

COMMENTARY

Locke and Latham's Legacy Provides a Model of Courage

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Goal-setting theory touched the lives of many by clarifying the types of goals that help people become more productive. The theory touched people directly through Locke and Latham's writings (e.g., Locke & Latham, 1990) and indirectly through their shaping of institutions' teaching philosophy. Reading Locke and Latham's (2019) legacy article unveils an ever more interesting story, a story of courage, with the two scientists cooperatively pursuing a research question of their passion against the tides of their time. In this commentary, I want to focus on three indicators of their courage even though many more could be added to the list.

The first indicator pertains to their inductive rather than deductive reasoning approach to science. Locke and Latham relied on extensive observations and were open-minded to the surprises that their data unveiled. The answer to why such inductive reasoning is courageous lies in the cultural norms of experimental psychology, which was largely taught as being theory driven and deductive. Rather than complying with the norms and succeeding within the well-established system, they continued to defend their approach of learning from data with fortitude, to this date.

Further attesting to their courage, Locke and Latham dared to include a wide variety of moderator variables in goal-setting theory. They showed that the effects of setting specific, challenging goals can wax and wane for different contexts, tasks, and mental states. They decisively refrained from the streamlined message of "more is better than less." They even foraged

into a research area that was talked down in recent years, the influence of nonconscious goals on performance (e.g., Shantz & Latham, 2011). Although originally critical, they allowed themselves to be convinced by their data that nonconscious goals in fact have predictive value and wide-ranging effects on cognition, affect, and performance, even in the real world of business and institutions rather than only within the confines of the laboratory. This line of work provided a turning point to the analysis of the role of conscious versus nonconscious goals in affecting performance.

The third indicator of courage pertains to the two researchers establishing their legacy in close cooperation. They started apart and then found their calling in thinking, arguing, and working together for decades. Rather than focusing on networking, arraying big names, or adorning themselves with influential institutions, they were concerned with discovery, solid methodology, and meaningful application of the phenomena they had discovered. They stuck together but also allowed themselves to go separate ways from time to time, for example, when Gary Latham focused on his insight that nonconscious goals do in fact matter for performance (e.g., Shantz & Latham, 2011).

Goal-setting theory has spurred a new generation of follow-up questions, such as what are the psychological processes that enable us to autonomously arrive at specific and challenging goals (e.g., Oettingen, 2012, 2014), how can we nudge others or ourselves into acting in line with nonconscious goals that are specific and challenging (e.g., Hertwig & Grüne-Yanoff, 2017; Thaler, 2018), or how can we use specific and challenging goals to improve executive functions in learners (e.g., Dawson & Guare, 2018; Meltzer, 2018). What I am most grateful for, however, is that Locke and Latham are a

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model for courageously finding one's individual path in the service of building progressive science.

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