

Perseverance: Older Students The October Character Trait of the Month

School is hard for everybody sometimes. Why do some people keep trying when things get tough, while others give up? Today we'll be focusing on how **perseverance** is affected by future thinking and long-term goals.

Many people avoid thinking about the future. Here are some of the reasons why:

- It can be scary! As annoying as it can be to go to school and live with your family, it's at least *familiar*. At the end of high school, you're presented with a million options. This is exciting, but also anxiety-inducing (fear and excitement are closely related emotions. Think about the last time you rode a roller coaster or had to speak in front of a group. Were you scared? Excited? The answer is probably both). There's a human tendency to avoid uncomfortable emotions, and some people avoid thinking about the future for this reason.
- fMRI studies (brain scans) suggest that when you imagine your future self, your brain does something weird: It stops acting as if you're thinking about yourself. Instead, it starts acting as if you're thinking about *a completely different person*.
[Read more about this phenomenon here.](#)

So is it **bad** to not think about your future? Here's an answer from an organization called "The Institute for the Future" (ifff.org):

"Studies show the less people think about their future lives, the less self-control they exhibit and the less likely they are to make choices that benefit the world in the long-run. People who don't think about the future vote less often, save less for retirement, make poor health decisions, procrastinate more, have a harder time resisting temptation, care less about long-term challenges like climate change, are more likely to drop out of school or be arrested, and more.

As the Institute for the Future's study shows, **the vast majority of people never think about the far future**, but that is something that can change and would lead to positive outcomes. "Future thinking is one of our most under-developed skill sets," [an IFTF representative] said. "It takes less than a minute a day, but studies have shown it can lead to improved health, better financial stability and much more. Universities across the country are starting to teach future thinking classes, including Stanford's continuing studies program where I teach, because of the benefits it has been shown to have. **Spending a little more time thinking about the future could have a positive impact on people's personal lives and our society.**"

People's lives have better outcomes when they have a vision of their future because it influences them to make good choices in the present. For example, I knew that I wanted to graduate from high school. This long-term goal helped me **persevere** through freshman PE. Here's another example: if you want to buy a gaming console (long-term

goal), you will be better able to resist the temptation to spend all of your money on french fries and energy drinks.

In contrast, if you don't have any idea WHY you need to get a good grade in math, it will be hard to **persevere** when your math class becomes difficult. If you have no clue what you want your life to look like after high school, you may be struggling to stay motivated.

Fortunately, future thinking is a skill that can be developed. If you are feeling totally lost about your future, our staff wants to help! Please talk to your ST or reach out to one of your school's counselors. We can help you establish long-term goals, and having long-term goals can boost your ability to **persevere**.

Your Counselors:

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