

## Success the other way round – Backward planning brings more motivation and success

by Caroline Cerar

**It is quickly agreed upon that a well-planned approach will produce better results. But how exactly should you plan the implementation of personal projects? Backward planning, i.e. planning from the end, has proven successful, especially for complex tasks.**

There are a multitude of planning methods for project procedures in an operational context. Many of them promote backward planning in one way or another - that is, backward planning based on the desired end result. With regard to planning for the implementation of personal goals, however, science has dealt with the subject less extensively. How should one plan and what are the consequences?

A study with students in 2017 shows that backward planning – i.e. planning backwards based on the desired end result – produces better results, especially for complex tasks, than if one defined the steps into the future starting from today. For simple topics, both types of planning promise equally good results.

When planning backwards, the thinking and planning process begins at the end. One then defines the immediately preceding steps, which are necessary to achieve the goal. So one goes backwards step by step and plans the tasks that have to be done beforehand.

This special planning procedure of backward planning has several clear advantages:

- **Better and more precise planning:** Backward planning defines the necessary steps more precisely. "Proximity to the goal" in planning means that tasks can be defined more concretely and precisely.
- **Greater conviction that you have the right plan:** Through intensive work on the goal and the important tasks before it, one is "psychologically" closer to one's goal. Thinking through and defining the steps immediately before the end result also leads to a stronger conviction that they are also the right ones for successful achievement of the goal.
- **Greater confidence:** This goes hand in hand with a higher subjective certainty that one can actually achieve one's own goal.
- **Greater commitment:** Backward planners tend to be characterized by greater effort and more commitment – a result of greater conviction and greater confidence.
- **Less pressed for time:** Backward planners feel less pressed for time.

The next time you have big and small personal projects, you should start planning more consciously and not give in to an automatic mechanism from “now” towards the “goal”. "The art of the beginning" should not be underestimated and, at the same time, more intensive "thinking and planning from the end" can result in higher motivation and better results.

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**Literature:**

*Jooyoung, P., Lu, F., Hedgcock, W. (2017). Forward and Backward Planning and Goal Pursuit. Psychological Science.*

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