

# SIMPLE GUIDE TO HELPING AUSTRALIAN STUDENTS SUCCEED

The **3 BIGGEST PROBLEMS**  
Holding Students Back From  
Success At School AND  
*What To Do To*  
*Support Them*  
*To Achieve Their Best!*

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# SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

For the past 18 years I have worked with over 100,000 teenagers across Australia and internationally and there are not many scenarios or stories which would shock me, or be unfamiliar to me when it comes to teenagers, their struggles and the journey they are on growing up in today's world and engaging with our current education system.

My experience has taken me into the juvenile justice system working with residents of detention centres. I've run a drop in centre for the disengaged, I've worked in an alternative education program for students who had slipped through the cracks of the mainstream system and I've worked a lot within the mainstream education system, in public schools, independent schools and some of the more elite private schools around Australia equipping high achievers with peak performance mind sets and skill sets.

As I engage with students on a daily basis I am often asking "what are the biggest problems or challenges you face which you believe are holding you back from achieving success at school?" More recently I thought it was about time to actually gather some data around the biggest challenges young people face today, not to highlight how hard they have it, but to know how best to support them to achieve success! So I put it out to my networks and over 39,000 teenagers around Australia, asking them the simple question

***"What are the 3 biggest problems or challenges which hold you back from achieving success at school?"***

*But before we go there, a quick story...*

In "Decide Your Own Destiny" my motivational keynote presentation which has inspired and empowered tens of thousands of students all over Australia I talk about the idea of 'Real Success' and ask the question, if you are to aim for 'success' what does that actually look like and what does 'success' really mean?

You see when I was in my early 20s I was chasing after 'SUCCESS!' and for me that meant, lots of money, an expensive car, a big house, lots of stuff and hanging out with 'famous' people. Then in 2003 I received a phone call from my dad which would change everything for me. At just 47 years of age my mum, who was one of my best friends and a mentor to me, had suffered a severe stroke and then almost 2 years to the day she suffered a second stroke - this one was the kicker!

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She ended up at St Vincent's hospital in Melbourne in ICU attached to all manner of machines and tubes and in a coma. When she came out of the coma they discovered that the stroke was so severe on her brain that she was unable to talk, unable to move, had to be fed through a tube straight into her stomach and because of her condition required 24/7 nursing home care.

So on one hand I was on my road to 'SUCCESS' chasing after fame, fortune and the 'fluff!' While on the other hand I'd have to go and visit my own mum, who at only 49 years of age, was living in a nursing home, unable to move, unable to speak and unable to do anything!

One day as I sat in the nursing home room, with my mum's hand wrapped around my finger I started to reflect on this journey that I was on, this goal I had created for myself of 'SUCCESS' and I started to think about what is success really all about?

I started to ask myself, if the things which we define success by (money, cars, houses, stuff, status, titles) can be taken away from us in a moment by something which happens to us which is completely outside of our control, is that really what success is all about? And what about if you can't 'do', 'achieve' or 'say' anything - how can you 'be' successful then?!

While I knew there was nothing wrong with any of the stuff I was chasing after, I realised that at the end of the day, none of that stuff would ever bring me fulfillment in life and success must be about something deeper than how much money is in my bank account or the letters after my name.

So I went on my own journey of discovering for myself what 'Real Success' was really all about, and very simply redefined real success to be 3 things:

1. Know yourself
2. Be YOUR best
3. Making a positive difference in the world around you

## **SUCCESS KEY #1 KNOW YOURSELF**

In the words of Lao Tzu, Chinese Philosopher, “Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; Mastering yourself is true power.”

“Know Thyself.” These two words are attributed to the Greek philosopher Socrates and inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

Self Awareness is powerful and is all about having a clear picture of your what makes you YOU! It takes into consideration your strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, beliefs, motivation, and emotions.

Self Awareness allows you to understand other people, how they perceive you, your attitude and your responses to them in the moment.

Knowing yourself is the first step in creating what you want, mastering your life and having REAL SUCCESS. Where you focus your attention, your emotions, reactions, personality and behavior determine where you go in life. Having an awareness of who you are and the elements which have shaped you to become who you are allows you to see where your thoughts and emotions are taking you. It also allows you to take control of your emotions, behavior, and personality so you can make the changes which will allow you to step into your greatness.

I believe that it's just as important to decide for yourself who you are and who you choose to be, especially in a world where we have voices all around us telling us who we should be, what we should wear, the type of music we should listen to, how we should behave. Knowing yourself and who you choose to be develops a self confidence which allows us to stand in our own personal power and say “this is who I am and it doesn't matter what anyone else says or thinks.”

In my own experience and my belief, the first step on the journey to 'REAL SUCCESS' is starting the journey of knowing yourself and developing a confidence in who you choose to be.

## **SUCCESS KEY #2 BE YOUR BEST**

In my opinion this race called life and the 'human race' is not about being the best in the world or coming first because we were better, faster, stronger, prettier or smarter than someone else.

Theodore Roosevelt put it so well when he said "Comparison is the thief of joy." When life and success is first and foremost about beating or being better than someone else, we will always lose. There is always going to be someone else who is better, faster, smarter, fitter, stronger, prettier, bigger or whatever.

Sure in competitive sport and lots of competitive environments the aim and objective is to win, to be first, to get the gold, but still with the elite athletes I've had the privilege to work with their progress and success is only ever a bi-product of their focus to 'be THEIR best.'

When you set your bar of success to 'be the best version of yourself.' It forces you to take 100% responsibility for all of your results. You remove the ability to blame, make excuses or justify your lack of or sub par results, because being your best means you take everything into account - every negative circumstance, every challenge, every problem, everything which is outside of your control that has the potential to be a stumbling block, everything that makes you uniquely you.

My own story begins with being born with a disability - 'radioulnar synostosis' a fusion of the radius and ulnar (the two bones in your forearm) which means I am unable to rotate my forearms so my palms sit facing upward.

For a long time as a young person I used this as an excuse, things would be different, better, more successful, if it weren't for my disability. Because of the condition, kids at school thought I had 'alien arms' so they called me E.T. and I copped all of the bullying that went along with that (before bullying was as popular as it is today.) I played the victim, I blamed my condition, I blamed the bullying, I blamed my situation and how I was so 'hard done-by.'

Eventually I realised that these were the only arms I was ever going to have, there was no operation to 'fix' my condition, there was no magic pill or potion which could change my circumstances - but at the end of the day, I had to take responsibility (response-ability = our ability to respond) for my behaviour, my results and who I was being, to be the best version of me.

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When we blame, make excuses and justify our low level results, we're simply reflecting our environment and the stuff in our world which we cannot control - we're being like a thermometer.

When we take responsibility for our responses, our actions, our works, our attitudes, when we take ownership of our results and become accountable for who we are being and what we are achieving - we become like a thermostat and rather than just reflecting what is going on in our environment we begin to take control and even start to influence our environment.

Taking responsibility is a huge key to being your best, understanding that we can't control everything, but we can either have results, or reasons, we can take the wheel and direct our path, or be the victim and live at the mercy of the stuff happening to us and around us.

## **SUCCESS KEY #3 MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD AROUND YOU**

As I sat in the nursing home room, looking into my mum's eyes and reflecting on this idea of success, the craziness of that whole picture hit home with the reality that for 18 years of her life my mum had been a nurse in that same nursing home.

For 18 years she had looked after people who couldn't look after themselves, for 18 years she had cared for people who couldn't care for themselves. Now in her time of need, when she needed to be cared for and looked after, the nurses there were doing everything within their power (and more) to make sure she was the most comfortable and getting the best care possible.

Now I recognise that mum's story is an extreme situation and I hope and pray that no one close to you ever has to go through anything like that - but what I learnt from that was this.

What you give away - will always come back to you.

Success, happiness, fulfillment is never just about you. The greatest fulfillment and happiness comes when we are able to contribute to the lives of others around us in a positive way.

One of the 6 Core Needs of Teens (which I use as a framework in a lot of my Student Engagement PDs for teachers) is CONTRIBUTION or the need to contribute to something which is bigger than you and outside of yourself.

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Success is never just about me, what I can get, who I want to be, what I want to achieve, and my needs. I believe 'Real Success' is always connected to contributing to the greater good.

Asking yourself the question, how can I use my talents, what I have been blessed with to contribute in a positive way to the people around me - my class mates, my friends, my teachers, my family, my community.

When we live life for ourselves and just focus on what I want, what I need, how I feel, how I'm so hard done by, our world gets really really small - it shrinks!

But when we live our lives in a way that makes a positive difference to the people around us our world gets bigger and bigger, the ripple effects spread and we find ourselves receiving everything we've been giving away.

I often ask students a very loaded question: 'who would like to receive more respect from their teachers, peers or people in their community?' Hands go up all over the place, often with a 'i'm hard done by' look on their faces. My response is 'well if you want to receive more respect, what's the best way to get it?' A myriad of answers will come back and I quickly suggest to them - "The best way for you to receive respect is to give it!"

The way life works is that what we sow we will reap - a farmer doesn't walk out into a paddock where he hasn't sown seed expecting that a crop will appear.

So if we want positive things to be showing up in our world - in the people and relationships, in the words people say to us, in the way people treat us, in every area, be that kind of person first!

Even beyond that, science tells us that one of the most reliable ways to experience happiness and positive emotions is to do an act of kindness for someone who cannot even repay you.

Making a positive difference in the world around us will give us purpose behind our hard work, it gives meaning to our wealth, it boosts confidence and self esteem as it helps us to see that we have something to contribute to others and it takes our focus off our own problems and challenges and shifts our eyes to see how we can help others.

With all of this in mind - I want to share with you the top 5 biggest challenges or problems which came back from students across Australia and then diving deeper into the top 3 AND how to best support students to be their best and achieve success at school!

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The top 5 problems and challenges students face which they believe hold them back from achieving success at school:

1. Stress, Anxiety and Mental Health (58%)
2. Lack of Motivation (54%)
3. Procrastination + Time Management (49%)
4. Expectations of Others (46%)
5. Focus, Attention + Distraction (42%)

One interesting observation to note is that while bullying did appear in the top 10 (at number 8) only 22% of students said bullying was in their top 3.

Looking at the top 5 we can see that some of these are symptoms of other challenges, some of them are external factors outside of their control (blame, excuses etc) and some of them are a problem because of a lack of skill or strategy.

## **PROBLEM #1. STRESS, ANXIETY + MENTAL HEALTH**

58% of students said stress, anxiety and mental health issues hold them back from succeeding at school.

I am guessing that it would be no surprise to you that the #1 problem faced by your students is related to their mental well being. My work focusses a lot around helping students develop health habits to manage their own thinking, their levels of stress and even working with young people who suffer from severe mental health challenges including suicidal thoughts and attempts.

If you've been following my work for any amount of time you will know how passionate I am about helping young people to see how amazing they are - I have even developed a camp specifically for teens 14 to 17 to take them on a journey of self discovery that they might discover what they are truly capable of - to face their fears, overcome their limiting beliefs, develop self confidence and self esteem and start to see themselves for the amazing young people they truly are - but why?

To now know that 58% of students suffer from a mental health related challenge, and feel like stress, anxiety or mental health is holding them back from being successful at school - tells me that the root of a lot of our other problems is related to a young persons mental well being.

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According to Beyond Blue suicide is the biggest killer of young Australians and accounts for the deaths of more young people than car accidents. That breaks my heart!

Evidence suggests that 3 in 4 adult mental health conditions emerge by age 24 and half by age 14 - this tells me that we need to work harder and be more strategic about supporting young people to develop the skills and the strategies to have healthy minds and to know how to manage the challenges that life in this world will throw at them.

Teens are stressed by a lot of things in their life - school work, parents, relationships, siblings, the future, change, expectations of adults.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

The mind and body are closely connected, and stress can affect the body from head to toe. Common symptoms include feeling nervous or anxious, feeling tired, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, feeling overwhelmed, having negative thoughts and experiencing changes in sleeping habits. Problems with concentrating and changes in eating habits (eating too much or too little) are also linked to stress.

It's normal to have some stress in life. But if stress persists at high levels for a long time, it can have lasting negative effects on health. Chronic (long-term) stress can cause anxiety, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system, and can contribute to diseases such as depression, obesity and heart disease.

Everyone is affected by stress at one time or another, and it can feel overwhelming. With the right tools, though, you can learn to manage stress before it takes a toll on your health. Managing daily stress can also lead to a more overall positive outlook on your life and well-being.

When we face a stressful event, our bodies respond by activating the nervous system and releasing hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol. These hormones cause physical changes in the body which help us to react quickly and effectively to get through the stressful situation. This is sometimes called the 'fight or flight' response. The hormones increase our heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, metabolism and muscle tension. Our pupils dilate and our perspiration rate increases. While these physical changes help us try to meet the challenges of the stressful situation, they can cause other physical or psychological symptoms if the stress is ongoing and the physical changes don't settle down.

## HOW TO REDUCE STRESS

Learning to handle stress in healthy ways is very important. Fortunately, it can be easy to learn simple techniques to help manage our mind and our body in stressful times. These include recognising and changing the behaviours that contribute to stress, as well as techniques for reducing stress once it has occurred. The following tips are simple ways to help your students know how to look after their mind and body, and reduce stress and its impact on health.

### **Identify warning signs and symptoms**

It is very helpful to be able to identify early warning signs in your body that tell you when you are getting stressed. These vary from person to person, but might include things like tensing your jaw, grinding your teeth, clenching your fists, getting headaches, or feeling irritable and short tempered.

### **Identify triggers**

There are often known triggers which raise our stress levels and make it more difficult for us to manage. If you know what the likely triggers are, you can aim to anticipate them and practise calming yourself down beforehand, or even find ways of removing the trigger. Triggers might include late nights, lack of sleep, too many hours playing computer games, deadlines, seeing particular people, hunger or no exercise.

### **Establish Routines and Rituals**

Having predictable rhythms and routines in your day, or over a week, can be very calming and reassuring, and can help you to manage your stress.

Helpful routines and rituals:

- Regular times for exercise and relaxation
- Regular meal times, waking and bedtimes
- Planning ahead to do particular jobs on set days of the week.

### **Surround yourself with people who fill your tank**

Spending time with people you care about, and who care about you, is an important part of managing ongoing stress in your life. In life we will find we come across two types of people; 1. People who deplete our tank, and 2. People who fill our tank. You want to make sure you surround yourself as much as possible with people who fill your tank.

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These are people who see your potential, see the good in you, speak positively about you and your future, encourage and support you to be your best. When you come away from hanging out with people who fill your tank you will notice you feel more positive about yourself and about your future, which helps you to shift your focus from the things which were causing you to stress.

## **Establish healthy habits**

Make sure you are eating healthy foods, getting regular exercise and sleeping. Take time to do activities you find calming or uplifting, such as listening to music, walking dancing. Avoid using alcohol, tobacco, caffeine or other drugs to cope.

## **Be aware of your mini-me (self talk)**

When we are stressed we sometimes say things in our head, over and over, that just add to our stress. This unhelpful self-talk might include things like: 'I can't cope', or 'I'm too busy', or 'I'm so tired', or 'It's not fair'. While we might think that these are fairly truthful descriptions of what's going on, they are not always helpful to repeat, and can even make you feel worse.

Notice when you are using unhelpful self-talk, and instead try saying soothing, calming things to yourself to reduce your levels of stress. Try more helpful self-talk like 'I'm getting there', or 'I've got this', or 'This too shall pass'.

Keeping things in perspective is also important. When we are stressed, it's easy to see things as worse than they really are. Try self-talk such as 'This is not the end of the world' or 'In the overall scheme of things, this doesn't matter so much'.

## **Take time to relax and be mindful**

Make time to practise relaxation. This will help your body and nervous system to settle and readjust.

*Consider trying some of the following things:*

- Teach yourself to become aware of your body, your feelings, tastes, sounds, sights, smells and everything that is going on around you.
- Flood your senses with your surrounds and practice gratitude - being thankful for everything you recognise. (The wind, the sun, the ants, the flowers, the bird chirping, the smell of freshly cut grass etc).
- Learn a formal technique such as progressive muscle relaxation, meditation or yoga.
- Make time to absorb yourself in a relaxing activity such as gardening, listening to music, art or playing an instrument.
- Plan things to do each day that you look forward to and which give you a sense of pleasure but are not linked at all to the thing which is stressing you.

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Stress, anxiety and mental health issues are way bigger than 7 bullet points on a piece of paper, but at the same time, being aware of the prevalence of stress and mental health issues in our students we can support them by integrating and implementing some of these basic tools and techniques into our classrooms.

My wife and I designed a program called “Mindful Melodies” which is now being integrated into primary school classrooms using music, movement and expression to help younger students develop some healthy habits, tools and strategies to combat the issues of poor mental wellbeing.

In my work training teachers and running professional development workshops for adults who work with young people I often talk about the need for us to take a ‘thermostat’ approach to our work. It’s easy to BLAME the students home life, background or other external factors for their current state, rather than TAKING RESPONSIBILITY for what we can control and actually changing our strategy a bit, rather than just keep doing what we’ve always done (because as we can see in the current climate that clearly isn’t working).

How can you help the students you work with understand the power of mental well being, a healthy mind and having healthy habits to combat stress, anxiety and mental health?

Some other simple ways to help students boost their results and reduce their stress:

- Manage time wisely
- Get organised
- Create a good, clean, uncluttered study environment
- Understand your learning style
- Practice visualisation (visualise your successful day)
- Work on your optimism and positive outlook
- Develop your study skills + accelerated learning techniques

I run workshops all over Australia (particularly my BrainMAX - Accelerated Learning and Study Skills workshops) which help students develop awareness, understanding and practical skills (the mindset and the skillset) to reduce stress, anxiety and increase their mental well being - which inturn leads to increased engagement, greater passion for learning and better grades and results.

Student stress is usually a symptom of an out of balance life where the young person does not have the skills and strategies to know how to take on the challenges in healthy way. Let’s do something to change that and help our students be their best!

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## **PROBLEM #2. LACK OF MOTIVATION**

54% of students said lack of motivation inhibits them from success at school.

I'm sure again this wouldn't be a surprise to you, knowing that 1 in 2 students is unmotivated at school. As such this is an area I do a huge amount of work in - engaging, inspiring and equipping students with the awareness, understanding and skills to manage and boost their level of INTRINSIC motivation.

You see motivation really has three levels:

1. Survival - Basic core human needs
2. Carrot or Stick - Pain or pleasure from an external source
3. Intrinsic - our internal, self directed motivation

The first 2 types of motivation may get the party started, but they never lead to true engagement. The reason I say this is because in my definition of student engagement it is self-directed. Compliance does not equal engagement! If you can get your students doing what you want them to do (sit down and shutup type engagement) it doesn't mean they're actually engaged in their own learning journey.

Motivation is students' energy and drive to learn, work effectively, and achieve to their potential. It plays a large role in students' interest in and enjoyment of school and study and underpins their ability to achieve.

Students who are not motivated will not learn effectively. They won't retain information, they won't participate and some of them may become disruptive, disconnected and eventually disengaged from the education system all together.

While motivating students can be a difficult task, the payoffs are huge. Motivated students are more excited to learn and participate. Simply put: Teaching a class full of motivated students is enjoyable for teacher and student alike. Some students are self-motivated, with a natural love of learning. But even with the students who do not have this natural drive, a great teacher can make learning fun and inspire them to reach their full potential.

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According to Dan Pink who wrote the book “Drive - The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us” the 3 core ingredients of motivation are:

**Autonomy** - the desire to direct our own lives, to be masters of our universe, to decide our own destiny

**Mastery** - the desire to continually grow and increase our level of capability, to feel like we have skills and strengths and to know that we are good at something

**Purpose** - to see how the things we are doing now contribute to a bigger picture vision or goal and to know that we have the ability to contribute to something which is outside of ourselves

Generally speaking students will score low in all 3 of these areas - as a teenager they are not autonomous and do not have anywhere near the amount of independence they would like. The majority of teens are not highly skilled and don't have a sense of mastery or self confidence which comes from a high level of competence and they lack purpose and direction for their future to see how the hard work they need to do now will pay off in the future.

Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose are three big ideas that can move our classrooms to focus on engagement and motivation, rather than on compliance. When we do, classroom management becomes a conversation about strategies to support learners, rather than a way to make them “follow the rules” in a one-size-fits-all model.

## HOW TO BOOST MOTIVATION

### A compelling vision of the future

In my leadership and self leadership workshops often I will talk to students about the reality that ‘what you focus on, you move towards.’ Like when you get distracted driving a car and start to focus on something on the side of the road and a few seconds later discover that you’re now swerving off to the side of the road right towards that thing you were looking at.

Helping students to create a vision or a picture of their preferred future, which is vivid and compelling, will give them something which not only motivates them but will draw them into their future.

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According to Dan Pink's 3 core ingredients of motivation - a vision will give purpose to some of the less than exciting work students need to do to get to where they want to be.

Based on teenage brain development, we know that teenagers are not great at planning ahead or looking beyond the here and now, so some coaching and strategic questioning is usually required to help the student think about what they would like their life to look like in 5 or 10 years time, but developing a compelling and exciting vision for the future is one key element for helping students enhance their motivation.

## **Visualise Success**

Believe it or not the brain doesn't know the difference between motor and cognitive activation. Visualisation is as powerful as performing the action for real.

A study conducted by Dr. Biasiotto at the University of Chicago was done where he split people into three groups and tested each group on how many basketball free throws they could make.

After this, he had the first group practice free throws every day for an hour. The second group just visualized themselves making free throws. The third group did nothing.

After 30 days, he tested them again.

- The first group improved by 24%. (practicing for 1 hour)
- The second group improved by 23% (only visualising)
- The third group did not improve which was expected.

The power of visualisation to bring reality to your vision and goals through the use of your imagination can significantly improve motivation.

## **Capability - Confidence - Motivation**

Self-belief and confidence is one of motivation's most vital components. Most of the focus on enhancing students' self-belief is usually on how to challenge their negative thinking and how to promote more positive self-talk. Although this is critical, I want to focus on something that is not addressed so frequently: *the need for students to succeed*.

Success is a cornerstone of self-belief. Two strategies to build more success into students' lives are 'chunking' and expanding their views of success.



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Chunking involves:

- Breaking tasks into more manageable bite-sized pieces, and
- Seeing the completion of each piece as a success.

Students also have more opportunities to succeed when they expand their views of success. In our highly competitive schooling system students tend to see success in terms of being the best, topping the class, and beating others. If students focus solely on narrow definitions of success they run the risk of cutting themselves off from opportunities to succeed. This is because under this narrow view of success only a few students can 'win'

As students progress they develop their capacity and capabilities, they experience more success, which boosts their confidence and in turn their intrinsic motivation levels rise as their perceived level of ability and capacity increases.

I have seen this time and time again at the student leadership camps we run for 14 to 17 year olds. We give them opportunities to do things they never thought they could do - jump from a 10 metre tower to grab on to a trapeze, walk on nails, break a block of wood with their hand etc All of these experiential learning activities are to help students create reference points in their world for success and achievement. The more reference points, the more solid and stable the young persons self confidence becomes.

## **Focus on growth + encourage failure**

Growth Mindset - which has been made famous by psychologist Carol Dweck tells us that the effort and growth is what we must focus on in our praise, in our encouragement of students as well as helping students understand that life and success is a journey not a single destination.

Helping students to focus on the learning journey, stretching and growing in the process and seeing their abilities and their intelligence as fluid with the ability to grow has a huge impact on boosting motivation, especially as they see progress through the journey.

I love it when I get to talk to students about my attitude towards failure - you see I believe there's ***no such thing as failure, there's only feedback***. Now I'm not giving students permission to get an F, but I am encouraging students to make mistakes, to view mistakes, poor performance, and setback differently.

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Motivated students see poor performance as information that helps them improve next time, they learn from their mistakes, they grow through them and they change their approach. When students see mistakes in this way, they are less fearful of poor performance and are less inclined to manoeuvre in defensive ways or give up.

Reducing students' fear of failure therefore involves minimising the link between students' achievement and their self-worth. Students' behaviour (that is, their hard work or their lack of work, their effective study or their ineffective study etc.) needs to be the focus and not so much them as a person. It may seem like a subtle distinction but it is a distinction that has significant implications for students' orientation to challenge, adversity, failure, poor performance, and setback.

Students also need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck. They need this repertoire and tool kit of different approaches—not just sheer effort—to learn and improve.

In one of my workshops which is titled '7 Keys To Aweomeness' I talk about the power of being flexible. Bruce Lee is quoted as saying 'Be like water' and I use this quote to illustrate how we can get past challenges and obstacles when we are flexible in our approach. When we are rigid and lack flexibility we can easily become unmotivated and discouraged.

## **Increase autonomy through control + choice**

Students who have a strong sense of academic control and autonomy believe they can influence academic outcomes in their life. For example, they believe that through appropriate quality and quantity of effort they can control the outcome or result.

Enhancing students' sense of control requires us to encourage students to focus their attention on factors within their control. Too often students attribute their successes and failures to factors beyond their control - factors such as good or bad luck, easy or tough marking, or a good or bad teacher. Enhancing students' sense of control means placing greater emphasis on their effort and strategy - that is, on how hard they work and the way they do that work. Effort and strategy are within students' control and the more they focus on these, the more empowered they are at school.

## **Measure and manage progress**

In business there's a saying "If you measure it you can manage it" this is true with academic success as well. If you can measure your progress towards your desired goal or vision then you

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can see how you're going, how far you have to go, how much you have already achieved and if you're on track with your timeline.

According to psychology progress and the ability to see progress is a huge motivator, especially for those who are more results oriented.

When you measure your progress you can see how you're coming along, and this is a powerful motivator to help you stick with it. If you are making good progress, your confidence grows along with your motivation. The very fact that you know you are making good progress, will give you the drive needed to see the goal through. When you measure your progress, it gives you a realistic picture of the situation. If you are not making the desired progress, you are able to see this before you fall too far behind. You can then identify the changes that need to be made and implement them.

## **Peer Recognition and External Accountability**

It is understood that one of the most motivating things for a teenager beyond positive reward for desired behaviours is peer recognition. To be publicly recognised by a peer or group of peers is one of the most powerful ways to reinforce positive behaviour or achievement and boost motivation to keep going.

We can all understand the negative impacts of peer pressure on youth and young adults, but it is often forgotten when it comes to positive peer recognition to increase engagement and motivation.

When young people receive recognition from their peers in a classroom or social setting it lights up the reward centres in the brain and reinforces the behaviour which earned the recognition.

Examples of positive peer recognition may be:

- Adopting a 'Box Of Awesomeness' – where students are encouraged to write something encouraging and uplifting about another classmate every week
- Have students award random awards to other classmates on a regular basis
- Allocating points (as per above) to genuine public positive recognition of other classmates
- Creating a 'Super Positive' recognition reward for the most encouraging person of the week

## **PROBLEM #3. PROCRASTINATION + TIME MANAGEMENT**

49% of students said procrastination and poor time management were a significant problem when it came to succeeding at school.

I was going to write a whole bunch of helpful information here, but I'll do that tomorrow... Okay once again, I bet you're not in any state of shock knowing that 49% of students are challenged by procrastination and time management.

This challenge is important to address because procrastination can develop into a habit that can seriously impact your ability to be productive. This in turn can negatively affect your academic performance. Research shows there are lots of reasons why we procrastinate including self-doubt about performance, low-frustration tolerance--a tendency to give up if the work feels too difficult, and believing myths like "I work better under pressure".

Developing a few techniques to help counteract procrastination or dedicating time early on to counteracting procrastination can not only help boost academic success, but also help develop tools and skills students will in their adult lives.

Some of the possible impacts of procrastinating include producing lower quality work at the last minute, completing and turning in work late, and increasing stress levels - it's all related. We procrastinate and put off work, so we do it last minute and it increases our stress levels, so we submit poor work and get a bad result, which depleats our confidence and self esteem, so we lack self belief and it negatively impacts on our mental health, then we procrastinate and the cycle goes on.

Procrastination can also take away time needed for sleep, exercise, relaxation, family, relationships, and other elements that contribute to life balance. Finally, when tasks are left until the last minute, there is no buffer zone for unexpected issues that might require time and attention.

There is no single answer to this. The same students might procrastinate for different reasons at different times. However, research in the area has demonstrated some common indicators.

Procrastination appears to be a problem of motivation more than time management. If students have the motivation to do a particular task, either intrinsic or extrinsic, they are less likely to

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procrastinate. The value placed on the task correlates with the likelihood of procrastination.

Fear of failure is a recurring theme. For some, it can be seen as more desirable to fail a task due to lack of effort rather than completing a task and demonstrating a lack of ability. There is often a correlation between procrastination and low self-esteem. Students who have a negative perception of their own academic abilities often 'live out' their perception through procrastinating to avoid any possible confirmation of their perceived inabilities.

Other issues which can cause students to procrastinate when given a task include:

## 7 REASONS PEOPLE PROCRASTINATE

- 1. The task appears too big, creating overwhelm** - where the student sees the task as a whole, rather than in a series of stages. Thus, looking at the task from this 'big picture' angle can make it seem unmanageable.
- 2. Not knowing what to do** - many students are not really sure what a task involves and consequently fail to act.
- 3. Inability to set priorities and manage time** - this involves not setting up priorities in relation to doing the task itself, but setting it off against other competing tasks, obligations and wants.
- 4. Having unrealistic expectations** - this is often linked with the concept of perfectionism and relates to students being unreasonably demanding of themselves in terms of attaining high academic grades. This can be especially true for students transitioning from a school-based environment where marking criteria can be different.
- 5. Fear of success and its consequences** - the idea that success breeds success can be confronting to many students. If a student performs well once, then that expectation will hold for future assignments. Moreover, success can also lead to the unknown, where students can be outside their comfort zones.
- 6. Lack of self-discipline** - transitioning from a nurturing study environment like high school to the autonomy of university can see many students struggle to become independent learners.

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**7. Unclear relevance of task to results** - if a task is not seen as being important to the overall grade in a given course, then it is tempting not to give it any emphasis, despite the fact that it might have other learning/content related relevance.

## WHAT TO DO TO OVERCOME PROCRASTINATION

**1. The task appears too big, creating overwhelm** - break down the task into manageable chunks. Only give yourself small, achievable goals such as reading one article at a time and take regular breaks between tasks. If you make your goals too big, you run the risk of being unable to meet them. Work upwards from small and simpler tasks; successful achievement can help you to tackle the more challenging ones.

**2. Not knowing what to do** - if you do not know what the task requires of you, it is important to find out sooner rather than later. Your tutors/lecturers will see your request in a positive light, as representing a desire for understanding. Knowledge is seen to be advanced through the asking of questions, so see this as a natural part of the research process rather than a knowledge deficit.

**3. Inability to set priorities** - this is one of the most significant causes of procrastination. You don't get round to doing something because you do not have time to do so. If this statement feels true for you, then it is important to examine and reorganise your priorities, both in terms of task/event and time taken in relation to them. Create a system of prioritising your commitments.

**4. Having unrealistic expectations** - this is particularly true for students in transition from high school to university. Perhaps at school you have been a perennially high achiever, yet at university your grades might be much lower. The demands of evidence based academic writing in a university context are often great and if your marks have not been what you would have expected, it is worth remembering that you are 'serving an apprenticeship' in academic writing and you will improve with experience.

**5. Fear of success and its consequences** - success might require you to do other things over which you have less control, such as giving public presentations. Moreover, success might not correlate with 'coolness'; the thought of you being deemed a 'nerd' might be an uncomfortable one.

Whatever the reason, success can take us out of our comfort zones, so stay calm and seek

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assistance.

**6. Lack of self-discipline** - if a lack of self-discipline is contributing towards procrastination, then it might be because you are not used to being in charge of your own agenda. In high school you were told what to do and when to do it; and if you did not complete a task there were often immediate negative consequences. At university, the negative consequences can seem much more distant. Provide your own positive incentives for doing work, perhaps in the form of a reward for task completion. By putting a reward system in place you are invoking a form of self-discipline which you can build upon.

**7. Unclear relevance of task to results** - sometimes you might procrastinate because the task might not be formally assessed and thus appear less worthy of your attention. However, in such a scenario, it is important to remember that whilst the task might not be assessed, there is significant value in completion of such tasks as part of the greater learning picture. Certainly, the skills, strategies and understandings gained could serve you well for future assessed tasks.

## A FEW MORE TIPS TO HELPOVERCOME PROCRASTINATION

- Get a clear picture on the cost of procrastination - when you procrastinate, what do you lose? what price do you pay?
- Develop self awareness around when you procrastinate and what triggers it
- Create healthy habits of getting stuff done
- Practice effective time and planning habits and use your time productively
- Commit to action and decide your non-negotiable standards
- Reduce distractions in your work environment
- Chunk your time - with breaks, rewards, (25 minutes with 5 minute breaks) reward yourself with things you would do if you were procrastinating, after you have achieved a result
- Ask family and friends to support you - Do Not Disturb (study hat, sign on the door), Accountability, Commitment squad
- Don't punish yourself - learn and grow through the struggle

There is a lot of really strong research into the brain and productivity which shows us that overcoming procrastination and developing productive time management skills plays a huge role in boosting memory capacity and improving academic success.

**PRESENTATIONS | WORKSHOPS | CAMPS | CONFERENCES | ACADEMIC ACCELERATION  
MOTIVATION | LEADERSHIP | STUDY SKILLS | EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE | PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Scientists have known this since 1885, yet somehow students never seem to pay it any mind and continue to procrastinate. The first time you hear a lecture or study something new, if you review the material that same day within 24 hours, you prevent yourself from forgetting up to 80% of what you learned. After a week it takes only 5 minutes of review to retain 100% of the info.

It's been known since classic 19th century educational psychology studies that people learn better when using multiple, short study periods rather than one extended session. Two years ago, the Lynch and Gall labs found out why. They discovered a biological mechanism that contributes to the enhancing effect of spaced training: brain synapses encode memories in the hippocampus much better when activated briefly at one-hour intervals.

“This explains why prolonged ‘cramming’ is inefficient — only one set of synapses is being engaged,” said Lynch, professor of psychiatry, human behaviour and anatomy, and neurobiology. “Repeated short training sessions, spaced in time, engage multiple sets of synapses. It's as if your brain is working at full power.”

These types of strategies require a more disciplined and stricter time schedule, but will ultimately result in increased performance, leading to improved self confidence, higher levels of intrinsic motivation and improved mental well being.

Anyone would think that these results were rigged, the way they dove tail one into another - but the truth is, over the past 18 years I have been super passionate about discovering exactly what is holding young people back from being their best and inturn have committed my work and my life to helping them devleop awareness, understanding and tools and skills to combat some of their biggest challenges.

My work with young people and adults inspires me everyday to keep growing and learning to equip myself with the awareness, understanding and tools and skills to help you do what you do even better and so I trust this simple guide has been useful to you.

Just to quickly recap the top 5 challenges and problems:

1. Stress, Anxiety and Mental Health (58%)
2. Lack of Motivation (54%)
3. Procrastination + Time Management (49%)
4. Expectations of Others (46%)
5. Focus, Attention + Distraction (42%)



# SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

Another report I have written and am happy to make freely available to you and your team is called “How To Create An Environment For Teens To Thrive!” (you may already have seen it) and it looks at:

1. The 3 Universal Human Fears
2. The 3 Questions Asked of Adults By Teens
3. The 6 Core Needs of Teens

My challenge for you is to take some time to really digest the information and ideas in this report and ask yourself the question - how can I apply this into my classroom, my leadership role, my school, my family and my community?

Then when you start to experiment - I'd love to hear from you!

Send me an email ([info@nathanhulls.com](mailto:info@nathanhulls.com)) and tell me what you're doing and how it's working for you.

I am a big believer in the power of expectation and the power of vision:

- Expectation dictates your experience - you get what you expect
- Vision dictates where you go - you move towards what you focus on

As I finish up this guide, my challenge for you for the future:

- What are you expecting - of yourself, of your students, of your team, of your family? Positive or negative? High or low? New and better or the same old same old?
- What do you see - for your own career, for your students, for your team, for your school, for your community? What is the picture of your preferred future? What's your dream? Or have you let the dream become dim and tarnished by a few too many years of hard slog?

I'd love to come to your school and enhance the work you do with some presentations or seminars in any of the following areas - motivation, well being, self leadership, social + emotional learning, academic acceleration and study skills.

I'd love to support you and your students so send us an email - [bookings@nathanhulls.com](mailto:bookings@nathanhulls.com) and let's make it happen!

Cheering you on!

Nathan Hulls

**Teen Behaviour Specialist | Motivational Speaker | Academic Acceleration Coach**

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# ABOUT NATHAN HULLS

**“REAL... ENGAGING... INSPIRING... INTERESTING... DYNAMIC... FUNNY... EMPOWERING... UPLIFTING... MOTIVATING!”**

Nathan Hulls is a teen behavior specialist, motivational speaker and academic acceleration coach. With more than 18 years of hands on real world experience working with young people, Nathan has earned a reputation as a leading authority on teen behavior, personal development, motivation, social + emotional intelligence, positive psychology and accelerated learning strategies. He has appeared on the TODAY show (Channel 9), in the Herald Sun, The Age, Daily Telegraph, PerthNOW, AdelaideNOW and as a ‘Girlfriend Guru’ in Girlfriend Magazine, his inspiring personal stories, life changing message and practical tools and skills engage, inspire and empower tens of thousands of students each year.

## ADULT FEEDBACK

“Nathan addressed my Year 12 students at their study camp. The message is a simple one, but delivered with the calibre of many a stand up comic. To get such an empowering, uplifting, motivational message across with laughter and engagement was a real feat without any of the cliched cheese or “whoop”. The message is being revisited in my year level meetings, and my addresses to parents on information evenings. What is the message? Now that would be telling. But in my 16 years teaching I’ve taught all-comers; from the brightest to the most damaged and damaging. This message is a key to fulfillment for all. I’ll be rebooking Nathan.”

**Justin Cooper, Bacchus Marsh Grammar VCE Coordinator**

“Nathan Hulls is a dynamic speaker who engages youth at their own level. He uses his own challenging experiences to show young people that all things are possible in their lives with the right thinking, determination and motivation to succeed. Nathan speaks of hope and a bright future for them all. He provides one step in their move forward in their thinking and thus in their lives. I know our students were impacted by your message.”

**Coral Maxwell, Creek Street College Principal**

## STUDENT FEEDBACK

“To be honest, I was only going for free pizza, but I got so much out of your talk. You are a really inspiring and funny guy. I can’t remember your exact words, but I loved the apple seed metaphor, that we all have potential inside us, even if it’s really small!”

“I absolutely loved your speaking today, you presented it so well, and kept me entertained the whole time, I literally couldn’t stop listening, everything you said was so relevant, one thing you talked about that really effected me was when you talked about putting the blame on one thing, and how you talked about how we are all important individuals and how we are all on this world for a reason. I would love to meet you again and I personally think that what you said would have changed many peoples lives including mine. Thank you so much, I enjoyed every minute of it.” Maddy (Student)

**WWW.NATHANHULLS.COM**