



### Using a 30-Day Challenge to Apply Planned Change Concepts

#### Introduction

For the past three years, I have taught a graduate-level Methods of Planned Change course, based primarily on Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations (2003). For the past three years, I have had students participate in a 30-day challenge assignment. Over those 30 days, they were to engage in the same challenge (e.g., 10,000 steps per day, drinking 64 ounces of water, etc.) each day. The class prepares students to be change agents after they graduate. The purpose of the assignment is to help students better understand the challenge individuals face as they go through changes. Students can ground course concepts in a practical experience. The assignment also provides a safe place for students to risk failing at the goal without failing the actual assignment.

#### Procedure

At the beginning of the semester, students are given the following instructions for the assignment: They need to choose a daily goal that is something they know they should be doing but are not. The assignment is due about six weeks after class begins, so students need to choose their challenge early to have time to complete the challenge and write up their reflections.

In their reflections, they document the change, including why they chose the goal, barriers for being successful, and what helped them be successful. The reflection also requires the incorporation of course concepts throughout the discussion. In addition to the reflection, students share their results with the rest of the class in a brief two- to three-minute presentation. At the end of the term, a final exam question relates to the 30-day challenge to allow more reflection on the long-term stickiness of the change and any other thoughts students have after more time to reflect on their experiences.

#### Results

Results have been positive. The students have been fairly engaged in the assignment, and informal feedback has shown that participation in the assignment can have effects beyond the semester. Most students do not maintain their goals past the 30-day limit, but final exam answers have illustrated the assignment had many students adjusting their goals to be more sustainably integrated in their lives. As with any assignment, there are sometimes where students do not perfectly complete the stated directions of the assignment, but they get the intention of the assignment. One issue is choosing a daily goal. One or two students each time will end up choosing a goal that is not actually a daily goal. There are also one or two who will choose more than one goal. The majority stay within the one daily goal parameters. Another issue is there will be some who fear that failing the goal means they fail the assignment. In an age where there is heightened sensitivity to grades, as well as grade inflation over the span of decades, this is not unexpected, but it can be mitigated if the goals of the assignment are communicated properly. Neither of these have been key issues, but they have occurred.

One unexpected outcome of the assignment was the amount of weight loss that has occurred. Many students gravitated toward health-based goals, so losing weight resulted for many students, though it was not required to share this in the reflection or presentation to the class. While not an intended result, it was encouraging to see real-world outcomes of the assignment.

**Recommendations**

For anyone implementing a similar assignment, it is recommended to ensure students go after goals that are attainable but are still difficult enough to allow for the possibility of failure. Part of the assignment is to help the students be empathetic toward the people they will potentially be working with in the future. Clarity of instructions is also important as students select goals. Otherwise, let students choose their own parameters. This allows for more buy-in.

This assignment is not necessarily appropriate for all courses, but there are aspects that can be of use to instructors. This assignment goes beyond applying the content to a real-world setting to applying it to the students' actual lives. They are not just seeing course concepts in action; they are seeing course concepts in their lives. This creates a different type of engagement with the material. In this case, students are getting to choose something that betters their lives, hopefully, while also completing required coursework. Basically, find a way to tie your course material to their lives in a meaningful way.

**Literature Cited**

Rogers, E.M. 2003. Diffusion of innovations. 5th ed. New York, NY: Free Press.

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