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SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES

Establish Habits that Put You on Top

Since the moment of birth, you have been engaged in a constant process of forming habits, breaking them and forming new ones. As much as 95 percent of what you do each day is done from habit. Habits include attitudes and dominant patterns of thought as well as actions. Habit formation is a constructive way to meet life's challenges. Every day you encounter situations and experiences that require a conscious choice or a decision. But once a satisfactory decision has been made in a common set of circumstances, it is a waste of time and mental effort to make the conscious decision again and again. Instead, your brain "stores" for future use all the data from that first satisfactory decision. That, in simple terms, is the process of habit formation, a constructive and mentally economical way of dealing with routine activities.

If, in meeting a new situation, you make a bad choice or a poor decision – one that produces an unsatisfactory result – you mentally reject that choice and make a different one each time that situation recurs until you find an acceptable choice. Once you have found a satisfactory response, you adopt it as a standard for the future – a new habit. Bad habits creep in only when they are not recognized as bad. For example, someone who talks too much and listens too little may have formed that habit to gain stature and prestige by always having something "interesting" to say. The habit seems good because it gives one kind of satisfaction.

Remember that habits include both attitudes and actions. An attitude is a habit of reacting in a certain way each time you encounter the same situation. It is especially important to personal leadership to form success attitudes. Such attitudes of self-confidence, self-respect, enthusiasm and determination are merely special kinds of habits. They are mental and emotional habits as distinguished from action habits. And such internal habits control your behavior.

Attitudes, since they are habits of thought, are formed in the same way as habits of action. You find a thought pattern that gives you pleasure or satisfaction. You repeat it, and it becomes habitual. Negative attitudes begin when people try to protect themselves from failure or from the fear of failure by saying to themselves, "I can't." The tragedy is that the satisfaction gained in this manner is insignificant compared to the exhilaration of achievement that could have been experienced by believing "I can."

Any change in attitude must come from internal understanding and acceptance. Insight always precedes change. Changes in attitudes that follow insight into yourself become permanent changes; any others are usually temporary. An attitude formed by blind acceptance of another's influence is subject to rapid change; but attitudes based on insight, commitment and belief and supported by a carefully planned course of action gain permanence. It follows naturally that your effectiveness in making attitude changes depends primarily on the extent of your insight into the reasons such changes are desirable. As you gain insight, you develop personal leadership. Your program of personal goals is the best possible tool for gaining that insight. Another factor in the willingness to change is your attitude toward change itself. If you consistently resist change, you live in a dull, drab life. But when you accept change, you find joy in living and the excitement of new experiences, new challenges, and new dimensions. Capture the spirit of enthusiasm, and recognize the "thrill of the chase" as a reward of goal seeking.

Dealing with Demotivators

You were born to lead, but in the process of adjusting to the complexities of the world, you are sometimes so occupied with satisfying basic needs that you can give little thought, time, or attention to self-fulfillment and development of personal leadership. Habits developed in this context become demotivators. Most demotivators can be lumped together as fears, worries and doubts. These demotivators can control only those who lack self-confidence. Build your self-confidence, and the demotivators disappear. Build a consistent

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attitude of self-confidence, substitute it for fear, and fear is dissolved. Then you live a rewarding life full of self-realization, achievement and success. A personal goals program is the most positive approach you can make to breaking through demotivators and building a strong sense of personal leadership.

Designing Your Destiny

No one can choose the direction in which you will grow. You and your team members must dream your own dreams, identify your own goals, and design your own destiny. Define a logical starting place and an ultimate destination where your goals program will lead you. With these two points clearly stated, planning how to move from where you are now to your destination is relatively simple.

1. Where your organization stands now. Spend some time in honest assessment and evaluation of your present level of growth in the various aspects of your organization. Organizational evaluation helps you gain insight into your present situation. You will discover some outstanding strengths and some areas of needed growth. Use this information to build on your strengths and to select challenging goals for growth.

2. Where you want to go. Once you have defined your present status, next decide where you want the organization to go. Identify ultimate goals for you and your team – goals that define your leadership style and the results you wish to achieve from your effort. Next, identify a number of intermediate milestones along the way to those ultimate goals. Those short- and intermediate-range goals involve all aspects of your organization – from people and productivity to maintenance and inventory. Carefully coordinate them so they are mutually supportive and so each one builds organizational growth and progress.

Where you want the organization to go may also include the long-range career plan you choose to pursue. Perhaps your career goal is to hold one of the top leadership positions in your company for a specific number of years before retirement. To support achievement of that career goal, set specific department or team goals – goals that represent your appropriate contribution to the overall goals of the organization. Success in your present job brings you closer to success in your long-range career plan.

Looking into the future toward ultimate goals includes choosing where you and your team want to be next year, next month, or by the end of this week or even day.

3. How you will reach your destination. When the first two steps have been completed, begin to develop workable plans for reaching your destination. Just as a travel agent must know when and where you want to begin and where you want to go before arranging reservations, you need to know where to begin and where you want to go.

As you develop plans for achievement, include both short-range and long-range goals. Short-range goals are those that can be achieved in a relatively brief time frame. Long-range goals provide overall direction for the organization. Plan to reach them by setting short-range goals that move you closer to their ultimate attainment.

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