

Achieving Success and Happiness in College

5 Ways to Make It Work



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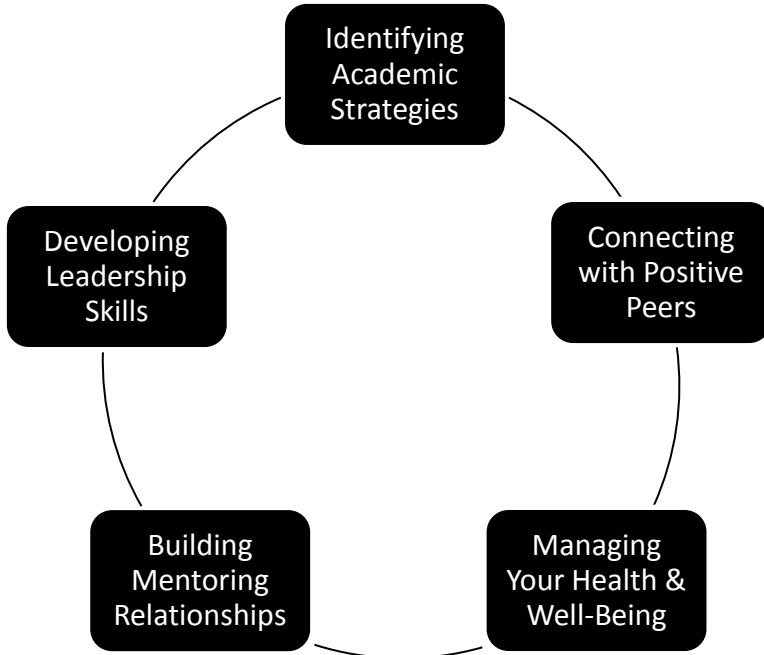
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Introduction

This book is designed to help you be successful in college. It's an excellent resource if you're about to enter a college or university for the first time, or if you're currently enrolled and want to make the most of it. The content provides insight into college life and presents strategies that can be used to address the most pressing issues—the personal challenges, social pressures, and academic demands.

The perspectives and suggestions presented throughout the book as well as the Strategies for Success sections included in each chapter will help you to:

- ✓ Increase your learning efficiency, academic performance, and self-confidence.
- ✓ Use strategies to discover and better utilize your unique talents.
- ✓ Create positive connections with professors and university personnel.
- ✓ Increase your ability to navigate a new, sometimes intimidating, and unfamiliar environment.
- ✓ Broaden your view of the world and develop valuable leadership skills.

- ✓ Expand your professional network and community contacts.
- ✓ Strengthen your linkages to responsible peer influences.
- ✓ Access supports designed to facilitate emotional adjustment, physical and mental health, and academic success.

Applying what you read in this book will help you to play an active role in creating learning opportunities that are both educational and inspiring, and ultimately help you down the path to a happy, successful, and personally rewarding college experience.

Finally, I would like to add a few comments about the writing style and content in this book. Significant efforts have been made to be concise and specific, yet be reasonably comprehensive at the same time. Therefore, you will find that some of the statements, suggestions, and perspectives, as well as the terms used, go straight to the point without lengthy explanations. This is particularly true in the Strategies for Success sections that identify student-centered skills that will often lead to success. I feel that this approach makes the book a quick read and will allow you to focus on the issues that you judge to be the most useful and relevant. All of the material included is put forth for your consideration and to use as you see fit.

Identifying Strategies for Academic Success

Avoiding Procrastination

Getting Off to a Good Start

Establishing Positive Study Habits

Think "Learning Efficiency"

Writing as a Learned Skill

Getting Help: A Sign of Intelligence & Motivation

Taking Advantage of College Supports

Establishing Goals for Academic Achievement

Tenacity Helps

Keeping Doors Open

Passion, Curiosity & Self-Determination

1

Identifying Strategies for Academic Success

Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.
- Lou Holtz

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.
- Aristotle

Give up the quest for perfection and shoot for five good minutes in a row.
- Cathy Guisewite

Most people would agree that college places different types of learning demands on students compared to high school. This in turn requires students to develop new and more effective approaches to studying, preparing for tests, and completing writing assignments. In many ways college requires students to understand the material in a deeper and more comprehensive fashion. Consequently, academic success is generally not accomplished through the process of just “repeating back” facts and details. Indeed, most courses require that you demonstrate your knowledge through thoughtful analysis and effective commentary (i.e., essays, papers, classroom discussions, lab reports, formal presentations, and the like).

This means that for most college courses the successful student needs to learn how the material relates to the “real world” in an applied sense. Therefore, to demonstrate your knowledge of the academic content on this more complex and abstract level you will most likely need to study smarter and harder, put increased effort into crafting writing assignments, understand the critical issues from different perspectives, and comprehend why the material is important in the school environment and beyond.

Another critical difference in college is the need for the student to be a self-directed learner. Let’s explore this point for a moment. College professors will provide a course syllabus that details learning expectations and specifies the evaluation methods/timetables, but the expectation is that the bulk of learning will take place outside the classroom. In other words, time in class covers only a small percentage of the learning that is expected of the student. Furthermore, the schedule of classes in college generally consists only of 12-18 hours of classroom time each week. Therefore, the most successful students put in many additional hours of reading, writing, and/or studying for each class throughout the week. In short, professors organize the material to be learned, teach the most critical content, provide extra help when requested, and institute evaluation methods. Your job as the student is to take in all of this information and execute an effective study plan that will allow you to achieve success to the best of your ability. The reality is that the responsibility for learning and performing well on tests and other graded assignments is on you.

Strategies for Success

Avoiding Procrastination

Be proactive and get started on all of your assignments when they are first put forth (not when they are almost due). A delay in getting under way with schoolwork is clearly procrastination, and unfortunately, this is a mistake that has led many capable individuals to fall behind, struggle unnecessarily, underachieve, and in too many cases fail altogether.

Getting Off to a Good Start

As a general rule it's a good practice to "overprepare" early in the semester to ensure that you get off to a good start (and to avoid getting caught by surprise on your first graded assignments). This will give you the chance to learn what the instructor expects and to determine how much work you will need to invest in each course.

Establishing Positive Study Habits

Developing good study habits is the key to learning college-level material. This includes organizing, planning ahead, blocking out time to study each day, creating study guides, prioritizing what you need to learn, and staying ahead of your assignments to avoid last minute pressures, stress, and overload. It's also important to study in distraction-free environments and to do your schoolwork

when you are the most energized, alert, and rested, and therefore able to concentrate.

Keep all of your school materials organized for easy access and reference, and use a calendar (or assignment book) on a daily basis to keep track of the due dates for all assignments. Be sure to attend all of your classes, take good notes, ask questions to show your involvement, and use your course syllabus and professor recommendations to develop a strategic study plan for all tests and papers. Additionally, it's important to read the student handbook, which will keep you informed of all academic policies and procedures (i.e., grading, drop/add deadlines, pass/fail options, degree requirements, etc.).

Think “Learning Efficiency”

The most efficient way to learn complex and/or large volumes of academic material is to study the content in small, manageable chunks over time instead of pulling an “all-nighter” or trying to “cram everything in” just before taking a test. The best study habits involve reviewing reasonable amounts of material over time (preferably doing some work each day), strategically prioritizing the content to be learned, and engaging in test preparation that leads to a deep and applied understanding of the material.

Writing as a Learned Skill

Keep in mind that writing is a learned skill. Becoming a good writer takes considerable practice and effort (e.g.,

generating multiple drafts, getting critical feedback from others, and polishing that final copy to reflect your best work). This process includes editing to improve the clarity and the flow of the content, strengthening the vocabulary, varying sentence length, eliminating redundancy, and fixing any grammatical or punctuation errors.

Most accomplished writing involves the tenet *No pain, no gain*. Given the effort involved, it's not surprising that many prolific writers throughout history have expressed awe at the amount of effort (and editing) needed to get to their final product even after experiencing years of literary success. Although there are many different ways to approach writing (which are shaped by each individual's personal style, strengths, and preferences), all of them require significant effort and most involve writing and rewriting to get it right.

Getting Help: A Sign of Intelligence and Motivation

Seek help from professors and advisors when desired or needed (it will not automatically come to you); and remember, it's rare when the need for some type of support or assistance does not surface in college. The vast majority of professors and instructors value student initiative to get help and see it as a sign of motivation and commitment (and not as a weakness).

Taking Advantage of College Supports

Know and use your academic resources in college. Virtually all colleges have student support services that include resources such as career counseling, tutoring, writing/math labs, academic advising, mediation for conflict resolution, in addition to providing learning and testing accommodations for persons with a documented disability (as mandated by federal law through the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Using these resources can increase learning efficiency, improve test-taking skills, and create highly individualized supports. In many cases accessing support in college can make the difference between earning good grades or poor grades and can often prevent unnecessary setbacks and frustrations.

Establishing Goals for Academic Achievement

The importance of setting clear academic goals and monitoring your progress toward those goals throughout each semester cannot be overemphasized. It's critical to routinely calculate your average for each class and to monitor your projected GPA during the semester. Taking a passive "wait and see attitude" will not provide the level of specific feedback that you will need to determine where you stand academically. Setting clear academic goals for all classes and having precise data available detailing your exact grades will enable you to determine specifically what needs to be done to reach your identified goals.

Tenacity Helps

Use tenacity and persistence to put forth your best effort in order to do well academically. In other words, do not be a passive learner. Remember that full-time students need to make a full-time commitment to be successful—40 hours per week devoted to class time and homework at a minimum.

Showing a positive work ethic and demonstrating the willingness to work hard when things get tough will pay off time and again. There's no guarantee that you'll be the smartest person in your class, but you do have the opportunity to be one of the hardest working. Putting forth a substantial effort in combination with working with your instructor (and/or school supports when needed) can certainly help you reach greater levels of academic success.

Keeping Doors Open

Setting your academic goals high to fully develop your talents can go a long way toward keeping your future opportunities open. Good grades do pay off and will often help a great deal when seeking employment and/or applying to graduate school. If you have the ability (and if you're attending a school that is well-matched to your academic capabilities), keeping your GPA in the 3.0 and above range can make a big difference in the long run. Striving for a high level of academic achievement is particularly important if you have graduate school aspirations. In the eyes of graduate admissions staff, a high

GPA can sometimes counterbalance a disappointing performance on standardized tests, since both your GPA and test scores will carry significant weight when graduate admission decisions are made.

Passion, Curiosity, and Self-Determination

College life provides all students with the opportunity to explore and pursue unique areas of personal interest. Fortunately, students in higher education have far more control and/or influence over their academic program compared to high school and most other educational institutions. This ability to choose, shape, and in some cases develop your own program of study can be a novel, exciting, and liberating experience. In fact, if you're fortunate enough to find a major that you're passionate about, you may also find that it's much easier to study, retain information, and ultimately achieve academically. Therefore, finding a college major of significant personal interest can be an important step toward increasing both your learning efficiency and overall academic performance.

Connecting with Positive Peers

Setting High Personal Standards

**Beware of Prejudice, Insensitivity,
& Ignorance**

Standing Up for Your Beliefs

2

Connecting with Positive Peers

Find your own path, and stay on it.
- Paul Vixie

In many respects, deciding which peers will influence one's attitudes, actions, and values can dramatically impact both academic success and personal happiness in college. Almost without exception, every student who enters college is confronted with peer pressure as well as choices that can have either a positive or negative effect on their life. In fact, for some students, success in college is more influenced by their choice of peers and their use of free time than by their ability to manage the academic demands.

Each of us chooses how and to what extent our peers will influence us one way or the other. Yet, despite the pressures, it's important to stress that our friends and acquaintances do not have the power to make decisions for us. This is not to suggest that our social environment does not affect us or that peer pressures do not influence our actions. But this point does highlight our vulnerabilities in this area (especially when first entering college), as well as the importance of seeking out the most positive and healthy interpersonal relationships possible.

Furthermore, for those inevitable times when negative peer pressure and temptation make their presence known (mostly when we are trying to “belong” or “fit in”), it’s critical to know how to manage it. I strongly recommend having a preplanned exit strategy or refusal statement on hand in order to tactfully, respectfully, and confidently avoid situations that may be unhealthy or even dangerous (i.e., riding with a driver under the influence, being pressured to use drugs, and so forth).

What are exit strategies and refusal statements? They are simple statements that decline offers to engage in undesirable activity (“No thanks, I’m not interested”) or that offer a “ready-made” excuse (“Sorry, I have other plans”). The truth is that most college students will be confronted with pressure-packed, high stakes, and potentially high-risk situations at some point, and they are not easy to manage. So being prepared in advance to navigate these situations can make it much easier to decline an invitation with grace and self-confidence (more on this in the Making a Safe Passage chapter).

Strategies for Success

Setting High Personal Standards

Seek out peers who display a positive value system—one that will contribute to your personal growth and ultimately your professional success. Spend time with individuals who are strong in character and mature enough to avoid taking any foolish risks that are potentially harmful to

themselves or others. Take steps to associate with students who consistently show kindness and understanding toward others who are different or in need. Whenever possible, form connections to students who have made (or will make) something of themselves. This includes those who wish to grow personally and have the drive and motivation to contribute something positive to the world. In other words, set high standards for yourself and put yourself in the company of others who do the same.

Beware of Prejudice, Insensitivity, and Ignorance

Avoid the influence of individuals (and groups) that are negative, biased, insensitive, and bigoted (even if they want your attention, support, complacency, and/or companionship). Beware that some individuals (yet to mature) may be charming, funny, interesting, and popular but may possess negative prejudices, think of others in terms of broad and unfavorable stereotypes, or feel indifferent toward others who are different from themselves and/or in need.

Standing Up for Your Beliefs

In social situations, don't be afraid to stand up for what you believe to be fair and just. Without question, this type of honesty and assertiveness has the potential to help others to rethink their point of view, alter their values, make more responsible decisions, and in some cases improve their outlook on the world as well.

Managing Your Health & Well-Being

Setting Priorities

Prevention of Health Problems

Stress Management & Balance

Access to Medical Services
& Psychological Supports

3

Managing Your Health & Well-Being

The greatest wealth is health.

- Virgil

*The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want,
drink what you don't like, and do what you'd rather not.*

- Mark Twain

A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book.

- Irish proverb

Entering college almost always poses new health and independent living challenges. This is certainly understandable since students frequently experience more personal responsibilities, time pressures, and financial challenges at a time when there is also a dramatic decrease in their access to a familiar support system (both at home and at school). At this time in your life you will be taking on greater responsibility for managing your personal affairs—shopping, medical appointments, laundry, budgeting, and more. For most, taking on these added responsibilities is not a gradual process but a big leap forward. So not surprisingly, if you become overloaded or overwhelmed with managing your personal affairs in addition to all the schoolwork, your physical and emotional health may be affected (or even jeopardized if you're not careful).

The Strategies for Success section below is intended to provide guidance (and reminders) with respect to health maintenance and restoration. This includes being attentive to your mind, body, and spirit as you take on the challenges of college life. Admittedly, many of the recommendations fall into the “Don’t you think that I already know that!” category for students, but nevertheless they are being included because *knowing* what is best and *doing* what is best are too often entirely different matters altogether (especially for college students). In any event, the suggestions that follow are well worth reviewing (and in some cases revisiting) to ensure that your college experience includes engaging in good health practices.

Strategies for Success

Setting Priorities

Do not spread yourself thin by taking on too many commitments that will lead to overload, interpersonal conflicts, and/or emotional distress (i.e., school, work, social activities, and so forth). If you fall behind, step back and prioritize what you absolutely need to get accomplished and focus on what is most important.

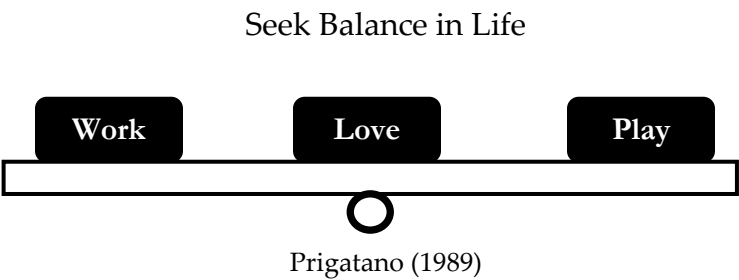
Interestingly, with respect to time management, executive consultants often stress that we cannot actually manage time, but we do have control over the activities that we choose to pursue. Therefore, the key to self-regulation and personal efficiency is to routinely organize and execute around essential priorities (Covey, 2004).

Prevention of Health Problems

Take responsibility for making decisions that are in the best interest of your physical and emotional health. This includes doing what you can to prevent health problems and being quick to seek medical attention when it's needed. Many ailments need immediate attention to prevent them from becoming quite serious. When it comes to health concerns: When in doubt, get it checked out.

Stress Management and Balance

Engage in good stress management practices—eat on schedule (avoid skipping meals), exercise regularly, eat healthy foods, find time to have fun, and get plenty of rest. Beware of the negative and cumulative effects of stress (anxiety, overload, fatigue, etc.). Take action to ensure that you have enough time to devote to the things in your life that are the most critical. For example, the diagram below, which is based on the writings of George Prigatano (1989), is an excellent framework to keep in mind. It can be used as a guide to help you set personal priorities in order to maintain a healthy balance in your day-to-day life.



Work refers to any form of productive activity (including school and volunteer activities). **Love** refers to all valued interpersonal relationships. **Play** refers to the vital social and recreational activities that serve to renew the spirit and recharge the batteries.

According to this model, too much time and energy devoted to any one area will have the undesirable effect of throwing one's life out of balance. The key is to have healthy amounts of Work, Love, and Play present in your life.

Access to Medical Services and Psychological Supports

Utilize the student health offices, psychological counseling services, and/or off-campus medical supports to help with addressing any personal or medical problems. These can include but are not limited to difficulties with relationships, eating problems, depression, anxiety, inability to sleep well, concerns about sexual health, self-image struggles, use of substances or addictions, feeling isolated or disconnected, or any problem that you think might need attention. It's critical to stress that all the health issues noted above respond favorably to treatment so please seek help if needed.

Building Mentoring Relationships That Inform & Inspire

Going Beyond Academics

Connecting with Subject Matter
Experts & Mentors

Becoming More Than Your Transcript

Pursuing Personal Enrichment & Career
Development Opportunities

4

Building Mentoring Relationships That Inform & Inspire

To live for a time close to great minds is the best kind of education.
- John Buchan

Knowledge is constructed, not instructed.
- John Dewey

One of the greatest benefits of college life is having the opportunity to work with a variety of individuals who have devoted their careers to a specific area of study or to a particular cause or concern. Most professionals in higher education have advanced training and significant expertise, as well as unique personal experiences that are brought into the classroom. Furthermore, college and university personnel who are drawn to academic life generally have a thirst for learning and discovery. This enthusiasm and quest for knowledge is often shared with students and it can be very exciting to experience. Granted, not all professors and instructors are created equal as far as their ability to teach and inspire others, but there are many who have that special combination of being an expert along with the teaching skills to reach their students. Therefore, one key to developing your own skills and getting the most out of college is to make significant efforts to find the best professors and take their classes (even if you have to go

outside of your major now and then to make it happen). This is just one example of healthy risk taking that can really pay off.

Interestingly, as most college students know, many years ago mentoring and tutoring were the primary methods of disseminating knowledge and developing expertise (such as through apprenticeships). In such cases, young and impressionable students worked closely with scholars or subject matter experts who would guide their intellectual development on a technical, personal, and in many cases, spiritual level. As higher education evolved and began to include large numbers of students (resulting in the need to be more efficient) much of this personalization was lost. Certainly, mentoring, apprenticeships, and internship models of student development still exist, but they are most often found in professional training programs on the graduate and post-graduate levels (allied health and medical training models are excellent examples). However, recent trends in higher education have paid much more attention to helping new students get off to a good start and to get meaningfully connected to the academic and social aspects of college life. Yet these positive initiatives may not reach all students and can often be limited in scope. In many cases schools do not go far enough to ensure that each student will get the maximum benefit from the expertise and diverse resources present within the academic setting and local community.

So where does this leave you if you want to develop your own knowledge and skills through increased collaboration

with professors and others? Simply put, you will need to show significant initiative to find ways to work more closely with professors, researchers, subject matter experts, and the like on a more individualized basis. This includes connecting with a wide variety of mentors and/or positive role models off-campus and in the community at large.

Strategies for Success

Going Beyond Academics

It's vitally important to develop skills and interests in college beyond what's being offered within the confines of your program of study. Even a productive and successful professional career is unlikely to meet all of your personal needs. Consequently, expanding your horizons (and talents) beyond academics is a very important investment in your personal and professional development. To this end it's important to find ways to get involved in campus and community life—organizations, clubs, volunteer opportunities, intramural sports, interscholastic athletics, scholarly activities, community health initiatives, and the like. These are just a few examples of ways to expand your knowledge, meet new people, and begin developing a valuable social and professional network. This is also an excellent way to make contributions to your immediate learning community and beyond.

Connecting with Subject Matter Experts and Mentors

Seek out opportunities to build a professional working relationship with professors, instructors, and dynamic university personnel. These various types of mentoring relationships can advance your knowledge in specific fields of study, build your self-confidence, and help you to explore your strengths and interests.

This can be accomplished in a number of ways such as doing independent study, participating in collaborative research, and designing work-study experiences to create high-interest learning opportunities. Also, it's important to look beyond your college or university and explore learning opportunities in the local community as well. Internships (paid and unpaid), volunteer work, job shadowing, and visiting employers of interest are all great ways to get started.

Becoming More Than Your Transcript

Find interesting and personally rewarding ways to achieve beyond academics alone. This can include initiatives such as assisting those in need, working to support national or international organizations, doing part-time work, participating in community-based agencies, or any pursuit that will enable you to demonstrate your unique capabilities. Without question, these types of experiences will allow you to become much more than what your college transcript by itself will show.

Pursuing Personal Enrichment and Career Development Opportunities

Take classes that will push you to grow as a person—communications, art, acting, philosophy, creative writing, or any course that will in your judgment help you to be a well-rounded person. Consider participating in the numerous learning opportunities and extracurricular activities that are routinely offered in order to increase your understanding of yourself and the world. This includes attending lectures, art shows, plays, writing seminars, concerts, recitals, conferences, scholarly/cultural events, readings, films, and the like. Studying abroad is another personal enrichment option worth serious consideration.

Finally, taking career interest inventories and aptitude tests at your college counseling or advising center is an excellent way not only to learn about your strengths and abilities, but also to explore new programs of study and professions that you may not have considered. This process can help you to learn more about occupations that may be of interest as well as any hidden potential that you may have in areas yet to be identified or fully appreciated.

Developing Your Leadership Skills

Leadership at Any Age

Learning by Observing & Doing

Developing Your Distinctive Personal Qualities & Communication Skills

Ethics Means Everything

Feedback & Personal Growth

Questioning

Optimism

Compassion

Collaboration & Ownership

Recognizing the Importance & Value of Leadership

5

Developing Your Leadership Skills

The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we made them.

- Albert Einstein

Rather than define leadership either as a position of authority in a social structure or as a personal set of characteristics, we may find it a great deal more useful to define leadership as an activity.

- Ronald A. Heifetz

The world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation.

- Jacob Bronowski

The “old school” views on leadership have dramatically changed (and evolved) over the last few decades. Today, there is an extensive literature on leadership which de-emphasizes the traditional top-down management of people and resources. Instead, the most progressive thoughts on leadership in the 21st century center on encouraging individuals to show initiative, persistence, and resourcefulness, and to help create a positive culture in the workplace—one that is supportive, fair, open-minded, productive, ethical, and innovative. Collegial problem solving, meaningful collaboration, and personal and professional development over the lifespan have taken on a greater importance at all levels within the best organizations. This clearly suggests that developing your talents and leadership skills in college will give you an

excellent head start in your career and ultimately many advantages in life.

Many of these points are touched on in the quotes presented above. Interestingly, Albert Einstein was a person who exemplified creative thinking and imagination. He was forward-thinking, outspoken, not bound by convention, and quick to challenge the status quo. To take his work to a higher level, he routinely sought out the expertise of others. The quote from Ronald Heifetz (1994) from his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, stresses the critical need for leadership “activity” (or actions) to originate from virtually every person within organizations, on working teams, in academic settings, and so forth. All individuals can suggest ideas, each of which has the potential to make a difference. No contribution, suggestion, or improvement, whether large or small, should ever be overlooked or underappreciated. Dr. Heifetz also emphasizes the need to value and listen to people who have unique perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, and roles. Taking all these points into consideration, students should be certain to assert themselves in a way that is consistent with their beliefs, perspectives, and convictions without being intimidated by fancy job titles or overrun by strong personalities. Lastly, the Jacob Bronowski quote stresses the importance of engagement—showing the initiative to confront and tackle the problems at hand and to find ways to contribute to the human condition.

So what are the main principles for college students to understand? There are a few points worth highlighting.

First, leadership encompasses many different types of individual styles and behaviors—it's not narrowly defined. Leadership is much more than "leading the charge up the hill" or taking on formally assigned responsibilities such as chairing a committee, being president of a student organization, or running a community event. Rather, leadership should be viewed more broadly to include simple actions and initiatives that make direct contributions or changes (whether they're large or small). Indeed, some leadership actions/activities involve long-term commitments and formal authority, yet many others are very brief or situational (i.e., writing a letter to the editor, assisting others in crisis, volunteering to perform an important task, etc.). All are needed and enormously valuable. Furthermore, leadership can and does involve stepping in (modeling) and/or speaking up (advocating) to inspire or challenge others to act, reflect, or change even when you're not "officially" in charge. And equally important, leadership is also doing "quiet work" that makes a difference in a small group or in the life of one individual who may need your help at a particular moment.

Without question, each and every day many students make a positive difference in the lives of others in a variety of ways. Some student leaders (I would argue a minority) are "directing the show" in a highly visible manner with well-defined roles and some degree of formal responsibility. Others (I would say the majority) are making a significant difference without fanfare or outside recognition (e.g., quietly doing good work and setting a good example). As

a rule, all student leaders are engaged, committed to excellence, function as results-oriented team members, show ownership, and operate as good role models through their words and deeds.

Strategies for Success

Leadership at Any Age

Get started on “leadership activity” early in your college experience (don’t wait until your last year or two of college). Take action to get involved in causes of personal interest not only to develop your own talents but to put yourself in a position to make a difference in the lives of others. Moving into leadership roles can help you to develop your own leadership skills by expanding and refining your unique talents, while at the same time learning from positive role models whom you respect and admire.

Learning by Observing and Doing

Observe others in leadership roles carefully (and critically) to inform yourself on what you believe exemplifies high-quality leadership. Look for and reflect on the good, the bad, the ugly, and the great examples of leadership. Watch for leadership skills (and actions) in those who have formal authority as well as those who do not (but nonetheless show the initiative to make a difference).

Performing a variety of leadership tasks over time and across situations will help you to develop your self-confidence, as well as your individual leadership skills and style. Finding ways to engage in real world leadership experiences will also help you develop professional relationships and connections, which may become a good source for references at a later date (especially if you plan to seek competitive scholarships, enter graduate school, and so forth).

Developing Your Distinctive Personal Qualities and Communication Skills

Do work that stands out. Find interesting, original, and innovative projects to pursue. With respect to building and expanding your communication skills, go the extra mile to use powerful and descriptive language to illustrate important points (verbally and in writing). Consider using dynamic and attention-getting mediums to get your message across (such as the creative use of the visual arts and technology). In other words, strive to develop high-impact methods to make your points and support your arguments so that you can make a lasting impression and inspire others to action. When engaged in leadership activities, be sure to choose your words carefully so that they demonstrate your insight and sensitivity to the perspectives, values, strengths, needs, vulnerabilities, and circumstances of others.

Ethics Means Everything

From the standpoint of ethical development, academic honesty and making decisions that demonstrate good character are far more important personal qualities than scoring high on a test, getting good grades, or going along with the crowd (i.e., conformity). Moral strength, fair play, doing what you know in your heart is right, and consistently exercising sound judgment are important qualities to solidify and strengthen at this time in your life. Hold yourself to the highest ethical standards and encourage others to do the same.

Feedback and Personal Growth

Solicit feedback from others to improve your knowledge and leadership skills. Do your best to increase your self-awareness specific to your strengths and qualities, as well as areas that you need to improve on. Although it's hard when you're invested in your work, try to avoid being defensive and resistant to suggestions. Learn to identify, work around, and/or compensate for your limitations without getting too discouraged or self-critical. Seek help, advice, and consultation in your personal, academic, and work life as needed. The most effective leaders don't try to go it alone or underestimate what others can contribute.

Questioning

Leadership often consists of asking important questions or simply sharing observations. As stressed throughout this chapter, leadership does not always involve being viewed as an expert, having all the answers, or being the person who is formally in charge. Encouraging people to analyze problems, reflect, probe deeper, be proactive, support their position, find alternative solutions, and pay attention to important issues (that otherwise might be neglected, overlooked, or avoided) are all excellent examples of quality leadership.

Optimism

Operate from a position of both honesty and optimism when addressing problems. Make these qualities a part of your very being. When working on assignments and projects with others, look for signs of distress, negativity, indifference, confusion, or dissent in those around you. To help those who are struggling, listen carefully to their perspectives and work pragmatically in a positive forward-thinking manner as you search for what can be accomplished or improved. Individuals who show both the conviction and drive to make positive improvements can be a powerful force when solving problems. Without question, optimism and taking a constructive “can-do” attitude can be highly contagious and inspirational to others who need support, direction, and a greater sense of hope.

Compassion

The most empathetic and astute leaders go well beyond “tolerance” of others. They genuinely strive to better understand, value, and explicitly recognize the critical importance and beauty of diversity, exceptionality, and multiculturalism. The best leaders always think of others who have disadvantaged circumstances (i.e., economically, culturally, etc.), do not have a voice at the table, or who may be unable to speak for themselves. Compassionate leaders ensure that all key stakeholders have a voice in the decisions that will impact them.

Collaboration and Ownership

When taking on leadership tasks, make room for all potential contributors, help others to recognize that they belong, and point out how their efforts are contributing something of importance. Leaders also help other team members to see the big picture, take ownership in solving problems (i.e., accountability), and identify the first steps that need to be taken to address large problems.

Recognizing the Importance and Value of Leadership

A final skill worth noting is the ability to recognize the positive effects of quality leadership. Warren Bennis (1993), a noted leadership scholar, feels that effective leaders should: 1) help all people to feel significant, 2) encourage ongoing learning, 3) facilitate a broad sense of community

and positive teamwork, and 4) make work both interesting and exciting for everyone involved. If you favorably impact any of these four areas in college (and beyond), you are most likely acting as an effective leader.

Making a Safe Passage

Making a Safe Passage

Substance Use, Personal Risks & Social Responsibility

Please be assured that this is not a lecture and I'm not going to probe into your business.... But I just wanted to let you know that you're at the toughest age...the important thing is getting through these years successfully and landing on your feet. Not having an "event" that can be prevented. You know...something that will hurt you forever!

- Professor Dillon

A More Favorable Light (Screenplay)

This will be brief, honest, respectfully shared, and blunt (for reasons that you will soon understand). It's hoped that the following information and recommendations are taken to heart, and that the suggestions put forth will lead to some soul searching and behavioral changes (if needed). This chapter is included to help you make intelligent personal decisions with respect to substance use and also help you play a role in encouraging others to do the same. This is shared in the spirit of support, and further, with the understanding that college life can be difficult and that we all make mistakes.

I must stress that this commentary is not theoretical or hypothetical. It's based on my direct work with students of all ages (on the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels), my personal experiences as a parent and

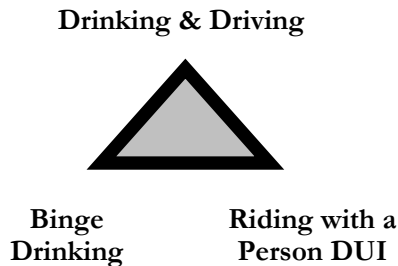
former college student, reviewing research on substance use and public safety, and working in the field of neurological rehabilitation for many years. With respect to neurorehabilitation, I've had the opportunity to work with thousands of people who were in the fight of their lives after sustaining a brain injury. This includes individuals who were striving to relearn basic tasks such as walking, talking, dressing, eating, and drinking, as well as those who were searching to find ways to cope and move forward despite the trauma and profound threats to their level of independence, self-esteem, and quality of life. Undoubtedly, these experiences still have a powerful impact on me and have certainly shaped many of my perspectives and opinions.

A significant number of these individuals were hit by a drunk driver and had no hand in causing their traumatic lifelong injury and profound family crisis. However, many young adults participating in neurorehabilitation were drinking and driving themselves (which led to their accident and the associated personal losses). Moreover, I have worked with many severely injured survivors who were riding with a driver who was under the influence of a substance and should never have been behind the wheel.

Being a close witness to the devastating consequences of the irresponsible use of substances over the years has motivated me to share this information with you in the hopes that these occurrences will be prevented. Again, this is not a lecture, but straight talk on an adult-to-adult level. The intent is to shine a light on the realities that come from

these lapses in judgment so that you and your friends can make informed and responsible decisions (not just in college but for the rest of your life). I hope that this information is so convincing that it will never be forgotten—that it will form a lasting impression that will help you to remain cautious and out of harm's way.

The overarching message here, as illustrated below, is to keep yourself safe when it comes to the use of substances. In other words, Do Not Enter the Deadly Triangle.



Substance Use and Personal Responsibility

Without question, there's a significant increase in our personal and social responsibilities when we enter adulthood, not the least of which has to do with the use of alcohol (and drugs). So, at the risk of oversimplifying these issues as they relate to college life, let's begin. After reviewing the information that follows, I believe that most readers will likely fall into one of two categories:

1) Those who will better understand (if they don't already) the profound seriousness of irresponsible substance use and, as a consequence, will make a firm and unwavering commitment to always make responsible decisions about the use of alcohol and drugs.

2) Those who will not significantly alter their attitudes and/or behaviors and will continue to put themselves and others at serious risk.

With that said I hope you will fit into the first category (if you do not at this moment in time)!

Simply put, there are a number of unfortunate personal decisions that students make each year that disrupt, take, and/or destroy lives. This occurs at an alarming rate and often involves the use (and abuse) of intoxicating or mind-altering substances. The tremendous pain and suffering often caused by this risk-taking behavior is usually beyond our full comprehension. In many ways the extent of this problem defies accurate measurement—statistically, financially, emotionally, legally, and so forth. Attempts have been made to quantify the human suffering and economic costs caused by the risk-taking incidents of college students, but I think most researchers will agree that exact numbers cannot be found or calculated with great accuracy. In short, words and numbers cannot portray or convey the full extent of the losses, whether it's an attempt to assign a dollar value, determine the true frequency of unfortunate incidents caused by substance

use, capture secondary or unintended consequences (such as economic losses or disruptions within the family system), or define the degree of psychological trauma and despair felt by those negatively impacted.

It's well-known, however, that many young students go through periods of testing the limits and experimenting with substances as they move through the teenage years. Unfortunately, some of these individuals continue in this pattern throughout college and beyond. Others, to their credit, make a firm and deliberate decision to stop (or at least moderate) this behavior before it goes on too long or is taken too far. Those who do moderate their use of substances and avoid engaging in high-risk behavior often do so because they begin to see the risks and consequences more clearly (not only to themselves but also to others, such as innocent citizens living in the community).

Drinking and Driving

I think it's fair to say that most people have been taught (time and again) never to drink and drive, never to ride in a car when the driver has consumed intoxicating substances, and to stay away from binge drinking. But sadly, despite this knowledge, aggressive law enforcement, and the ever-present tragedies covered by the media, many people in our society still don't heed this advice. They just don't seem to get it, think they're above it, or believe that a tragedy will not happen to them. With respect to drinking and driving, the safest rule is:

If any form of alcohol touches your lips don't turn the ignition key under any circumstances!

If you follow this simple rule you will NEVER be in trouble for alcohol-related offenses on the road. Furthermore, you will NEVER find yourself in a situation where your decision to drink and drive has killed or permanently injured another human being. You will NEVER be arrested, imprisoned, or sued for this type of offense. This is a 100 percent guarantee that you can take to the bank.

Without question, the use of substances combined with driving is a deadly formula that all too often leads to serious accidents. This certainly includes deaths, devastating/permanent lifelong injuries (e.g., brain trauma, spinal cord injury, painful disfiguring burns, etc.), and/or legal and financial problems that can last a lifetime (such as jail time, lawsuits, settlements, a permanent criminal record, the loss of marketability in the workplace and decreased access to desirable professions).

These far-reaching and devastating risks far outweigh any justification for drinking and driving. After all, it's better to "stay put" or take a cab home than to ride a medical transport helicopter to the trauma center or take a slow ambulance ride to the hospital for a visit with the medical examiner (both daily occurrences throughout the United States). To put it mildly, these mistakes and resulting tragedies occur at alarming rates for college students, and it would be great if they became less prevalent and never involved you or any of your friends and family.

It's important to emphasize one final point regarding drinking and driving since it's a pervasive problem in our society. Driving drunk or under the influence is a crime that often produces a lot of victims. Regrettably, there are still many individuals willing to take the chance that they might sustain a serious injury or worse, without carefully considering their personal responsibilities and legal obligations to avoid putting others at risk. So what is the bottom line? When it comes to the use of substances it's critically important to think beyond the moment, anticipate the consequences of your actions, and make detailed plans to keep yourself and others safe at all times.

Binge Drinking

Let's shift for a moment and look at binge drinking which is also an enormous problem on campuses. Binge drinking is defined by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 percent or above. This typically happens when men and women consume multiple drinks over just two or three hours. So binge drinking is rapid consumption leading to impairment and/or intoxication. It also includes the regular and heavy use of alcohol during the week or over short periods of time.

Binge drinking presents a multitude of serious risks beyond those linked with driving as discussed above. Rapid and excessive consumption of alcohol can also lead to death secondary to poisoning, choking, heart failure,

acute gastritis, falls leading to neuro-trauma (e.g., central nervous system bleeding, brain swelling, etc.), accidental fires that can take many lives, and the list of sad possibilities goes on and on. Moreover, other problems such as drowning incidents, pedestrian accidents, fights, unwanted pregnancy, STDs, falling victim to crime, and the like also occur at alarming rates when people are intoxicated. Unfortunately, some students who have been bingeing die alone when they are separated from their peers or when their friends misjudge their condition (thinking they are just “sleeping it off” without realizing that the amount of alcohol ingested was lethal). In some cases, students are rushed to the ER where pumping out their stomach gives them a second chance. Yet too often even the best medical interventions cannot save the individual if they’ve had too much to drink.

Heavy drinking over time can cause a variety of medical, physical, mental health, and social problems as well. These include seizures, kidney disease, struggles with addiction, permanent cognitive impairments, an increased risk of stroke and cancer, motor problems, underachievement, chronic economic struggles, interpersonal conflicts, and so forth. This aspect of substance use should not be taken lightly in that some students in college (without even realizing it) are in the early stages of developing a drinking habit that will result in long-term addictions and/or irreversible health problems.

A Few Final Thoughts on “Thinking Before Acting”

Please remember that when it comes to the use of substances all it takes is one lapse in judgment to put yourself and others in crisis—yes, just one mistake in this area and life as you know it can change forever. Also, keep in mind that the United States criminal justice system in many respects is better at forgiving than forgetting. In other words, arrests and criminal charges (even without convictions) will turn up on background checks when seeking employment and/or professional licenses (another complication that can be 100 percent prevented).

Each semester, thousands upon thousands of college students learn these lessons the hard way through arrests, legal actions, accidents, injuries, and the like. Although not every risk in life can be prevented (bad things do happen to good people), many risks in college can be avoided and/or minimized.

The good news is that many of the risk factors discussed above can be eliminated and/or prevented by using sound judgment and showing personal restraint. This is easier said than done since the media and popular culture in our society make unrestrained partying look like so much fun, while disregarding the associated risks or serious consequences. I hope that the points made in this chapter will provide indispensable information to help challenge this false and distorted image, and will convince you not to make a serious mistake that you may come to regret.

**Closing Remarks –
For Your Consideration**

Closing Remarks – For Your Consideration

*What it all comes down to ...
is that I haven't got it all figured out just yet.
- Alanis Morissette*

*Fair play to those who dare to dream.
- Markéta Irglová*

All you can do is to put your best effort forward. Please remember that the college years are a time of self-discovery as well as career exploration. Taken together, this process of personal growth and establishing a purposeful direction in life is generally measured in years rather than semesters. So enjoy the learning process and do not expect too much too soon.



Ideally, the college experience sets the foundation for students to establish direction and to get the training they need to grow personally and professionally. If you study what you love, pursue what you do well, and follow your passions and interests, you will most likely be heading in the right direction.



In many respects, learning how to learn and developing the capacity to solve problems with others are some of the most important skills you can acquire in college. These

essential life skills will work to your advantage in all professions, and as importantly, will help you to meet the many personal challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.



It's important to stress that your initial choice of a college may not be a good match (i.e., socially, academically, financially, etc.). In some cases it may take awhile for your first choice to work out, but if it doesn't, don't feel trapped. Transferring to another institution may be the best solution. There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States, which speaks to the fact that there are many opportunities to find a school that will meet your needs.



Finding a program of study that fits with your interests and abilities can be a challenge as well. It may take time, life experiences, and/or exposure to alternative majors to find the right path. Beware that, in some cases, the major that you have chosen may be an excellent fit for you, but the particular program or institution that you're enrolled in may not be the best match. If this is the case, do not be too quick to abandon a major that's truly a good career choice. In fact, it's not an uncommon occurrence when a major is well-suited to the individual but the school or academic department may not be the best fit (i.e., limited space for enrollment, academic pressures are just too overwhelming compared to other schools, etc.). Schools that offer the same major can significantly differ in their admission standards, philosophy of education and training, curricular offerings,

and level of student support. Therefore, it may be worth exploring other schools.



If you find that you're struggling to master college-level material despite giving it your best effort, it may be wise to participate in educational and/or psychological testing to evaluate your learning style. This process can identify learning strengths and needs, as well as any undiagnosed learning difficulties that might be impacting your success in college. This can be a great help in that learning and test-taking strategies are frequently identified, along with instructional supports, which can definitely help you to reach your full potential.



Do not get swept up or distracted by all of the published rankings and listings that rate colleges and universities. All accredited institutions of higher education have talented professors and unique characteristics that offer a wide array of opportunities. Perhaps Kate Zernike (2001, April 8) says it best in her review of *The Harvard Guide to Collegiate Happiness: A Ten-Year Study Reveals How to Have a Better College Experience*. She states that "It doesn't matter so much where you go to college, but what you make of the experience" (p. 18).

So in many respects, the key is to find the school that works best for you—one that will nurture your talents and help you to achieve your goals. After all, when it comes to

higher education and career development, where you end up is far more important than where you begin!

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Graduating from a college or university with a degree is not the only pathway to success in life that is known to humankind. Many happy and successful women and men are self-taught, follow their entrepreneurial spirit, enter lucrative and personally satisfying trades, and pursue other unique individual talents that are already highly evolved as well as profitable.

~

Not all college-level work needs to be career- or degree-driven. Education has tremendous intrinsic value, and will frequently, in and of itself, provide a rewarding and self-enhancing experience that is well worth the time and effort.

~

Never underestimate the importance of finding the time to get away from the daily grind of school so that you can “clear your head” and recover your strength. Take mental health breaks. Consider engaging with the natural environment to help with renewal and relaxation. Oftentimes the best way to manage stressful pressures in life is not just to step back but to get into another pursuit that will provide a healthy break and diversion from it all.

Conclusion

Do your best...and don't look back.
- Sandra Day O'Connor

I hope that you've found the material in this book to be interesting, relevant, and useful as you engage in higher education. I truly believe that if you strive to do your best, seek help when needed, study what you enjoy, and associate with those who appreciate you and respect others, you will definitely be on the right track. In the end I wish you the best of luck, success and happiness throughout your college years, and of course, a safe passage.

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