

Back to School? Stick with It

Written by Julie Desmond
Monday, 20 August 2012 22:14



Ah, September! When the leaves change and the school buses come out and everyone gets new backpacks and goes back to old routines. Reality check: for some people, back-to-school is a dreaded thing. Whether the fall brings high school, college, rehab or the graduate program you have been dragging yourself through, seeing it through to the finish line, to graduation, is not always fun, easy or even imaginable. Admit it. And then try a few tricks to help yourself stick it out.

Imaginable is a key word. Regardless of why you started, who wants you to finish or what will happen next, can you IMAGINE yourself graduating? Sketch a picture of yourself standing on a stage somewhere, in a funny cap and gown, accepting a diploma. Seeing is believing, right? So, if you can imagine it, you can probably do it. Whenever you think of quitting take another look at that picture, every day if you have to, to remind yourself of your goal.

Competition can be inspirational, so keep a scorecard. You might not make it to graduation, but try to stay in longer than anyone else. Make a list of people in your program, your own name first, followed by names of five people most likely to finish, and then five or so people you think are most likely to quit. When someone drops out, cross his name off your list. You have now gone further toward graduation than that person. As others exit, you will see that your name is still there, top of the list, not quitting yet. Suggestion: don't tweet your list, or even share it with anyone. This one is personal.

Enlist allies. Armies have allies, teams have managers; create your own network of people who want to see you finish. Friends, teachers, classmates, coaches, church leaders... connect and enlist their support early on so you will know who to call when things get tough.

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Run for the hydrants. Distance runners build up stamina by alternating short and long runs. One runner I know pushes himself by going just to the next fire hydrant, and then to the hydrant after that. If getting to graduation seems too far to go, try a shorter distance: just get through today, this week, this semester. My dad was a heavy smoker in his twenties. Now 89, he says he's still a smoker, but he just hasn't had one in over 60 years. "I might smoke tomorrow," he says. You might quit school tomorrow; but for today, you're riding it out.

Finally, plan ahead. You have a picture in your mind of graduation day. What will you do after that? If you can see yourself moving on, you will begin to see that this is only one step, it is not your entire future. Do what you have to do now so you can do what you want to do later.

If you are someone who struggled to finish and made it, please write to me. I'd love to hear your success story!

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