

# Goal Achievement

## SUMMARY

In this episode of *Change Starts Here: Research Conversations*, cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Eve Miller, Ph.D and former educators Dr. Jennifer Chevalier, Ed.D, and Kim Yaris, M.Ed. discuss the importance of creating clear pathways for achieving goals. They explore the concepts of hope, adaptability, and managing emotions while working towards goals, emphasizing the idea that the process is a crucial part of the pathway to success.

## DEFINITION

Planning ahead is an executive function that involves the ability to anticipate future tasks, set goals, devise strategies, and organize resources to achieve those goals. It encompasses thinking ahead, creating timelines, and making proactive decisions to effectively manage time and tasks.

## TRY THIS!

### Overcoming the Top 3 Barriers to Goal Achievement

#### 1. Confusing Optimism for Hope

Understanding that people do not have to have unwavering faith in a positive outcome helps them to recognize their own ability to enact impactful changes or make significant progress towards their aspirations. For example, a person may recognize the shortcomings of an education system (pessimism) yet firmly believe that there is a viable pathway for improvement. Making this shift fosters a greater acceptance of challenges and instills a sense of heightened agency when striving towards personal goals.

#### 2. Believing the Pathway to Achievement is Linear

When people think about goal achievement as linear—like a balance beam—setbacks are often perceived as failure which can derail their progress toward a goal. Shifting to thinking about goal achievement as non-linear—like a jungle gym—helps people to see setbacks as an expected part of the process of attaining goals. Thought experiments that ask people to envision their goal and anticipate challenges that can move their progress forward, backward, as well as side to side, prepares them to anticipate possible obstacles and how to navigate them when they arise.

#### 3. Encountering Complex Emotions

When the path to achieving a goal becomes rocky, it is normal to experience a wide range of emotions, including complex feelings like frustration, disappointment, or even failure. These emotions can paralyze forward momentum or cause people to abandon a goal altogether. Anticipating challenges in advance enables individuals to mentally prepare and rehearse narratives that attribute failure or adversity to factors such as ineffective strategies, which can be adjusted, rather than fixed elements like a lack of talent.

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

- [Why Feeling Close to the Finish Line Makes You Push Harder](#)  
In this article, behavioral scientist Oleg Urminsky explains why people tend to work harder when they get close to achieving a goal.
- [High School Students' Perspectives on Their Futures](#)  
This study analyzes students' views on their future, taking into account the influence of family income and race/ethnicity, both known to impact adolescents' perceptions of success.