



Designing Self Rewards

One friend would reward herself when she edited and critiqued her own doctoral dissertation, which she was editing for use as a published book. At the bottom of each page, she would place one lone M&M. When she got to the bottom, she would eat it.

Another would celebrate another long, tough week at work by going hiking with friends on the weekend.

Whenever the end of the semester would roll around, one group of graduate students would make it a point to meet at a deli close to campus to celebrate getting closer to achieving their degrees.

Long-term and complex goals often require a lot of time to achieve. These also require different strategies. Some of these strategies may involve making contact with important experts. Others may require

research through digital repositories, websites, publications, and archival resources. These may involve taking formal courses as well as informal ways of learning.

Recording Milestones

No matter what the strategies are for long-term goals, it is a good idea to celebrate milestones. Milestones are moments when a sub-goal has been reached. For long-term projects, many will track and report their own progress. This helps them stay up with the tasks, and it shows them when they may be falling short.

Rewards encourage the learner to move on to the next goal. It also gives a moment to rest and reflect on the achievements and to maybe strategize the next steps for the overall goal.

Ways to Mark Progress

People all have different ways of rewarding themselves. More people celebrate in ways that are personally meaningful.

For some, they may want to get together with friends and family for a social event: a dinner or a party. Others may splurge with a shopping spree. There may be a favorite ritual—like going to a particular restaurant, going on a short trip, buying commemorative jewelry or some artifact or type of clothing.

Many will post to their social network site “wall.” Or they will post to a micro-blog to let their friends know in real time. “I’ve just finished my half-marathon!” “I just took the bar!”

It's important to choose rewards that are healthy and will not habituate into something negative in the long-term. (For example, celebrating with cigarettes, hard liquor, or unhealthy foods may habituate into unhealthy long-term behaviors—which would be ultimately counter-productive.)

Encouraging Repeated Positive Behavior

Long-term goals are tough to achieve. They often require the achievement of many smaller sub-goals along the way. Research has found that people need some 21 days of a habituated change in order to achieve the desired behavior as a regular part of life. Longer term goals (which may take years or even decades to achieve) require even more encouragement and rewards for the necessary perseverance.

Setting up a reward regimen requires the self-awareness of what one would consider a reward. And then, it's important to track one's progress (in sub-goals) towards certain over-arching goals. Then, it's very critical to follow through on the rewards whenever called for. Sometimes, it may be good to just reward general movement in the proper directions towards a sub-goal or goal.

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