



FOCUS

Values for Living—Cadet Character Development Forum

INTRODUCTION

Each Values for Living character development forum helps Civil Air Patrol volunteers explore a virtue from multiple angles and practice that virtue through a hands-on activity. The combination of analysis and practice helps members internalize that virtue so it stays with them beyond the squadron meeting.

Focus is the ability to keep our attention fixed on our vision and goals. When we lose focus, we stop engaging in activities that give us a sense of purpose. Instead, we lose our time to lethargy, amusements, and diversions. This lesson explores the consequences of a lack of focus and strategies for persisting in pursuit of our vision and goals.

This lesson is suitable for online delivery.

PRECLASS CHECKLIST

Prior preparation is essential to success. Please prepare the following well ahead of time:

- All media installed and checked out
- Phase Three cadet orientation/training completed
- Participation awards such as candy or granola bar treats available
- Room arrangements complete

ATTENTION GETTER

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (5-10 MINUTES)

Option 1: Media Clip” The Key to Staying Focused. Media clip is available for download with the lesson.

Option 2: Media transcript. If your unit does not have multimedia access, please read aloud the following transcript of the attached video. You may invite members of your unit to take turns reading passages aloud.

We've spent the last couple months discussing Vision and Goals. We learned from President John F. Kennedy how a vision and SMART goals organize our energies and produce spectacular results. Then we studied the exceptional perseverance of Sir Ernest Shackleton. Despite

catastrophic setbacks, Shackleton refused to give up and eventually returned every single member of his crew home safely.

But when we fail to reach our goals, catastrophic setbacks are rarely to blame. When we're honest with ourselves, our failure to meet our goals is most often due to losing focus. This month's lesson is about **focus**, *our ability to keep our attention on our vision and goals*. When we lose focus, we stop engaging in activities that give us a sense of purpose. Let's take a look at the most common ways we lose focus and explore what will bring us back to our vision and goals.

First, we lose focus when we give in to **lethargy**. We've all felt this way. We feel too tired or exhausted to get started on a project. The goal seems impossible or too far out of reach. We get bored or restless and start looking for shortcuts. We blame our circumstances and start complaining to anyone who will listen. We may have feelings of self-pity, envy, or resentment and be tempted to give up.

A second threat comes from **amusements**. The word "amusements" comes from the Muses, ancient Greek goddesses who were believed to have inspired the arts and the sciences, from poetry and music to astronomy and history. If you put the letter "A" in front of the word "Muse," you get the opposite of inspiration—amusement.

Amusements are entertaining distractions that draw us away from, our vision and goals. They're fun but do not give us a sense of purpose.

Think of amusements like desserts. We all enjoy desserts from time to time, but a steady diet of desserts won't provide the nutrition we need to survive. Perhaps you enjoy following your favorite sports team, watching a TV show, or playing a video game. As long as we exercise moderation, amusements can serve as a welcome opportunity to relax and recharge.

And yet... we need to be careful. Amusements are big business and have become deeply ingrained in our culture. Sports teams, entertainment companies, and video game developers spend millions of dollars to draw and hold your attention in order to fulfill *their* vision and goals. Just remember, these activities are fun, but they won't fulfill *your* vision and goals.

And finally, we can lose focus on our own goals because we focus on a **diversion**. A diversion is a meaningful activity that serves someone else's vision and goals, but not our own. This can be tricky because as CAP members we ARE committed to helping others through volunteer service. However, we can be tempted to spend all our time accomplishing other people's goals and neglect our own. I can justify neglecting my own work because someone else needs my help! Again, we need to practice moderation to keep our attention on our own vision and goals. So, what can we do to strengthen and maintain our focus?

First, **remind yourself of your vision and goals**. Have you written them down? Where are they posted? How often do you review them or even call them to mind? If someone asks you, "What's your vision for your life?" are you prepared to answer?

Second, **embrace accountability**. Set goals that are measurable and time-bound—the M and T in "SMART." Keep a written record of your progress. Report on your progress to someone you trust. If someone asks you what you've been doing to realize your goal, what are you prepared to say as an answer?

Third, if you **develop a routine** you'll find it's easier to resist lethargy, amusements, and diversions because you'll know in advance how you're going to spend your time. Balance the time you spend with other people with time spent alone. Avoid multi-tasking and make time for mono-tasking, giving all of your attention and effort to getting just one step closer to your goal.

Finally, **have a sense of humor**. We're all going to make mistakes; who hasn't eaten too much ice cream? We all need breaks from time to time. As long as you don't take yourself too seriously, you'll be able to make steady and consistent progress toward your goals and enjoy healthy, well-earned down time without becoming obsessive.

You may never face a catastrophe quite like Shackleton's. However, you will be challenged daily by lethargy, amusements, and diversions. By frequently reminding yourself of your vision and goals, embracing accountability, and keeping to a routine, you can preserve your focus, achieve your goals, realize your vision, and live with excellence.

Note: Because the options above introduce terms relevant to the following discussions (such as lethargy, amusements, and diversions), the use of a personal story is discouraged for this lesson.

UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRED BEHAVIOR

ONLINE GROUP OR SMALL GROUP FACILITATED BY PHASE III CADET (15 MINUTES)

- We have spent the last few character development forums on a deep dive into vision and goals. Help us keep that theme going by sharing with the small group one part of your vision for your life and a current goal associated with that vision.
- Be honest: have you written down your vision and goals?
- How many times in the last month have you reviewed your vision and goals?
- Lethargy is a feeling of tiredness or exhaustion that makes it difficult to get to work on a project. When was the last time you felt this way?
- Amusements are entertaining distractions; they might relieve stress or help us relax but they rarely help us become the kind of people we want to be. What amusements are most tempting for you?
- A diversion is a worthwhile activity that may not serve your own vision and goals. What sorts of good works are most likely to divert your time and energy from your goals?
- What helpful routines would keep you focused on your vision and goals? Are there any you're currently using? How is it working for you?

APPLICATION OF THE BEHAVIOR TO THEIR LIVES

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (15 MINUTES)

Several discussion prompts are listed below. Choose questions that are appropriate for your unit.

- Focus is closely tied to our Core Value of Excellence. How can a lack of focus undermine your ability to live out the *other* Core Values?
- All of us know the feeling of lethargy. What techniques have helped you deal with those feelings? What can you do to protect yourself from lethargy or feeling overwhelmed?

- About how many hours per day should you spend on amusements?
- Other people can both help and hinder our focus. Can you think of a way in which someone else might help you focus? How about a way in which someone else might hinder your focus?
- We all need reminders to keep our focus on our vision and goals. What reminders have you found effective? (Suggested examples: setting an alarm, tape a note to the mirror, set out gym clothes the night before, etc.) Which reminder would you like to try?
- What goes into an effective routine?

ACTIVITY

ONLINE GROUP OR SMALL GROUP FACILITATED BY PHASE III CADET (10-15 MINUTES)

Assessing Invitations and Saying No

All of us will have many opportunities to pursue great things, but we won't be able to accept every invitation. If we are going to maintain our relationships and our focus, we must be able to weigh our options and, when necessary, politely decline an invitation.

In your small groups, take turns roleplaying the following scenarios. In each case, first decide whether you should accept the invitation. If you will accept, explain why this is a good choice. If you would decline, explain how you can do so politely and in way that maintains your relationship with the person to whom you are saying no.

Small group facilitators may choose which prompts to discuss in their groups.

- Your congresswoman is hosting an information session for those interested in applying to the United States Air Force Academy. You would like to attend but have a flying lesson scheduled at the same time and your flight instructor has difficulty rescheduling lessons. Will you risk missing a lesson to attend the info session?
- Your Deputy Commander for Cadets has asked for your help in starting a CyberPatriot team. You have been taking a cybersecurity class at the local community college and are interested in the competition but perhaps not ready to be responsible for leading a team. Are you up for the challenge?
- Your parents have decided they would like to eat dinner together as a family at least five nights per week. You worry about the demands of homework, team practices, and squadron meetings. You tell them about your goals in these areas. Then they ask you somewhat pointedly, "What are your goals for our family?"
- Your history teacher tells you that you are a natural leader with a gift for public speaking. She encourages you to run for a position in student government. Your classmates support the idea and promise to vote for you and help you with a campaign. What will you say to them?
- A friend from your religious community asks for your help in organizing a can drive to collect non-perishable foods for the homeless. He has done this before and assures you that the commitment is no more than three hours per week for the four weeks of the drive. Will you help?
- You have committed to a fitness routine and have seen some promising results. Tonight, however, it's getting late and you haven't yet had a workout. Will you stay up to get the workout or go to bed on time?

- Your 18th birthday is approaching. Soon you will be ready to start college and move away from home. Your squadron commander pulls you aside and politely asks what he can do to keep you involved in the squadron. You have more experience and knowledge than most of the other cadets and would be an invaluable resource and role-model for younger cadets. Are you willing to help?

LESSON SUMMARY AND WRAP-UP

LARGE GROUP FACILITATED BY CHAPLAIN/CDI/COMMANDER (5 MINUTES)

We have spent the last few months examining behaviors required for excellence. We started with the observation that excellence means giving your best effort, no matter what challenge is in front of you. We then asked, how do you *know* that you have given your best effort? We saw that your best effort requires a long-term vision and SMART goals. Remember, SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Vision and goals organize our energies and challenge us to perform at our highest level. Last month, we saw that perseverance allows us to keep working toward that vision, even in the face of dramatic or catastrophic setbacks.

Here's a hard truth. Most of us won't fail to meet our goals because of catastrophic setbacks. Most of the time, our visions are undone and our goals frustrated by our lack of focus. Excellence demands that you keep your attention on your purpose and priorities. You will need to protect yourself from lethargy by focusing on the next step, getting enough sleep, and building in reminders of why you're pursuing your vision and goals. You will have to practice moderation in amusements and recreation. And you will need to limit your diversions by learning to say no, politely but firmly. Only by deciding what you are going to do—and what you are *not* going to do—can you excel in service and realize your full potential.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Focus is a matter of deciding what things you're not going to do." – John Carmack

"Successful people maintain a positive focus in life no matter what is going on around them. They stay focused on their past successes rather than their past failures, and on the next action steps they need to take to get them closer to the fulfillment of their goals rather than all the other distractions that life presents to them." – Jack Canfield

"I don't care how much power, brilliance or energy you have, if you don't harness it and focus it on a specific target and hold it there, you're never going to accomplish as much as your ability warrants." – Zig Ziglar

"Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun's rays do not burn until brought to a focus." – Alexander Graham Bell

"My success, part of it certainly, is that I have focused in on a few things." – Bill Gates

"The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus." – Bruce Lee

“Most people have no idea of the giant capacity we can immediately command when we focus all of our resources on mastering a single area of our lives.” – Tony Robbins

“One look at an email can rob you of 15 minutes of focus. One call on your cell phone, one tweet, one instant message can destroy your schedule, forcing you to move meetings, or blow off really important things, like love, and friendship.” – Jacqueline Leo

“Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.” – Proverbs 4:25 (ESV)