

12. Effort Activity: Recognising Your Blockers

A 'blocker' is a psychological barrier that stops you working. It might be a pattern of thinking or a habit you've established that you can't break. All of us have blockers – thoughts and feelings that stop us doing the thing we know we really need to do.

To put in the effort for A level success you have to recognise your blockers and break down those patterns of thought. This four stage model is useful for recognising the behaviours and thought patterns that are a sign of blockers.

1. Initial Lack of Motivation

Everyone feels discouraged at some point – the feeling that they don't want to complete a piece of work, finish an essay or put in a couple of hours on a tricky piece of coursework. The difference is what you tend to do next ...

2. Bypassing Conscience

Most people will feel guilty when they don't work ('I should be finishing that essay ...'), but sometimes we find ways of bypassing our conscience. We deliberately rethink the situation until we feel better about it. Some thought patterns you might have include:

- » Student A hasn't done it either, so I'm not that bad.
- » At other schools/colleges they don't even do this piece, so why should I?
- » The instructions were unclear, so I've got an excuse. I'm telling myself I didn't really understand.
- » I rushed a piece last time and the grade was OK. I'll do that again.
- » I deserve a break. I've always really loved this TV programme – I'll watch it instead.
- » I'm going to do something else that has some 'educational value'.

3. Creating An Opportunity

Next, there needs to be something nearby that can distract you. Some students work near others and tell themselves this is beneficial because they can ask for help if they need it. What they might actually be doing is hoping for a distraction to occur. The same goes for workspaces. Do you work near or next to your phone, laptop, tablet, PS4 console or TV, secretly hoping for something to take you away from your work? If this is you, then you are subconsciously (or maybe deliberately!) creating the opportunity for blocks to occur.

4. Getting Away With It

Finally, for the pattern to continue, you need to feel that you have got away with it. The thought pattern here often goes, 'Nobody said anything, so it must be alright' or 'I didn't get told off, so I'll do it again.'

This activity might help you recognise your own tendency to self-sabotage. Don't worry, everyone does it to a certain extent – really productive people have learned to fight the feeling!

Once you've noticed the ways in which your blockers get in the way, try the following:

Effort

- » Think about a piece of work you never completed. How did you justify the non-completion to yourself? Which task on your list at the moment are you least likely to do? Why?

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- » Take a task that has been on your to-do list for a while because you've been putting it off. Why is it there? Is there an action you can take right away which will make the task suddenly achievable?

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- » Next time you put a task off, ask yourself why. Are you simply sequencing tasks and saving it for later? Or is this an act of self-sabotage?

Now that you've recognised some of your own blockers, make a plan for overcoming them. Record your observations and ideas here:

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Final Thoughts

Everyone has blockers – and everyone occasionally sabotages their own progress. The key is to recognise you're doing it, and to fight it! If you feel self-sabotage coming on, move location. Get yourself to a quiet room, a study area or the library. Start the task. You don't even have to finish it – work for thirty minutes or so – but get it started. You're less likely to sabotage a project that is already underway!