

Improving Executive Function Skills

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Association on
Higher Education
And Disability®



untapped®

Overview

1. Executive Function and Retention
2. Developing EF Skills
3. Skills We Assume Students Have
4. Q&A

“Other people don’t have more motivation than you, they just have better routines.”

- Nick Thompson

Brandon Slade

Diagnosed ADHD

Academic Struggles

Special Education/School Psychologist

Founder of Untapped Learning



The Power of EF Skills

Key Predictor of Success:

EF skills are among the strongest predictors of academic and life success.

Outperforming SES and IQ:

EF skills predict college graduation likelihood better than IQ and Economic Status.

Reference: U.S. Department of Education. (2017). Executive Function: Implications for Education.





Executive Function

The Common Link: Executive Function Skills

Executive function skills are the complex set of cognitive processes that work together so you can achieve your goals.



Executive Function Requires:

**Time
Management**

Organization

**Focused
Attention**

**Impulse
Control**

**Task
Initiation**

**Emotional
Regulation**

Flexibility

**Planning &
Problem
Solving**

**Verbal &
Working
Memory**

Metacognition

EF Challenges are Associated with:

ADHD (129 million worldwide, 6.5 million diagnosed per year)

Dyslexia (30 million in the US)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (7 million in the US)

Anxiety (54 million in the US)

Depression (21 million in the US)

Making Toast

Get out bread

Plug in toaster

Set toaster to appropriate level

Put bread in toaster

Get butter out of the fridge

Get plate and knife ready

Get toast from toaster

Put toast on plate

Add butter to toast



Misconceptions about Students with EF Challenges:

1 Students who struggle with executive function are not intelligent.



2 Students who struggle with executive function are lazy, unmotivated, and can concentrate when they want to (like when playing video games).



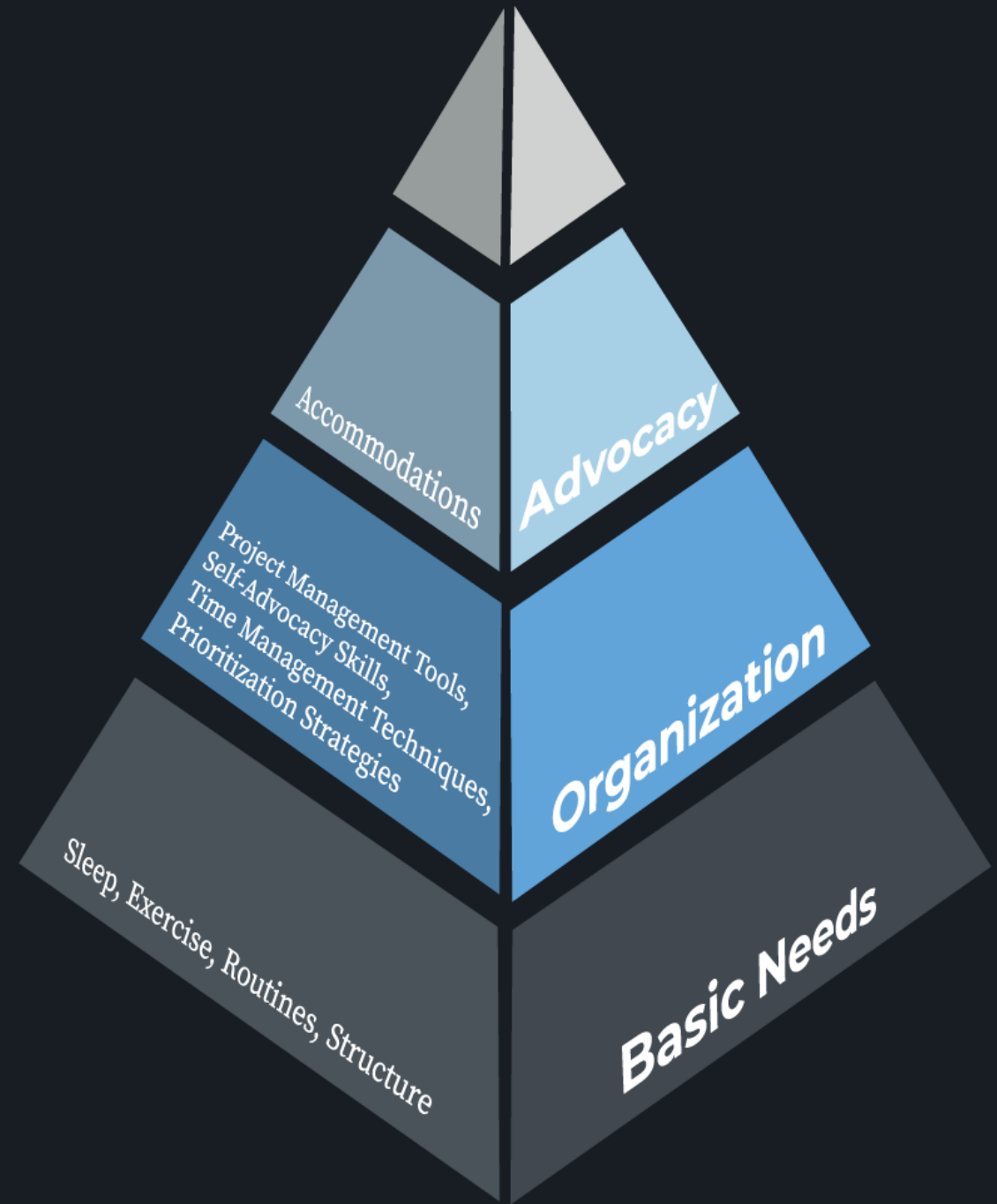
3 Students who struggle with executive function are not successful in life.



Mindsets to Improve EF

DISCIPLINE = FREEDOM

Hierarchy of Needs



Students with EF challenges could be faced with

**20,000 corrective or
negative comments**

by the time they're 10 years old.

Let's make up for that.

Skills Employers Seek in the Workplace

Technical Skills & People Management

2015

- Complex problem solving
- Coordinating with others
- People management
- Critical thinking
- Negotiation
- Quality control
- Service orientation
- Judgement and decision making
- Active listening
- Creativity

Innovation, Creativity, & Originality

2030

- Analytical thinking
- Resilience, flexibility and agility
- Leadership and social influence
- Creative thinking
- Motivation and self-awareness
- Technological literacy
- Empathy and active listening
- Curiosity and lifelong learning
- Talent management
- Service orientation & customer service

Q&A



Creating Routines that Work

Impact of Routines

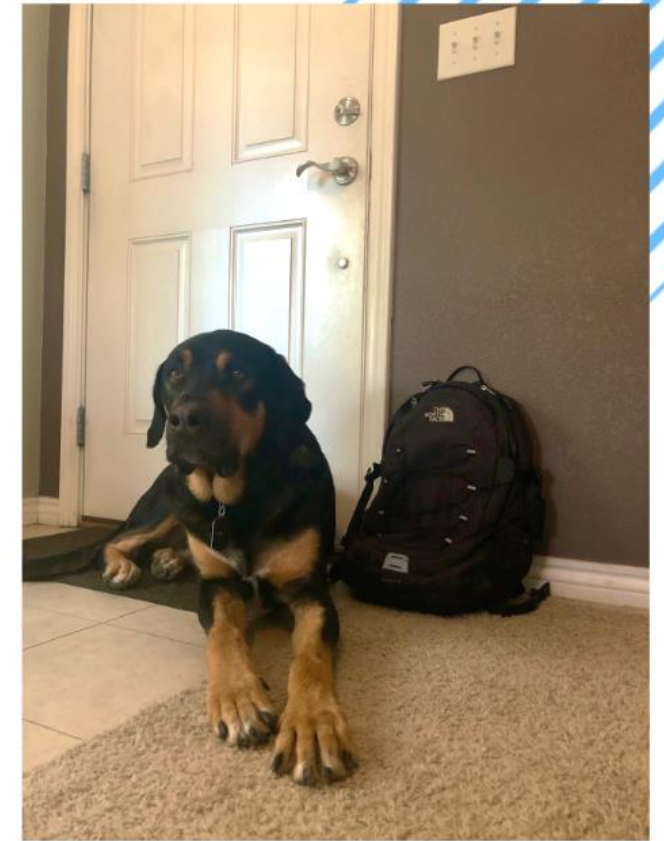
Routines allow our brain to switch from “manual” to “autopilot”, which allows us to focus on more important tasks.

Routines:

- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Increase focus and organization
- Build confidence and discipline



My Routine



Lead Domino

1. Identify your lead domino: **the one thing that, if fixed, will have the largest positive trickle-down effect.**
2. Create a routine around your lead domino.
3. Institute the routine in portions—one at a time—until it is a habit.



Lead Domino Examples (1)

Students:



Bedtime Routine:

Better sleep → Improved focus → Efficient Studying → Lower Anxiety, etc



Movement:

Morning exercise → More energy → Clearer thinking → Better time management → Fewer late nights



Office Hours:

Clarity on what to study → Less procrastination → Efficient studying → Better performance

Lead Domino Examples (2)

Faculty:



Deep Work Time:

Blocks focus time → Consistent research progress → Less deadline panic
→ Sustainable productivity



Organized Portals:

Clear LMS structure → Students self-serve → Accommodations fulfilled →
Less scrambling



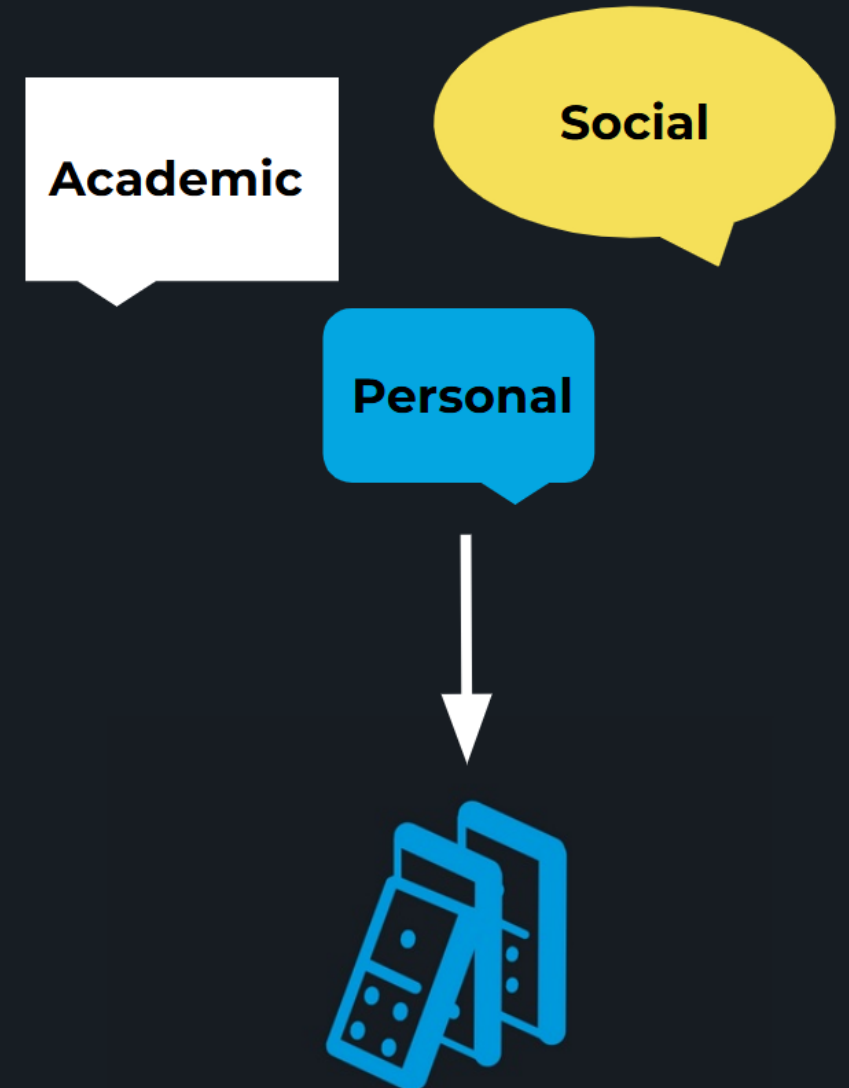
Email Batching:

Set email times → Fewer interruptions → Deeper focus → More time for
what matters

How to Find Your Lead Domino

Steps:

1. Write down your top 3 pain points.
2. Circle the one that, if fixed, would create the biggest ripple effect.
3. What routine could you build around this?



Q&A



**Skills We
Assume
Students Have**

Self Reflection

Help students to:

- Recognize strengths and weaknesses
- Understand different abilities and capacities

What was the hardest part about getting started, and what helped you push through?

What distracted you while working, and what did you do to get back on track?

How did you study, and how did that work for you?

Faculty Self Reflection

Reflect on How You Can:

- Move from reactive to proactive
- Recognize your own EF strengths & challenges

"What routines help YOU stay organized and focused?"

"When do YOU experience executive function challenges in your day?"

"How do YOU model self-compassion when routines break down?"

Stress
+
Rest
=
Growth

Add recovery time after intense project phases. This could be small check-ins or low-stakes tasks keep progress moving without burnout.

- Helps avoid burnout
- Allows them to stay engaged
- Increases comprehension and retention

Q&A

RESOURCES

For Educators



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For Parents



untappedlearning.com/parents-subscribe/

THANK YOU!

Untapped Website



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