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Expand Your Freedom to Make Choices

By Paul J. Meyer

You may lead a rich, full life or a shallow, empty existence. But whatever you gain from life is largely a matter of choice – your choice. You are free to choose whatever you want to do or to be. Your greatest power is the power to choose your own destiny. The reality of the power that comes from your freedom of choice becomes evident when you understand the unalterable principles under which this freedom works.

Choice is a talent that must be developed. The power of choice can be developed. If you are reluctant to make choices and decisions because you fear failure, you may choose to play it safe and miss experiences that could lead to making better choices. Good decisions are based on prior decisions.

You must choose for yourself. Because no two people are exactly alike, no one can make a completely satisfactory choice for someone else. When you allow others to make your choices, you hand over to them your destiny and rob yourself of your birthright.

The choice determines the consequences. You may select any action you choose, but once you make a choice, you must accept the consequences. You can use your freedom of choice to make whatever changes of habit or attitudes are necessary for developing personal leadership and self motivation.

Give your choices time to yield results. Today's habits are the result of choices made long ago. Tomorrow's habits will be the result of the choices you make today.

The Choice to Lead

While no two leaders possess exactly the same personality or leadership style, effective leaders generally demonstrate similar characteristics. They frequently exhibit a contagious enthusiasm for life, a genuine concern for others, an enhanced clarity of purpose, and a firm commitment to the achievement of worthwhile, predetermined goals. The magnetic force of effective leadership is a tool which draws on the ability to arouse in followers a desire to be like the leader—or to possess some of the admirable qualities and personality traits seen in the leader.

Effective leaders bring out the best in their team members. To do so, they employ leadership traits which can be divided into three major areas: attitudes, behavior, and people skills.

Positive Attitudes

- Goal direction. Effective motivational leaders define clearly the goals they want to reach, visualize them vividly, and work toward reaching them with intensity of purpose.
- Self-motivation. Never feeling compelled to wait for someone else to tell them what to do, effective leaders rely on their own decisions and actions. Self-motivation propels effective leaders into purposeful and productive action.
- Insight and judgment. Determined, effective leaders apply their general intelligence and common sense to the task of learning what works, and what does not work. This trait, practiced efficiently, allows leaders to move ahead without wasting time before making a decision or taking action.
- Competence and action. Effective leaders face problems and do something about them. They often find themselves in new or unfamiliar situations without guidelines to follow or established patterns to give direction.

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They are forced to devise creative new paths to their goal, new methods for attaining their purpose, and new ideas for achieving success. Leaders know that some ideas and actions will prove unworkable. Effective leaders rebound from temporary setbacks, risk trying the next creative idea for achieving the goal, and persevere until the problem is solved. Good leaders typically think in terms of overall organizational objectives, not just along departmental lines. This "big picture" approach promotes good relationships among team members.

Behaviors and Habits

- **Decision making.** Effective leaders are decisive and action oriented. They make firm decisions at the appropriate time – and then take action. They accept personal responsibility for their decisions and their actions. They are cooperative team players, but they refuse to be swallowed up by the organization, by social pressures, or by current trends. As they make decisions, they remain relatively free from personal bias.
- **Ability to handle problems and crises.** Effective leaders often anticipate problems and take appropriate action to prevent problems or crises. When a chaotic situation does develop, they restore order to the organization and return the team to smooth operation in a minimum amount of time.
- **Time organization.** Clear priorities are the effective leader's criteria for time use. Good leaders conscientiously plan the allocation of their time, and delegate duties to carefully selected, well-trained team members.

People Skills

- **Understanding of people and situations.** Understanding their people enables effective leaders to choose the appropriate leadership style for the team members involved and for the task at hand. Understanding people saves time, prevents problems, and increases productivity.
- **Belief in people.** Effective leaders believe in people; they regard other people as a valuable resource with the potential for development and achievement. They believe that people are basically intelligent and creative, and that they want to do a good job. They communicate their belief in people by their words, attitudes, and nonverbal cues. Although they expect peak performance and top quality, effective leaders are sensitive to others, treating them with respect and tact.
- **Encouragement of people.** Effective motivational leaders help team members to succeed. Effective leaders encourage people to take on new responsibilities, provide support and opportunities for growth, praise people for a job well done, and give team members credit for their individual success as well as for contributing to the organization's success.

The demand for effective leaders is heard throughout the business world, and the rewards are unlimited. Effective leaders often have the ability to make decisions, to set goals, and to achieve a level of success far above the average. But achievement through leadership is always based on sound planning and persistent effort in addition to knowledge and skills. The development of those skills and the cultivation of the knowledge and attitudes required to use them is the basis for becoming an effective leader.

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