The Power of If ... Then Thinking

It has been found that people who want to put their efforts into achieving great things, but don’t, are derailed by seemingly small problems like these:

➔ They want to finish a task to a high standard, but a phone call disturbs them.
➔ They want to complete a coursework piece, but the weekend is just too busy.
➔ They want to do some serious revision, but some friends disturb them and work is abandoned.

It has been argued that if this happens to you, it’s because you have low ‘implementation intention’ - you sort of want to do the work, but you will be easily put off is something goes wrong.

The solution? Successful students anticipate these problems and plan for how they will respond to them with maximum effort. You sequence actions that anticipate obstacles and build in pre-planned solutions - you effectively beat self-sabotage before it even happens.

Consider these examples:

Student 1: ‘I’ll get started on this first thing in the morning.’ This is a really common internal dialogue you might experience as a student. However, with one small disruption, the whole plan comes to a standstill.

Student 2: ‘I’ll get started on this first thing in the morning. And…’

➢ If I wake up late by accident, then I’ll use my morning break to start it instead and …’
➢ If I feel really unmotivated, then I’ll get two coffees from the canteen and drink them quickly to give me a boost and …’
➢ If I get disturbed by my friends, then I’ll make an excuse to go to the library.

It is easy to see which student is more likely to succeed. By planning a change in action when small obstacles come along, you are more likely to keep pushing on.

List all the usual blockers you use to prevent high levels of effort and for each one, commit a solution.