What If My Plan Doesn’t Work?

Long term planning requires using processes of monitoring and modifying the plan. If we try something new and it doesn’t work, expecting results to improve without changing anything about the plan or the action we take toward accomplishing the plan is unrealistic and unproductive. Analyze the following example to see the processes of monitor and modify in action.

Every year Thomas writes New Year’s resolutions, and by February he hasn’t kept a single one of them. He’s given up trying to plan his life because goals just don’t work. We can empathize with Thomas, and we’ve probably had the same experience, but giving up is not the answer to this dilemma. Instead, consider looking at the barriers or obstacles that get in the way of your plans. By analyzing the reasons for a plan’s failure and addressing those specific issues, we can safeguard our success.

Here is Thomas’s analysis of the reasons for his failure.

1. **List a goal that is important to you and that you are currently developing**: I want to do well in school, but last semester I scheduled classes from 8:30 – 1:00 on four days, but I didn’t do well because I missed classes so much. I have to do better this semester or I’m out of school for good!

2. **What barrier kept you from achieving this goal?** I overslept every Monday and missed my first class, and then on Wednesdays I didn’t want to go because I didn’t have my homework done. On Thursdays I work at 2:00, so I skipped my 11:30 class sometime, well—often, to eat and fool around with my friends at school before work.

3. **How can you overcome the barrier or obstacle?** I shouldn’t take an 8:30 class on Mondays since I work on Sundays until 11 p.m. I could take afternoon classes, and I’m always awake by 10 in the morning, so I’d make classes if they were from 10 – 2:30. That schedule works with my job, too. And when I do miss class, I need to email the instructor and ask her what is due the next class period and then do the homework right away before I forget about it. Since I work at 2:00 on Thursdays, I’m going to take one Friday morning class from 9 12. That way I won’t skip class to eat before work. The other thing I need to do is to just suck it up and face it when I don’t have my homework done. It’s better to go to class without it than to get so far behind. Last semester I had to drop two classes, and I can’t do that this semester. I have to make myself go to class.

Thomas reflected on the plan he designed for his semester at college and found valid reasons for the plan not working. If Thomas registers for his next semester and sets a schedule similar to his first semester, he will likely continue to experience the same problems and receive poor results. If, however, Thomas uses the solutions to the barriers he discovered by reflecting on the obstacles to his success, he will likely have a much better experience and achieve his goals.