

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY: Takes Initiative

"Do one thing every day that scares you."

Eleanor Roosevelt

Defining Characteristics

- Sees what needs to be done and seizes opportunities.
- Pursues goals beyond what is required or expected of them.
- Responds in the moment rather than postponing action.
- Does not wait for orders or permission to make things happen.
- Assertively seeks out new information and approaches to overcome obstacles.
- Mobilizes others through unusual, enterprising efforts.
- Cuts through red tape and bends the rules when necessary to get the job done.
- Accepts accountability to achieve objectives.
- Motivated to work hard to attain goals.
- Willing to take risks.

Development Activities

- 1) Identify a goal in which you would like to move things forward.
 - a) What are the benefits to you in moving it forward? To your organization?
 - b) What is *one small step* you can take today?
 - c) Do it!
- 2) List your best opportunities and barriers to achieving a particular goal.
 - a) What can you do to remove the barriers?
 - b) What can you do to seize the opportunities?
 - c) Take action *today* on one opportunity and one barrier.
- 3) Before you start each day, take a moment to make a To Do list of actions for that day, including making important calls, clarifying miscommunications, making decisions, or setting up meetings.
- 4) Choose a behavior you believe is getting in your way of taking more initiative and commit to changing that behavior. For example: addressing disagreements in a forthright manner; stepping up to take

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responsibility for leading a key project; speaking up when you have a different perspective; managing your time better; waiting to be told what to do because you have not clarified your role or degree of authority.

5) Review actions to take with your manager or someone you respect, agree on realistic deadlines and commit to reporting back on progress at a set time.

6) Volunteer to lead a task force, special project, or a non-profit board.

7) Request that you be given authority for making more decisions in your area of influence. Be open to negotiating this with your manager.

8) Clarify your assumptions about who you think might be taking on a particular action. Don't allow important activities to fall through the cracks because you assume someone else will be handling it.

9) Apply the Pareto diagram to your goals. What are the 20% of actions you need to take that will yield 80% of the benefit?

Recommended Reading

1. Argyris, Chris. Knowledge for Action, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Argyris examines how our mental models, reinforced by our values, beliefs, and systems, propel our organizations down paths to dysfunctional behaviors and inefficient performance. Deals with the unexamined assumptions by which we evaluate the events around us and build action plans.

2. Block, Peter. The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

Empowerment promises to instill in our institutional life the values of individual freedom, dignity, and self-governance that we readily embrace as a society. Assumes we each must develop initiative and self-discipline skills individually before instilling them in others.

3. Brookfield, Stephen. Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

4. Coleman, Daniel. Working with Emotional Intelligence. Bantam Dell, 2006

5. Coleman, Daniel. Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence, Harvard Business School Press, 2002
Discusses initiative as one of the primary aspects of emotional intelligence

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demonstrated by star leaders.

6. Covey, Stephen R. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.

One of the foundational skills that Covey presents is Personal Mastery, of which initiative is an important element. .

7. Covey, Stephen R. Principle-Centered Leadership. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

8. Kelley, Robert E., How to Be A Star At Work, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1999.

9. Nadler, Reldan S., Leaders' Playbook: How to Apply Emotional Intelligence—Keys to Great Leadership, Santa Barbara, CA, 2007.

Covers emotional intelligence tools that relate to taking initiative including: inability to delay gratification, self-confidence and procrastination.

10. Nelson, Bob. 1001 Ways to Take Initiative at Work. New York: Workman Publishing, 1999

Other Resources

Executive Coaching with Bev Weise of Leadership Talent Solutions. Acts as a coach and "thought partner" to help clients set goals, identify barriers to taking initiative and holds accountable to taking action.

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Web-based training by DDI: "Personal Empowerment: Taking Initiative."

<http://www.ddiworld.com/learninglinks/default.asp?fuseaction=module&wbt=yes&id=37>

"Engage Employees By Encouraging Them to Take Initiative" by Bob Nelson, in Manage Smarter

http://www.salesandmarketing.com/msg/content_display/training/e3icc2aee71977fdb17ba144b5180c60fe6

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