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Want to keep those resolutions? This young man knows the secret

Future paleontologist Holden Heppler has the recipe for achieving goals: purpose, passion, and a community of supporters

by Jennifer Blair

With holiday dinners behind us and a fresh year ahead, our minds often turn toward our New Year's resolutions — those promises we make (and just as quickly break) to do better this year. Well, 16-year-old Holden Heppler has a surefire way to stick to those resolutions. "There's one road to success, and that road is hard work," said Heppler, a 4-H member who recently shared his words of wisdom at the Farming Smarter conference. Of course, it's a route with frequent roadblocks named procrastination. "Everyone does it — putting off things until the last possible moment so you can focus on those more important things, like Netflix or that cute video of a cat playing a piano," said Heppler.

"Well, today, I'm here to tell you why you shouldn't procrastinate and get out there and do something you believe in." Heppler has perfected a "three-step method for removing procrastination from your life and becoming a hard-working, goal-orientated individual." The first step is finding your purpose. "Find what makes your fire burn, your clock tick, your heart beat," he said. "Make every task and goal orientated to that." That purpose is different for everyone, he added. "We all have that fuel to fight for something. This passion burns deep within our veins," he said.

"For some people, fighting for equality like Martin Luther King Jr. did is the most important thing in their life. But to others, it might be as simple as being a good father to your son." Heppler's dream is to be a paleontologist and that goal has been his driving force since he was nine years old. "Every night before I went to bed, I would read a book about dinosaurs so that I could prepare myself for that specific job." He also makes "every meaningless task" part of achieving that goal. "I could be writing poems or drawing in Language Arts, and those things are two things I hated," said Heppler.

"At age nine, I would make them dinosaur related so that not only would I want to finish them, but also to lead me to my end goal." Heppler now works at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology in Drumheller — "a huge opportunity" that wouldn't have been possible without his passion. Once you've found your purpose, step two is getting involved. "Whether it be rallying at corporate buildings for equal pay or watching your son in the playoffs, when you find your passion, make sure you do everything you can to put your heart into it," said Heppler. People tend to get "turned off" at this point because they're usually starting "at the bottom of the totem pole," he said. "But you must never stop." "Wayne Gretzky wasn't doing slapshots out of the womb," said Heppler.

"You need time to grow, mature, and perfect your interests. So don't be discouraged if your fundraiser was a flop or you didn't get that job. "Perfect your interests, because there's never

been a success story for someone who hasn't tried." One of the reasons people procrastinate is because we're "inherently afraid of failure." "The only thing stopping you from success is the barriers you've put in front of yourself," he said. "Once you get past this fear of failure, your goals become a lot easier. You're more willing to take risks and get involved." And the final step on the road to success? Having friends and allies.

"A huge part of achieving your dreams and stop procrastinating is by creating a support group of peers, friends, and co-workers — these people can help you through times of weakness," he said. "When you want to go to the movies instead of study; when you want to have that slice of pizza instead of sticking to your diet; these friends, co-workers, and peers will help you through those tough times." And make sure you tell them — and everyone — about your passion. "Scream it from the rooftops. Tell everyone you know about it. Make it feel like what you're doing is worthwhile. That will help you keep on track for your goals."

Heppler isn't guaranteeing his three-step method will work for you. You'll need to do the hard work yourself, he said. "But it can at least make you say you tried