Turning one’s motivation to engage in desired thoughts, feelings, and actions into binding goals has long been thought to be sufficient to get what we want. But striving for these goals often turns out to be ineffective: people fail to get started and easily get distracted once they got started. Preparing one’s goal striving in advance via making plans on when, where, and how to act (referred to as making if-then plans or forming implementation intentions) however helps to promote goal attainment. The beneficial effects of making if-then plans are observed no matter whether hindrances from within the person (e.g., ego depletion) or from outside (e.g., negative social influences) are to be dealt with. In my talk, I’ll delineate the processes on which the beneficial effects of implementation intentions are based on by presenting relevant research using cognitive task paradigms and assessing brain data. I’ll also report findings demonstrating that implementation intentions can be used to curb even habitual cognitive, affective, and behavioral interfering responses. In closing, I’ll point to recent research on planning to think carefully showing that such plans improve decision making. Moreover, I’ll point to potential moderators of if-then planning effects.

All are welcome