



The Next Wave in Leadership Development: Habits

As a leader, what role do you take in your own leadership development?

If 2020 taught us anything, it was the importance of seeing the big picture without losing sight of the small details. This requires a tremendous skill in balancing priorities, energy, and focus. And while most great leaders can take pride in their ability to multi-task under stress, this year has really tested their abilities.

Leaders are called on again and again to shift their attention from one priority to another. They must consistently and consciously choose (and judge) that which is deserving of their attention. They must ignore impertinent distractions.

Developing the right leadership skills and habits is critical to personal and organizational success.

The Importance of Habits

Consider this: 80% of our results stems from only 20% of our efforts, according to Joseph M. Juran. In the context of our productivity and efficiency, this means that only about 20% of our activities actually provide the results we are looking for, professionally and personally.

To devote more time and energy to our most important activities—the people, vision, or mission that give our life purpose—we need to be able to recognize and say “no” to the people, places, and things that distract us from achieving our goals. This isn’t always easy, especially when we really like our distractions, or worse, our distractions become bad habits.

Disrupting the habits that are counter-productive is important, but it doesn’t eliminate them. Unless a new routine takes its place, the pattern will continue automatically. Fortunately, we’ve come to a new level of understanding about habits, and we’re

A Message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization’s bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?



In today’s highly competitive environment, it’s no surprise that “*what got you here may not get you there.*”

At **Proffitt Management Solutions** we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

Find out how services such as individual or team coaching and development, motivational and skills workshops, seminars may help you better answer those 5 questions and benefit you...

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learning and practicing new techniques to improve them.

The Importance of Focus and Concentration

In *ConZentrate: Get Focused and Pay Attention--When Life Is Filled With Pressures, Distractions, and Multiple Priorities* (St. Martin's Press 2000), Sam Horn identifies essential keys to concentration that are helpful reminders, especially as we prepare for the coming year:

- **Develop your ability to be single-minded.** Concentration means we must temporarily ignore some things in favor of others. Deferring other projects doesn't mean they're not important, only less so for the moment. It requires making choices as to priorities and scheduling.
- **Put your interest(s) in action.** Can you think of a time when you were so engrossed in an activity that you became one with it? All sense of time disappeared. All outside activities were unnoticed. Athletes call this the zone. Others, a state of flow.
- **Discipline your thoughts.** Concentration means harnessing our thoughts, focusing on what is needed, and saying "no" to outside distractions. Recognize that the mind often prefers play to work. If that is the case, try delaying a gratification, or apply the Premack Principle, which involves doing something pleasurable after a task is completed.
- **Begin again, and again, and again.** The ability to persist in spite of distraction, opposition, discouragement, and counterinfluences is the key to attaining what we want in life. That means completing an activity even though it may not be perfect. It includes the ability to keep on in spite of making mistakes. It is keeping on keeping on, persisting, correcting, continuing, and coming back.

An important key to focus and concentration is to recognize when on auto-pilot, or taking action out of habit.

When Distractions Become Habits

To be sure, some behaviors make for good habits. This includes the behaviors you stopped doing, especially when distractions become habits. In today's business world, this can make a big difference in your success.

In his recent book, *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2020) behavior scientist BJ Fogg, PhD, demonstrates how behavior happens when motivation, ability, and prompt converge at the same moment. Fogg

illustrates this in the Fogg Behavior Model, whereby motivation is your desire to do the behavior. Ability is your capacity to do the behavior. Prompt is your cue to do the behavior.

You see, the more motivated you are to do a behavior, the more likely you are to do the behavior. When motivation is high, people not only take action when prompted, they can also do difficult things.

We've seen this happen over and over again this year. People learning new habits to protect themselves, and others. Wearing a mask in public places. Frequently and thoroughly washing their hands.

But, when a task is more difficult to complete—when a new behavior is more challenging to do—the less likely we are to do it. Keeping space between yourself and another person is not always easy when they are not also motivated to do the same.

Motivation and ability work together. If you lack ability, you need greater motivation. Likewise, if you lack motivation, you need greater ability. They are continuous variables, triggered by a prompt. You see, no behavior happens without a prompt. This is great news when you want to disrupt, or change, a behavior. Removing a prompt is sometimes the best course to stop a bad habit.

A Simple Model to Create New Habits

To create a new habit, work through the model, or formula:

Motivation+Ability+Prompt=Behavior

1. Is there a prompt for the desired behavior?
2. Is there ability to complete the desired behavior?
3. Is there motivation to complete the desired behavior?

As any great leader or manager can attest, all of these questions need to be answered as it relates to the individual completing the behavior.

The process of habits includes neurological cravings for the pleasure-inducing neurotransmitter dopamine, which motivate us to take action. However, motivation alone is not enough to help us change our behavior and create a habit.

Motivation

Fogg describes the complexities of motivation as:

- The Motivation Wave: a temporary surge of motivation

- Motivation Fluctuation: minute by minute fluctuations in motivation
- Motivation toward an abstraction doesn't yield results.
- Motivation is not the winning ticket for long-term change. What actually drives behavior is ability and prompt.

Motivation is complex, often made up of competing or conflicting motives: opposing drives related to the same behavior. Therefore, we must outsmart motivation by focusing on behaviors.

According to Fogg, aspirations are abstract desires, and outcomes are measurable abstractions. A behavior is something you or your employees can do right now or at any given moment.

Ability

“Your ability chain is only as strong as its weakest ability factor link.” - BJ Fogg, PhD

Understanding and strengthening our skills and abilities is critical to success. To make a behavior easier to do—to increase ability—successful leaders improve skills, get the tools and resources needed to complete the behavior, and/or make the behavior tiny with a small step toward the desired behavior. Fogg calls this shrinking the behavior down to scale.

Prompts

Prompts are the “invisible drivers of our lives,” according to Fogg. He contends that if there is no prompt, there is no behavior, “even if you have high levels of motivation and ability.”

Prompts, or cues, can be simplified into three categories:

1. **Person** (reptilian brain; internal cues)
2. **Context** (environmental; external cues)
3. **Action:** a behavior you already do (an anchor) that can remind you to complete a new action until it becomes a habit. For example, *after I* (anchor), *I will* (new habit.)

Because we often have no control over the first two categories, the third is most reliable and effective. However, we must know how many new habits to do at once and when to add more.

The Habits that Transform Your Leadership

As a leader, which of your habits yield the greatest productivity and efficiency for you and your organization?

Consider how 80% of our results stems from only 20% of our efforts. Imagine how much more we could accomplish if we created positive habits that devoted more time and energy to those crucial 20 percent of our activities!

Knowing this, it makes sense to identify the 20 percent of your efforts that bring you 80 percent of your results. If you need help with this, consider working with a qualified executive coach. Then, identify three important behaviors you can turn into habits.

Identify Transforming Habits

Fogg shares a step-by-step process in behavior design to accomplish this:

1. **Clarify** your aspiration (or desired outcome).
2. **Explore** specific behavior options without censoring yourself. Consider those you might do once, those that would become a habit, and even habits you would stop.
3. **Match** with specific behaviors. Identify your “golden behaviors:” those that are effective (impact), desirable (motivation), and doable (ability).
4. **Start tiny.**
5. **Find** a good prompt (anchor).
6. **Celebrate successes:** emotions create habits. Positive emotions trigger that feel good reward of dopamine, so celebrate immediately: give yourself a pat on the back, a high-five in the mirror, bust a dance move, congratulate yourself, whatever works for you.
7. **Troubleshoot, iterate, and expand.**

Many leaders and managers use this methodology (intuitively or intentionally) to innovate and manage change within their organization. They understand that by beginning with the smallest, simplest tasks they can build confidence and momentum. When they demonstrate how to turn small behaviors in to powerful habits, they can achieve the results they are looking for.

Questions for Leaders

Here are some things to discuss if you're working with a coach:

1. What are you paying attention to?
2. What are your biggest distractions?
3. What three habits would bring you quality results?
4. What new habits will transform your leadership?



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