

# ***INVEST IN YOURSELF***

**“The difference between winners and losers is that winners do things that losers don’t want to do.”**

- Phillip McGraw

Before making the decision to attend college, some people spend a great deal of time agonizing over whether or not it is the right life choice. They weigh alternatives and carefully consider how the demands of college will impact on their life and the lives of those close to them. They examine their priorities, such as work and family, and evaluate how to balance the challenge of college with their current responsibilities. On the other hand, some people are simply swept along in a process that almost seems to be out of their control until they suddenly find themselves sitting in a college classroom, wondering how they got there. Sometimes these students are a little concerned that they may be in college mainly because most of their friends were going to college and it seemed like the thing to do. They aren’t really sure about whether or not this choice is the right one, but now that they are here, they’re willing to give it a shot and hope for the best. For some other students, going to college is a matter of great pride - it is a dream they have had for a long time. These students feel that their high level of motivation will be enough to assure that they will succeed. They are very excited to be here.

No matter what led to your choice to be a college student, you are at a crossroads in your life. College is a fresh start for everyone. You have just as good a chance of being successful as anyone else. Now that you are an adult, you recognize that your life has a purpose. Whether or not you have identified exactly what that purpose is at this point, you do know that college fits into the plan. Your success here is an opportunity to invest in yourself and in your own future.

You know that you are a person with promise and that you are worth the investment. You also need to recognize right from the start that college is not about having good intentions. What you *say* doesn’t count - the only thing that matters is what you actually *do*. Nobody can do it for you. If you succeed, it will be because of the choices you make in the coming months. It is critical that you are realistic and honest with yourself about what it means to be in college and the very real sacrifices that this decision will require of you. This chapter will lay out for you in an honest and direct way the realities of the step you have taken. It is up to you to resolve that you are ready for the challenge and willing to do what it takes to be successful.

## SOME STUDENTS “GET IT” AND SOME STUDENTS JUST DON’T

☛ **Reality Check:** You and only you are responsible for your success or failure in your classes. You are personally accountable for the choices you make. You are not a victim of circumstances and there are no excuses. Either you do what it takes to be successful or you don’t.

In each one of your classes there are students and there are people who are *playing around at being students*. Some people “get it” and some people simply don’t. The division between these two groups is very clear and it is obvious quickly to instructors and experienced students.

- ⌚ On the second day of class, an anxious young woman arrives ten minutes late with her three year old child in tow. Even though the instructor has begun to teach the class, she walks noisily in front of him and plops her son in a desk next to her own. She listens carefully throughout the class, although she is sometimes distracted by questions from her son. After class, she approaches the instructor and says that she missed the first class because she has been having problems arranging for reliable child care. She assures the instructor that she really wants to be in college and that she is very excited about it. She says she will probably never miss another class unless her son or one of her other children is sick or there is some other family problem.
- ⌚ An instructor has asked his students to fill out schedule cards during the first class session. In reviewing the cards later, the faculty member notices that several of his students are working nearly full time jobs as well as taking a full time load at the college. The instructor makes an announcement before the start of the next class that anyone who is working more than thirty hours each week and taking a full course load should be sure to stop by and see him in his office because he has serious concerns. Only one of the students follows through and visits the instructor during office hours. That student, an energetic young man with a charming smile, assures the instructor that his schedule will not be a problem at all. He is highly motivated and is sure he can handle it all. He also points out that he has all day Saturday to study.
- ⌚ The beginning of the third week of class, an instructor is taking attendance when she notices that there is an unfamiliar face in the class. She asks the quiet woman in the back of the room if she is here visiting the college. The woman replies that she is enrolled in the class but has been sick so she is here for the first time. She assures the instructor that she can catch up without any problem. After class the faculty member gives her a stack of materials and points out that she has already missed three assignments and a quiz. The student promises to catch up right away and says it will all be turned in next class.
- ⌚ An English instructor requires that all papers be typed. He gives students a handout with

the hours of the college's Academic Computing Center and says that the staff there is very helpful. When the first set of papers is collected, he notices that one student has turned in a paper that is neatly hand-written. When questioned about it, the student looks confused that there is a problem and says, "But I don't have a computer and the Computer Center was closed this morning. I didn't have any way to type it. You mean you aren't going to accept my paper? I don't get it - at least it's done."

## ***The Network***

On every campus there is an interesting force at work behind the scenes. As the semester unfolds, a comfortable network develops. Within the network are a large group of students who are involved and interested during class, do their assignments, prepare for exams, reach out for help when they need it, make some new friends in their classes, and generally enjoy being in college. Also within the network are faculty members who honestly like and respect their students, and who try their best to help their students succeed. Inside this circle there is a warm, supportive atmosphere. Most students who are a part of the network have a very positive experience in college and go a long way toward meeting their goals.

To understand how the network works, imagine for a moment the classroom where your reading course this semester is held. The first week of class, the students and the faculty member do not know each other, but the beginning of the network is already being established. The instructor takes time to introduce herself, to tell the students what to expect from the course and to share from experience the strategies that will lead to success in the course. The students usually have a chance to introduce themselves a bit, either through some type of classroom activity or through friendly discussions during the class. Some of the most important principles that will be taught in the course all semester are introduced and explained for the first time. By the beginning of the second week, most students are starting to feel comfortable and the network is developing. The most important thing to notice is that every student starts out as a part of the network. At first, all you have to do is be there and be open and ready to give it your best shot.

Let's think for a minute about students who are not in class during that critical network-building stage of the semester. A student who misses classes in the first week starts out at a definite disadvantage. If that has happened to you, be aware that you have some work to do. Checking off your name on the list and hanging around after class to get a pile of papers will not do it. You need to take the time to visit the instructor during office hours and talk over what happened in class when you were not there. Get to know the faculty member in the same way the other students in your class did. Sit down and let the instructor know a little about you. Try to get to class a few minutes early the next several classes so you can talk with one or two people in your class and get to know them. And, most importantly of all, do not miss any more classes for MANY weeks, no matter what happens. You can recover from missed classes in the first week if you take the right steps. But, you should know that many people who miss classes in the beginning of the semester do not take those steps and they never do feel like they belong in the class. They feel like outsiders and like somehow the class has already "passed them by". They have a very high drop-out rate. This is true, by the way, with every class on campus, not just your reading class. So, the message here is clear. If you have missed class early in the semester, you

must take action now. Your goal in the first two weeks of the semester is to find your way into the network in each one of your classes. You will know when you get there. Once you are there, half the battle is won.

## ***On The Outside, Looking In***

Remember that students who connect into the network in their classes tend to be very successful. One of the most frustrating things that faculty members face is that the negative behavior patterns that lead to failure among their students are established very early. As much as the instructor would like for all of his or her students to do well in the class, the bottom line is that in the end it's up to the student to make it happen. Many students who have these clearly recognizable negative patterns are in major denial. They somehow think that good intentions will replace action. Faculty members try to communicate serious concerns before it is too late, but students in denial are convinced that because they are "highly motivated" and "really want to be here" that it will be enough. Again, good intentions do not replace action. There are basically two ways that students find themselves on the outside, looking in:

- ☹ Missing class
- ☹ Getting behind on assignments / studying

## **GET TO CLASS**

If you have missed classes early in the semester, take it as a serious warning sign. Figure out exactly WHY this has happened. If it is simply because you had registration changes, then you know what to do, so do it and you'll be back on track. Just be sure that you follow through and do more than just make sure your name is added to the class list and that you have a copy of the syllabus. That won't do it - get yourself connected.

However, think about the woman in the first story that led into this section. She missed the first class, had to bring her child along for the second class, and planned not to miss any more classes unless something came up with her children. But, she is "really excited to be here". This woman needs a serious reality check because **unless she makes a major change in her approach to college NOW, she will not make it.** If you told her that, she is likely to become very angry and say you are not giving her a chance. She would tell you that her children have to come first and ask what she is supposed to do if her child care worker is unavailable or if her child is sick. She would tell you that she would be in class if she could, but sometimes she just can't and she has a very good excuse. She expects her instructors to be understanding and help her, since she really does want to be here.

All of that sounds fine, but here is the bottom line:

Every time she misses a class, for whatever reason, it is as if she is getting up from her chair in the class and taking one more step away from the classroom network and out the door.

Although it would be nice if intentions were enough to lead to success, this is true neither in college nor in life. This woman is not doomed to fail. But, she must get out of denial immediately and make some serious changes. She needs to realize that if school really is a serious priority, she must have back-up plans for day care. She needs to think through every single possible scenario (i.e., my child is sick, my day care is closed because of the weather, my child gets sick while at day care, etc.). Then, she needs to figure out a way to deal with each situation other than simply not going to school that day. She needs to get on the phone and call family and friends to ask if they will be willing to help out in an emergency. And then, when an emergency comes up, she must put her plan into action and get herself to class. This is the same strategy she will use some day when she has a career. She will not stay employed for very long if every time something comes up with her children she just stays home from work.

Then there is the woman in the introductory story who was sick and missed the first two weeks of class. When she announced to the instructor and to the class that she will make it all up and be set by the next class you can imagine the reaction of the students who had been coming to class regularly, who had done the three assignments and who had taken the quiz. It was at that point when it clicked for many of those students that they were part of the network. This woman is on the outside looking in. It's too late and no matter how powerful her intentions are, it doesn't matter. It will not be "ok".

Let's say this woman had been hired as a receptionist at a local business. She was scheduled to report for work on October 5<sup>th</sup>. She just never showed up and never so much as called to say that she was ill. She arrived for the first time out of the blue on October 20<sup>th</sup> and announced that she had been sick. Now here she is and she's really excited to be at work! Sounds pretty ridiculous, doesn't it? Why do students think it's any different when the commitment made is to attend college? It isn't.

Just keep in mind that attendance, especially in the first four weeks when the network in each class is being formed, is absolutely critical for success. In many respects, it's a matter of establishing your momentum. Everyone has watched the power of momentum in a basketball game. Once things get rolling, it's as if the players on the team with momentum just move from one smart play to the next. The feeling that everything is going right helps move them along. A team without momentum stumbles around and looks bewildered. In college, the first four weeks establish your momentum for the semester.

## **DO YOUR WORK**

There are two things that make or break students. Attending class is one of them and it is absolutely critical, but of course it's not enough all by itself. Even if a student attended every single class, if he never put in any time outside of class he is certainly not going to be very successful.

The second key factor for success is keeping up on assignments and studying effectively for exams. There seem to be three different issues that can cause students trouble in this area:

- ☁ Being overloaded with outside work responsibilities
- ☁ Putting assignments off until the last minute
- ☁ Getting frustrated with assignments and giving up

## ***Overload***

Do you remember the young man who was working full time and also attending college full time? He had a lot of energy and was sure he could do it all, even though he had virtually no time outside of class to devote to school. He probably will have to use his charming smile when he explains repeatedly as the semester goes on that he is “a little behind” because of his heavy work responsibilities, but that he will get caught up soon if he can just have a time extension on the assignment. When his first test grades come in and they are not what he was hoping for, he will tell his friends that he could have done well if he had studied. As assignments, papers and exams pile up and he gets more stressed and upset, that energy he started with will fade fast and he will begin to blame his instructors for expecting too much. He will start to miss classes because the assignments aren’t done, but then he’ll realize that he doesn’t even know what the next assignment is and the instructor is not willing to accept his work late. Class goes on with or without him. Other students in the class know what they are doing and he doesn’t - he feels himself backing out of the class network. If someone suggests that he cut back on his work hours, he will explain that he just can’t do that because he has to earn the money in order to live. He has no choice. Eventually, he will be so far behind in some of his classes that he will have to withdraw in order to avoid a failing grade. He will look back on his first semester feeling like he was robbed - after all that stress and frustration, he has very little to show for it. It just doesn’t seem fair.

It sure doesn’t. But, before you feel too sorry for this young man, you need to understand that he needs a serious reality check. He is in denial about one of the critical elements of being in college. To be successful, you will be expected to spend several hours on assignments every day. Depending on your class schedule, you need to have at least three and as many as four or five hours to devote to school-related work every single day. You can’t add it up and say that you’ll spend all day Saturday or Sunday studying because it just doesn’t work that way. You need time **every day** and if you don’t have that time but you’re sure you’ll be fine anyway, you are in denial. You are setting yourself up to fail.

The time outside of class has to be there. Students like the young man in the story have a couple of choices, and it’s really very simple. If he is serious about being in college, he needs to take a hard look at his job and decide if he honestly does need to work so many hours in order to survive. Is he working to pay for his rent and his food or is he working to pay for new clothes and taking his girlfriend out on weekends? If working full time is a necessity, then he needs to cut back on the number of classes he takes each semester and go to school part time. Many people do this very successfully. Sure, it takes longer - but look

at the alternative. If he ends up dropping classes every semester because he has fallen so far behind, he is no better off than if he had simply registered for only the number of classes he knew he could handle with his work schedule in the first place. If it takes him four years part time to get a two year degree, so what? He'll get it done and he'll keep his sanity and his self-esteem. Full time work with part time school is one good alternative.

If he's working all those hours just for "extras", then the issue is entirely different. He needs to take a close look at why he is doing this to himself. He is setting himself up to fail for a reason. There is **always** a reason. Sometimes it's as simple as a lack of maturity. Maybe he isn't ready for the commitment it takes to be a serious college student. In that case, he should stick with the job and come back to college in a few years when he has grown up. He'll save himself and everyone else a lot of grief.

Sometimes the reason goes a lot deeper. He may be using his job as a way to avoid the risk of really trying. That way, if he is not successful in college he can always say it was because of his job. Remember how comfortable it felt for him to say he did poorly on the test because he didn't have time to study? The real question is, if he calls himself a college student why in the world didn't he have time to study? The honest answer to that question can be scary. If he has arranged his life so there just isn't enough time available to devote to school, it may very well be because he is afraid to break out of that comfort zone and take a risk. Just in case he fails, he knows he has something to blame it on. That can be comforting...but it's also sad. He doesn't need to set himself up with an excuse for when he fails - instead he should give himself a real chance to succeed. He should cut his work hours and see what it feels like to do it right. Success feels great.

So, it comes down to this: if you are working more than 25 hours a week, take a close look at what you are doing to yourself. If you don't have at least three hours each day outside of class to devote to assignments, then you need to realize that you are kidding yourself. Remember that your success in college will depend to a great degree on the choices you make in the first few weeks of the semester. If you make the conscious choice to overload yourself, expect serious consequences and don't complain about it. You were warned.

## ***Procrastination***

- 🔍 **Reality Check:** Nobody works best under pressure. You may *get it done* because of the deadline, but it will not be your best. It will just be done. In fact, if you have always waited until the very last minute to complete your assignments and to study for exams, you have no idea at all what your best work looks like, because you've never let yourself see it.

## **Classic Procrastinators**

You may have a long history of procrastination in dealing with school assignments. Especially in

subjects that are less than thrilling, it's easy to just let it go until you can't let it go any longer. Then you force yourself to do it and get it over with. This sometimes involves racing through a confusing math assignment during the class you have right before math. You might find yourself coming in late to English because you had to finish typing your paper. As you are frantically pulling together your last minute assignment and the stress builds up, you promise yourself that you are definitely not going to let this happen again. Next time you'll start the assignment the day it is given and do it right. (Maybe this assignment won't count too much, if you're lucky...). But then an amazing thing happens. The assignments are passed to the front of the class. Even though you notice enviously - and a bit nervously - that some of your classmates seem to have put in a lot of time on theirs, at least yours is done, so your stress level relaxes. You promise yourself again that next time you'll start sooner and do a better job. But that night, you are really tired and you decide you deserve a break. The next night, some friends call and you convince yourself that you don't have *that much* to do. On it goes until another deadline is staring you in the face and you get mad at yourself all over again.

## **Student Firefighters**

Another form of procrastination is less obvious to students who use it, but just as much of a problem in the long run. This approach involves constantly "putting out fires". These students use only enough time outside of class to complete the written assignments that are due very soon. The night before, they "put out the fire" without ever noticing the sparks that are smoldering all around them. The next night another urgent task flares up, and they jump on it. Since they get their written assignments finished, they feel that they are being responsible and are doing just fine. For many students, this worked in high school so they expect it will also work now.

The problem with this approach in college is that "student firefighters" use no advance planning and there are times during the typical semester when everything seems to hit at once. Suddenly there are tests coming up based on textbook chapters that didn't seem urgent, but now are - four chapters, thirty-five pages long each...in two classes. You also have four week's worth of lecture notes to learn...for both classes. The tests will be the same day. At the same time, that English paper the instructor gave out three weeks ago is breathing down your neck and you're still thinking about changing your topic. Your math assignments still keep coming at you. Just when you are holding on by your fingernails, an instructor assigns a project and only gives you a week to get it done. It's about then that the student firefighters realize that they are in the middle of a blazing forest fire and there just isn't enough water to put it out. These students aren't classic procrastinators, since they have been doing their work each night. However, they have been letting the major tasks slide in order to deal with the minor ones, and this is a very serious form of procrastination that can affect even sincere, well-meaning students.

## **TAKE CONTROL**

Procrastination is less of a problem the first few weeks of the semester than it becomes as the semester progresses. Most people begin the semester with a fair amount of enthusiasm, and they also want to impress their instructors with the quality of their work. **This week** is the time to set up a plan that will help you deal with this issue, before it becomes a problem. There are a couple



of fairly simple steps that can go a long way toward helping you conquer your urge to put things off or to concentrate on just one little task at a time and not see the big picture.

### *Same Time, Same Place...*

When you have a job, at the end of the day you come home and usually you can just relax. You will discover very quickly that in college you are **never** finished. Even if all of the written assignments that will be collected the next day are packed away in your bag, ready to go, there are always other things you can and should be doing. Planning ahead will help you to even out your semester workload so you don't end up overloaded and stressed out during crunch times.

The single best step you can take to deal with procrastination is to look closely at your daily schedule and find three hours every day that you can routinely set aside to work on assignments and studying for exams. The idea behind this is very simple. The best way to be sure that you not only complete the obvious assignments, but also stay on top of the long range items is to set up a specific amount of **time** to work every single day. It has to be a routine. Think of it as if you wanted to start an exercise plan for yourself. If you just said, "I want to be sure to work out for half an hour every day", there would be many days when that half an hour would just never happen. However, if you knew that at 4:00 every single day you always head to the gym to work out, after a while your routine will carry you there even if you don't especially feel like going. The excitement students feel in the beginning of the semester inevitably fades as the semester progresses. Let your study routine carry you through and help you keep your momentum up.

Of course, the time blocks you have available for your study routine may not be the same on Monday as they are on Tuesday, but you do need to have the three hours of study time available every single day. For the "routine" element to work effectively for you, the times and places you pick have to fall into a fairly stable pattern. That way, when it's Tuesday and Thursday at 3:30, you know that you'll be sitting down at your desk to work on school until 5:30. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11:00, you know that you'll head to the library to work until noon. Look for blocks of at least an hour. You may be lucky and have a fairly simple schedule that allows you to set aside from 7:00 - 9:00 every evening and from 1:30 - 2:30 on campus between classes. Most people have schedules that are a bit crazier than that so flexibility is important, but you need to deal with what you have. Just make sure that you can set aside at least three hours every day, preferably in blocks of one to two hours. Also, be sure that you not only know the "when" of your routine, but also the "where".

Be sure that the times you have selected will find you in a frame of mind that will allow you to use the time productively. For "night" people, studying from 10:00 PM until midnight, after the children are in bed, would be just fine. "Morning" people in the same situation might choose to relax at 10:00 in the evening, but get up at 6:00 to work until 8:00 when the children begin to get ready for school. You have to know your own body rhythms, and when you can honestly accomplish something.

## ***Just Do It!***

Establishing a study routine will go a long way toward helping you get control of your workload. How you use that time is also very important. To efficiently use your study time, you need two things: an assignment calendar and a daily “to do” list.

### **Assignment Calendar**

Almost every college student knows enough to purchase and use an assignment calendar to keep track of upcoming due dates. If you haven’t already bought a calendar that you can keep with you at school, do that immediately. Instructors often make assignments weeks ahead and barely mention them again until the day the papers are collected. You certainly don’t want to be riding the elevator with a classmate one day down the road and have that student say, “So, are you all set for the test today?” when you had no clue that a test was scheduled. A calendar can quickly solve major organizational issues for you.

You should have received a syllabus for each of your classes. Sit down this week and take a careful look at all of them.

- ☛ If there is a list of dates for exams, find the date on your calendar and write it in: “COM Exam – Ch. 1 – 4.” Also, back up a week and write in: “COM test next Wed.”
- ☛ Put all of the assignment due dates you find on every syllabus all in one place, in your calendar, up front. Don’t try to work off a separate list of dates buried on the second page of each syllabus for four different classes.
- ☛ Look for a schedule of textbook chapters that will be covered each week and write those in your calendar.
- ☛ If exams are only listed as “Week Four”, then count out when week four will be and write in a tentative date for your test. Your goal is to have no surprises at all this semester.

### **“To Do” Lists**

You could sit down for your routine study time, pull out your assignment calendar, check what is due tomorrow and do it. This is what many students do. It seems to be fairly efficient, but that’s what leads well meaning, hard working students into a pattern of “putting out fires”. The way to combat that problem is to get into the habit of jotting down a comprehensive “to do” list every day.

Many students write out a “to do” list in the morning, either over breakfast or on campus when they have spare time before class. Another alternative is to jot down what you need to accomplish the next day before you go to bed - then you can forget about it and get some sleep, because you know it’s on paper.

The important thing is not when you write out your list, but how you structure it. All of these types of items need to be on your list:

- ☛ Short term assignments: Jot on the list the brief, written assignments given one class and due the next. (ex: math homework)
- ☛ Text chapters: If you have a chapter to read each week, divide it into sections and assign yourself to read one section each day. (ex: read and mark COM Ch. 3 pgs. 86 - 92)
- ☛ Papers: When a paper is assigned, figure out the steps you will need to complete it. Plot it out on the calendar and assign yourself one step each day. (ex: finish outline of “persuasion paper” and start introduction)
- ☛ Preparing for Exams: Assign yourself to review lecture notes each day. This is a lot easier when you only have a few pages instead of 30 pages of notes right before a midterm exam. It makes exam preparation much less stressful if you are not looking at the notes for the first time since you took them. (ex: make flash cards for terms and lists in SOC note.

Using a “to do” list is the most powerful time management technique there is. If this is not something that you have done in the past, give it a try. You will be amazed how much more you will get accomplished when you have a list than on days when you just slide along without one.

## FRUSTRATION

☛ **Reality Check:** You will not catch on to everything the first time.

One unavoidable truth about college is that it is not easy. How you react to the normal periods of frustration and confusion that every student faces will make or break you.

- ☞ John is working through the assigned problems for his algebra class. He understood the instructor during class and copied down all of the model problems in his notebook. Now he can't believe the assignment - the problems look completely different than the ones that were done in class. The longer he stares at the first problem the angrier he gets - has this instructor been drinking, or what??? How does he expect the class to do homework that is different from what was taught in class?

- ❏ Melanie read the article assigned for her reading class. She had been doing fairly well on the articles up until this point, but this particular one was really confusing. The topic wasn't something she found interesting and the vocabulary level was what the instructor had called "challenging"...no kidding. She read the first part again but still didn't have any idea how to write the thesis.
- ❏ Marie was excited to get her first English paper back. She had worked hard on it, and felt it had come out extremely well. When she opened the paper, there was no grade. It just said, "Please see me about some major revisions you will need to do...". Marie liked her paper just the way it was and couldn't imagine how it could be any better. She was especially frustrated to see that many of the students sitting near her had received grades of "B" or even "A".
- ❏ Nathan took chemistry in high school, but it was nothing at all like his chemistry class in college. This one was moving way too fast, and in class he found himself still trying to figure out one formula when the instructor was already moving on to a whole new topic. The book made absolutely no sense at all. He didn't even want to think about it the first test, coming up next week. He was beginning to think he was in way over his head...

When you feel like you are giving it your best but you still must cope with situations like these, you understand how frustrating college can sometimes be. Recognize a couple of truths about that feeling of "hitting a brick wall":

- ☂ It happens to all college students at one time or another.
- ☂ How you react to frustration says a lot about you and directly determines your likelihood of success.

When faced with frustration in college, here's the rule:

First: **Dig Deeper**

Second: **Get Help**

## ***Dig Deeper***

A lot of students make the mistake of giving up on themselves too quickly. Recognize that normally when an assignment is given, students really do have the tools they need to complete it. When John feels frustrated by his algebra assignment that seemed different from what was presented in class, he is falling into a trap. He is assuming that, like in high school, the assignments mainly are designed to practice a certain specific skill that was demonstrated in class. It's just a matter of plugging different numbers into exactly the same problem, right? When his math assignment required him to think and go beyond exactly what was presented in class, he felt frustrated at first. But, if John took the time to take a deep breath and dig in, he might be surprised that he really could do these "different" problems after all. Maybe he just needed to carefully go back and re-work the problems from class, concentrating on **why** each step was being taken. He

could check his math textbook to see how the concept is explained in there. He could try the problem and if it doesn't come out right, he could experiment with a different method. John needs to understand that sometimes it's in struggling with a frustrating assignment and actually figuring it out that the most powerful learning happens.

Notice that the rule above says: First, dig deeper. Your first step is always to rely on yourself and try to figure it out. Struggle with it for a while. Melanie, who didn't understand the article for her reading class, has several options. She should go back and read the first section again. She should look up some of the words that are unclear to her. She should take it one paragraph at a time, if need be, and jot in the margin what that paragraph seems to be saying before moving on to the next paragraph. It may take her a while to get through the article, but if she takes her time she can do it. Best of all, she'll have the satisfaction of knowing that she figured it out herself.

When you feel frustrated, just remember that the rule says - **FIRST: Dig Deeper**. Don't quickly give up or immediately ask somebody for help. Rely on yourself first. If you've given it an honest effort and really worked hard at it and still are confused, then move on to the second step: get help.

## ***Get Help***

There are a number of support services available for students who need assistance in their classes. Typically, the instructor will mention the services that are most closely connected with the individual class and will encourage students to make use of them. However, it is up to the student to take the first step.

Do you remember Marie, who is upset about having to revise the English paper that she thought was terrific? Please notice that her instructor didn't just give her an "F" and basically say "tough luck." Marie has the opportunity to visit her instructor during office hours, sit down one-on-one and talk over the paper. They have a good place to start, because Marie has given the assignment a solid effort. With revisions, the paper can be excellent. If Marie is open to this chance, she will discover that in working closely with her instructor and taking the time to re-work the assignment, her final product really is significantly better. Marie will end up learning much more from this paper than her classmates who had the basic idea up front. She will understand clearly by the time she is finished that her paper is now much improved. On her next paper, she will be able to apply the new insight she has gained because she and her instructor have worked as a team. Marie's decision to overcome her anger and reach out for assistance is critical to her success.

Nathan, who is really losing it in his Chemistry class, has several options. His first step is to work on Chemistry every single day. He should review his notes, spend extra time on his homework,

work with his textbook and consider approaching a classmate to join him as a study partner. As soon as it becomes clear to him that Chemistry is going to be a problem course, in addition to putting in extra individual study time, he should meet with his instructor during office hours and explore with them the option for a peer tutor. A peer tutor can sit down with him once a week to re-explain confusing items and help him work through problems and apply formulas. He should also check and see if there are extra review classes or study groups offered in the department that go along with his course. Nathan needs to take action right away to get back on track for success in the course.

The point is, in every class on campus there is a safety net available. You will notice, though, that the help Marie and Nathan needed didn't come to them. They had to reach out and take it and use that assistance in combination with a strong individual effort. Successful students take action when they are faced with a course that challenges them; they don't just think about it.

**To have what you want, you have to do what it takes. Nobody will do it for you.**

Effective students work through their frustration, knowing that they can and will conquer courses that seemed, at first, beyond their comprehension. They have the courage and the determination to do what it takes to meet their goals. They do not give up.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

This chapter outlines two steps you must take to be successful in college. It comes down to this:

☛ **GO TO CLASS**

☛ **GET YOUR ASSIGNMENTS AND STUDYING DONE**

You have to admit, this is a pretty basic formula for success. If after reading this chapter, you react by thinking that what is laid out here is demanding too much of you, then you just don't get it. If you can't get to class and don't have the time or the determination to study and complete your assignments, why did you enroll in college? One of the saddest things about some students who "don't get it" is that they think all of this applies to other people, but not to them. Somehow, they will be the exception and against all odds, defying common sense, they can make it work. They are on the outside of the network, looking in....and they don't even know it. Don't do that to yourself. Now is the time to take a hard look at what you have before you this semester and make the changes in your approach that will allow you to be successful.

You are invited into the classroom network that is currently forming in each of your classes. Your instructor will be very happy to meet you half way. Your classmates will be supportive as you work together. Campus services are there for the taking because we want you to be successful and meet your goals. You are worth it. Recognize that the only way you can be excluded from the network is through your individual actions and choices. Make the right choices for yourself and for your future in these opening weeks of the semester. Remember the quote that opened this chapter: "The difference between winners and losers is that winners do the things that losers don't

want to do.”

Start out the semester right. Let the momentum of your routine carry you through the times in the semester when your enthusiasm fades a bit. Let yourself want more and then do what it takes to get it. **YOU are worth the investment.**