

In the Classroom 50

Planning for a New Term, New Year, and New Decade

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Stan Skrabut: Thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast, it certainly means a lot to me. I really do appreciate it and I want to take a moment and say happy new year. We are about to enter a new decade. This is the last episode for 2019. Personally, I am looking forward to putting up a new calendar, I am looking forward to a new term, a new year, a new decade, I can't wait.

In this episode, I want to talk a little bit about goal setting and how I approach it and maybe some ideas for you. Additionally, I want to provide you with some ideas that you can consider as you put together your plan for the next decade, year and even term, so, let's get started.

First of all, the new decade, we are about to get into 2020, so, as we enter 2020, there's two camps. There's those that believe a decade starts with a zero and there's those that believe a decade ends with zero. I'm of the opinion that a decade starts with zero, so 2020, for me is the start of the 2020s, and we are about to enter a new decade. This means that I have some big planning to do, and I need to get on it and make sure that I am going to be ready for the decade.

What do I want to achieve in this upcoming decade? For some of you, you may believe that the decade ends with zero. If that's the case, you have a whole year to plan and either way, planning is going to be the front and center in what we need to do. With every month, every week, every quarter, every term, every year, every season, every decade, we have an opportunity to sit down and reflect so, we can make improvements on what we want to do.

How can we get to the next level? This is also an opportunity to reset, so what I mean is, every month I have goals, every quarter I have goals, every year I have goals. Some of the goals I achieve, some of the goals I don't, some of them are stretch goals, some of them, I just failed, I just didn't do it, but every opportunity, every week, every month, every quarter, every year, I have an opportunity to reset. Rather than quit, I just reset, restart again and start putting focus forward to them, so, that's what I want you to do.

You may say, "Well, I don't do goals because I always fail." I have to in a way agree with you because I have been in that mode for a long part of my life, but I've done a lot of reading, and it's basically I've improved on that. A lot has to do with how I structure this all. What kind of systems do I have in place? That's what I want to share with you. What I want to do is talk about breaking this all down so, it's achievable, so,

at the end of the day, you're walking away saying, "I have made progress on my goals." Over time, you start checking those goals off.

Let's start at the very top, these big broad goals, identifying those big goals. With a decade in front of us, what I want you to do is sit down and think, where do you want to be 10 years from now? What do you want to have achieved when you look back to say, "Man, I've achieved some really good stuff." What is it that you want to achieve? I want you to write those goals down because those goals are going to set your path forward. Everything from those major goals as you start working down to your day is aimed at achieving those goals. The smaller goals that you set should be to achieve those major goals that you want to set, that you want to achieve at the end of the decade.

A recent article made me bring this idea of a decade right into focus and this idea of goal setting and this article happened to be focusing on reading goals. I believe it was from modern Mrs. Darcy's talking about the new decade was coming, what are your reading goals? It just made me think about my reading goals. One of the things that I enjoy doing is reading and writing book reviews or reading books and writing book reviews. What do I need to do to make adjustments to my reading goals that will step up my game for this upcoming decade?

Currently, I'm on pace to read 600 books in the 2020 decade, and that's also writing reviews, so, for the next 10 years, I'm on pace. The way I'm doing it right now is to read 60 books. To be honest, it's been a challenge to read 60 books a year, but I think I can jack it up to 750 books for the decade. That's my stretch goal, 750 books. I also want to not only write a book review for each one of those, but I want to submit at least one book review to a journal for each of those 10 years. That's my stretch goal. I've only submitted a few book reviews to journals that have gotten accepted, but I want to see if I can get 10 in the next decade.

In order to achieve that, I need to read 75 books every year, and if I further break that down, I need to read just over six books every month. It's a little more than what I'm typically doing right now. I'm reading five books a month, but now I need to add another book or a little more than a book. In order to do this, I need to really think about how I'm going to structure my life. That there are some things that I'm just going to have to cut out of my life in order to make time for reading and I'm going to have to just hone in, but it's all doable. This is part of that whole planning.

I have other goals lined up. Some deal with fitness, some deal with finances because, in this coming decade, I'm going to retire from what I'm doing. That's just what it is. I'm going to be retiring, so I'm making plans in how to structure my life for that, and that's what I need to plan for this upcoming decade. What I want you to do is I want you to think about what your big goals are for the decade. What do you want to achieve in terms of life, in terms of work, in terms of whatever? It doesn't matter. What do you want to achieve? Sit down, put together your major list.

The next thing is we need to break this down, so your decade goals are probably really overwhelming and they're going to be impossible to achieve immediately. You need to start breaking these down into bite-sized chunks. What can you accomplish in this

upcoming year in order to meet that goal? By knocking off those steps, that will help you get closer to your decade goal.

Thinking about my 750 book goal, I can't do this in a weekend. It's just impossible for me to sit down and read 750 books, so I need to break it down. As I already noted, I need to read 75 books in a year or six books a month. Knowing from experience, some months are going to be better than others, but this is now breaking it down to something that is more achievable. You have to do this for your goals, you have to break these things down.

Knowing what your decade goal is, what goal do you have for each of those major goals that you can achieve in the next year? I want you to take the major goal, break it down to what you need to do in the next year to make it closer to that decade goal. Now, we're going to break it down even further. There is a book, I learned some important lessons that were written by Brian Moran and Michael Lennington and their book, *The 12 Week Year: Get More Done in 12 Weeks than Others Do in 12 Months*. I'm going to put a link in the show notes with this book, as well as a few other books that helped guide and shape what I'm doing as far as meeting my goals.

What I found out is, if I just rely on an annual goal and try to meet that annual goal, I have often come up short, so what I have to do is break it down even to a smaller unit. I found that this 12-week-year, basically a quarter is a good timeframe. We tweaked it a little bit for my work, so, rather than focus on quarters, we focus on term, so, we have our fall term, our spring term, and our summer term, so we are basically focusing on 16 weeks as opposed to 12 weeks, but it doesn't matter, the idea is to kind of break it down even into that smaller unit.

What you want to do for that 12 weeks is identify three to five items that you want to complete in that period of time, and you're going to just focus on those items. Naturally, these items are tied back to your annual goal that as you check them off, they will help you achieve your annual goals and as you check off your annual goals that's going to help you achieve your decade goal, but breaking it down into 12 weeks or a quarter makes it so much more manageable that you can keep your eye on the ball just a little bit longer and a little bit more focused.

The other thing I like about these 12 week years is it also lines up with this idea of OKRs. OKRs are objectives and key results and John Doerr introduced these to Google and Google has done okay. I try to look at what folks are doing who are successful and try to emulate some of those things, and I found this idea of really just focusing on smaller pieces this quarter has helped me get a lot more done quicker.

With that 12-week-year in line now we're going to go to the next level, and I'm taking this from agile programming, and it's called a sprint. A sprint can be one week or two weeks. I typically go with two weeks, it's a specific block of time that you are going to do a specific set of work. Looking at what you have set for your quarterly goals, now you're going to very specifically say, "In the next two weeks, this is what I'm going to do." That's what you focus on for those two weeks. Forget about all those other goals and all those other things that you have going on. Right now, you're focusing on that

two week period and knocking out work that you can do to achieve that two week period.

You only want to do three to five things. You don't want to do a crazy amount of work. As you can tell, we just keep honing down. Now, this brings us down to our daily worklist. Every day, out of all the things that you have to do, just identify three things that you're going to work on. A lot of us have to-do lists with tens of items that we need to get done and we ended up getting paralyzed because we're overwhelmed. From that, and this is how I do it, the night before, I identify three things that I want to make sure I get done, to say I had a great day and I put those on my list.

A matter of fact, I look at my calendar and I align my calendar with this sprint list to identify what I need to work on. I block out time on my calendar and that's what I'm going to focus on. I turn everything else off. I focus on those things and it allows me to just hone in. At the end of the day, I can say, "Okay, this was a great day because I achieved these things." That's what I recommend.

Starting at the very big goal, the decade goals, and breaking it down. What are you going to do this year? Then from there, "What can I get done in this quarter to achieve my yearly goals?" Now, "What can I work on this two-week that will help me move towards completing my goals?" Today, "This one day, what am I going to focus on that will help me get closer?" Which brings me also to this idea of the one thing. The one thing, we have a lot of competing items, but you can only have one priority.

When you're trying to get something done in your sprints, try to really focus on one thing at a time. Try to get that all done. For example, maybe you have to build three courses. Rather than try to work on three courses throughout your sprint, instead focus on one course. This is a lot more efficient than jumping back and forth between courses. It allows you to batch your time. It allows you to focus and do a deep dive on that particular item and really helps you move your goal a lot quicker than working on all these other competing things because you have to switch your thought processes.

You have to start thinking differently as you're jumping from one thing to another, that takes too much energy. Like I said, start big and just hone in on the couple of things that you can do in a day in order to focus on the few things that you're going to do over the next two-week, which allows you to complete those few things that you want to get done in the quarter. That'll help you move to your goals just a lot quicker.

Part of this is certainly track your progress. I use a tool called Sana to help track my projects and goals and making sure that I go in and identify the three things that I'm going to work on and I can check them off. There's a sense of accomplishment when I do that, so I really like it.

Another thing that I want to just toss in here in order to help you complete your goals is getting better to say no. Every time you say yes, you're saying no to something else. Everything that you're bringing a yes on starts to reduce your time and energy that you can apply to your goals. You have to balance your time. You only have so much capacity and every time you say yes to something, it cuts into that capacity. You got

to learn to say, no. you can't be everything to everybody. That's my suggestion for that.

This is a strategy that's helped me move a lot of projects forward very quickly. I just wanted to share that with you, because I think it's really important as we're looking at this new term, the new year, the new decade. What do you want to achieve? Being able to look back at the end of that term, at the end of that year, at the end of the decade, to say, "You know? I did accomplish my goals." That's what I want to put forward to you.

Another thing that I want to share with you is some ideas of what you can be doing as far as your classroom goals that you may want to set for yourself. The first is talking about open education resources. I talked about this in episode three and I'm a proponent of open education resources, OER. Some of the things that you may want to consider as you're setting goals related to OER is, "Is there a course that you can totally convert to OER?" That, maybe, over the course of a term or the course of the year, that you can totally convert a course into OER.

You will find out in the end, this is better for students and it's better for you. It allows you to be the master of your domain because you get to specifically pick and choose the items that are related to the learning goals that you've set forth in your class. Think about OER, how you can weave that in.

The next one is Universal Design for Learning. The Universal Design for Learning, I talked about in episodes 8, 9 and 10. This helps you to increase access and inclusion in your course. It helps you create content that is available for everyone. Everyone gets the message that you are intending. There's just little tweaks that you can make throughout your course that you can do a review of your course to make sure that you are attending to UDL principles. That you can look for pinch points and make tweaks to your content to make sure that you address pinch points. That you can have a text track or a multimedia track. Make sure that you have both that are speaking to the content for each point.

There are plus ones that you can add to your course. Something that if you have text, run it through a text to speech program in order to get an MP3 file. Those are things that you can do. What can you do in your course? Make it a goal that you take your course and apply some of these thoughts and principles to it.

In line with that, multimedia. I talked about this in episode four. One of the things that we are not really good at is building out a PowerPoint deck, we have too many words. That if you want to increase learning, it's about increasing visuals that you include on your PowerPoint presentations. Get rid of the words and folks will remember those presentations much longer than the typical slide decks that we normally put together.

If you're using a lot of PowerPoint to support your lectures, go through those PowerPoints and convert them. Make them better. Use these principles of multimedia learning in order to raise the level of those presentations. Nice thing is that you can carry them over to a new term, so the time definitely will not be wasted.

Another area to look at is quality review. If you're doing online classes, run your classes through a quality review. Look for areas where you can improve your classes based on the feedback that you're receiving from reviews. If you did one class per term with a review, you will raise the standard of your courses. Once you've gone through all your different courses, start again. This may be a couple of years down the road, run it through again based on the improvements you made to see if you keep on improving. That is something that you can do. I talked about that in episodes 19 through 24.

Twitter in the classroom. Go out and experiment with Twitter. There's a lot of different ways that you can use Twitter in the classroom regardless of the discipline that you are teaching in. There are amazing, good resources out there available to Twitter. We need to teach our students how to be citizens of this world. Part of this world is the use of social media and how to use it in order to advocate for different positions that we have as well as use it as a research tool. I talked about Twitter in the classrooms, episodes 33 through 36. Go back and check on those.

Mastery quizzes. You can create a very powerful tool for your student by using mastery quizzes, by building test pools. With these test pools, you just keep adding questions to them that students go through to improve their knowledge. You can find more about that in episodes 18 and 40. Remember, you don't have to do all this at once and you don't have to do it by yourself. You can work with other faculty. You can work with students, have students build the tests. All you have to do is just make sure that they're accurate. That's a way that you can move forward with that.

Check out specifications grading. I talked about that in episode 31. In specifications grading, it's basically go/no go. If they met all the criteria, you let them go and give them the max grade. If not, you send it back for rework. This will make your life as an educator much easier in terms of grading. Check out specifications grading. Do you have a personal learning network? If not, check out episode 45, to build a personal learning network. Build a system that will work for you. That will help keep moving your professional development forward based on the content, the interactions that you're making with other people.

Finally, create a RAFT assignment. I talked about RAFT in episode 49, which was just the previous episode, and this talks about building assignments that are very flexible. They're very universal designed for learning friendly because RAFT talks about the role, the audience, the format, and the topic. It allows the student to be more creative in the assignments that they're putting together for you. Something to think about. That's my list. I think there's a lot of good stuff there that will provide you with some goals to work on at least for the year or for the upcoming term, something that you can pick and choose.

One thing I want to caution you on is, do not try to do everything at once, you will burn yourself out, you'll become overwhelmed, but I would suggest that you have a steady progress. As my plan, looking at the decade goals, moving down to the year, moving down to a quarter, moving down to a two-week sprint, moving down to the day, we're only talking about really focusing on three to five items at a time and how we can achieve those type of things.

I am really excited about this decade coming on. I am getting pumped to just start new. Those are some of the things that I'm going to be looking at, but I'm working on my major decade goals, where do I want to be? This is all part of it and I wish you luck on your goals. Definitely would love to hear about some of those, so put them in the comments below, I'd love to hear them. Before I let you go, here's a quick plug for my book.