Self-discipline is the most important personal quality for assuring long-term success,” writes Brian Tracy, International Business Consultant in *The 100 Absolutely Unbreakable Laws of Business Success*. What is self-discipline? The working definition that I like the best is the following: self-discipline is having the ability to consistently bring your actions in line with your goals.

Does positive self-discipline imply continuously pushing oneself to accomplish? No positive self-discipline mean applying excellent leadership skills to your own life. Then you find you want to become more disciplined to reach the goals that are absolutely important for you to accomplish. You come to see self-discipline as a success tool that helps you accomplish more of what you really want to achieve.

Living Ideals

Perhaps the thought of practicing self-discipline brings to mind negative images such as a Spartan soldier stoically depriving himself of pleasure, friendship, adequate food, rest or health. This picture may turn us off to seeing the positive merits of self-discipline in our personal and professional lives. But the question remains does self-discipline equate with self-denial and giving up everything.

No; on the contrary, self-discipline does one thing extremely well it liberates one from a myriad of distractions. It therefore moves us toward our goals, not away from them. Self-discipline coupled with tough values makes us more noble and heroic. With positive self-discipline, we think twice before taking short cuts, sacrificing the future for today, and the significant personal costs of not living according to our highest values and ideals.

*The Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2006, “Some Students Use Net to Hire Experts to Do Their School Work,” reported on an occurrences of student-justified outsourcing of homework to internet providers. These college students reasoned that since businesses outsource work why shouldn't they do the same? These students seemed to feel learning assignments were actually valueless, busy work to complete by the easiest and earliest means possible. One wonders what this students goals and values really are? There would seem to be a complete disconnect in their thinking between the value of learning and the personal commitment and effort required to reach an academic goal.

Keeping on Track

However simply paying lip service to possessing self-discipline is useless unless goals are set first—daily, weekly, monthly, yearly and lifetime. When you have a goal in mind, self-discipline suddenly becomes an ally rather than a task master.

A burning desire to become, do, accomplish and create creates the need for an effective code of behavior. Self-discipline is like the high-torque engine in a four-wheel-drive vehicle in low gear. It carries us slowly but steadily forward through sand, mud, snow, over steep and rough terrain. Without passionate goals, developing such a powerful engine as self-discipline may seem frivolous or even a waste of time.

Applications to Teaching and Learning

How does all this apply to college teaching and you? First, your students need to see self-discipline modeled by their instructor. They develop a respect and desire for self-discipline when they learn from an instructor who, for example:
• Conscientiously prepares a variety of learning activities for each class session.
• Logically organizes content to form a meaningful whole.
• Carefully and continuously evaluates learning outcomes.
• Takes the time and makes the effort to communicate performance improvement strategies to his students while sharing his own learning struggles and achievements.
• Always does his or her best to create the best learning environment and process they can in each class they teach.

Students need opportunities to develop and talk about the value of self-discipline in study, preparation and producing learning products whether they are papers, demonstrations, poems, animations or any other myriad possible learning products.

Some believe self-discipline is achieved by devoting a fixed number of hours to a task. In reality discipline means applying concentrated, focused effort to the task no matter how many hours are spent of a given task.

**Authentic Awareness**

The self-disciplined student does not converse with friends, sip a latte, or daydream about a vacation while reading the textbook assignment. Disciplined individual know how to focus and control their attention.

Self-discipline or as some schooled in Asian thought refer to it as mindfulness is described as authentically being there, focused and fully engaged in the work of the moment—doing what is necessary to complete the task, goal, or assignment.

There are certainly more aspects of self-discipline than can be investigated here, so try the following action steps:

• Interview the most successful practitioners in the your field ask them about the role of self-discipline in their career.
• Find out what self-discipline techniques and principles they use and how often they use them.
• Then when and where appropriate in your classes discuss self-discipline and the roll it can play in success.
• Adopt and implement a self-disciplinary approach to improving teaching and learning.

When you compete these action steps, you will be teaching for success and helping your students understand the roll of a fundamental success tool. Help your students become acquainted with the missing factor.