effective. Write a to-do list each week. Ask yourself the question, "What is the one thing I could do

this week in each subject area that would improve my results?" Then do it.

6. Use your time well

Many people muck around in school and then wonder why they have to do so much work to do outside of school. If you can focus and listen well while at school you can save yourself endless hours. Hours that you can spend doing the things you really want to do. Some people find if they sit at the front they are less distracted.

Teachers want their students to do well. Watch your teachers closely. Observe the things that they emphasise or repeat. Take notes of these things. It is a fair bet that these things will feature in tests and exams.

7. From little things big things grow

Do a little bit, often. Succeeding at school can be easy if you do a little bit each day. The best learning occurs when you do spaced interval training. This means do a little bit of practice every day. Interval training is especially powerful in subjects like maths and the sciences.

8. Focus and immerse yourself

For at least some time every day switch all forms of technology off and focus on whatever you're studying. Don't try to watch TV, listen to music or gaze at a screen at the same time as learning something. Technology is not going to be there in exam rooms so you need to be used to performing without it.

9. Don't try to predict the future

Most students are really bad at predicting how well they are going to do. In fact, they are hopeless at it. So don't spend the year thinking how awful your results could be. Just

do the most important things first and do them regularly.

10. Be curious

Think of someone you know who always seems to know interesting things- weird facts, strange occurrences, funny jokes, and whacky stories. Try to be one of these people. Look out for and learn things that are fun and interesting.

11. Play more

Be active; break out into a sweat now and then. Lack of blood flow is a common reason for lack of concentration. If you've been sitting in one place for a while, stand up and stretch or bounce one of your legs for a minute or two. It gets your blood flowing and sharpens both concentration and recall. Even if you are really busy three twenty minute bursts of exercise a week makes a massive difference to your stress levels, happiness and sleeping.

12. Decide to be happy

Lots of people wait to be happy. They wait for the situation to be right. Or they wait for the right friends to show up. Some people spend their entire lives waiting to be happy. Decide to be happy now. Have a look at the things in your life you can feel lucky that you have. Appreciate the people who like you and love you. Make the most of the moment and seize the day. Help and encourage other people. Be a really good friend. Laugh more. Have fun. Have a fantastic year. **Andrew's most recent book is "Unlocking Your Child's Genius" (Finch, 2015).**