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Habit 1. Be Proactive

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Habit ①

Be Proactive

“Your life doesn’t just “happen.” Whether you know it or not, it is carefully designed by you. The choices, after all, are yours. You choose happiness. You choose sadness. You choose decisiveness. You choose ambivalence. You choose success. You choose failure. You choose courage. You choose fear. Just remember that every moment, every situation, provides a new choice. And in doing so, it gives you a perfect opportunity to do things differently to produce more positive results.”

So what’s it mean to “be proactive”?

Well, for starters, it's about taking responsibility.

Let's take another look at that word: **response-ability**... as in: your ABILITY to RESPOND

(To situations—both good and bad—in your personal life as well as your professional life.)

As it turns out, this ABILITY to RESPOND is pretty critical if we're looking to live a successful and fulfilling life.

Regardless of how we differ in our definitions of Success, Happiness, Fulfillment and so on, there's one thing we've got to get a handle on if we want to feel those zesty feelings of ultimate awesomeness out of our lives — and that one thing is response-ability.

Proactive people take responsibility for their lives and YOU should do it too.

They recognize they're "response-able."

Regardless of situations or circumstances;

Regardless of conditions or conditioning;

Regardless of good genetics or bad genetics;

Regardless of all of the above and more — **PROACTIVE** people take FULL response-ability for how they choose to RESPOND to the various dimensions of life — regardless of the cards they're dealt within them.

Proactive vs Reactive

Proactive people choose their behavior. **Reactive** people let others choose their behavior.

Proactive people manage + redirect their own emotions, turning them into empowering beliefs. **Reactive** people let others control their emotions, giving away their emotional power to others.

Proactive people direct their desires + take action towards what they want. **Reactive** people allow others to direct them (whether they realize it or not).

Proactive people proudly take full responsibility over their lives + hold themselves accountable. **Reactive** people avoid taking responsibility or holding themselves accountable.

Proactive people understand that they—and they alone—have the power to choose how they want to feel and behave in any given situation. Proactive people don't get the "blues" when it rains outside because they carry the weather with them (it's sunny outside no matter where they go).

And most importantly, proactive people take full responsibility.

Reactive people, on the other hand, are affected by their physical environment, rarely take responsibility, and often blame external circumstances — trying to blame-shift their own responsibility to others. If the weather is good, they feel good. If it isn't, it affects their attitude and performance, and they blame the weather...

How different their lives could be if they only understood that responsibility isn't about getting people to take the blame or do the work; it's about getting yourself to do the work required to take the blame and attach an empowering meaning to it.

Note: When I say “blame”, I'm referring to the personal blame of taking responsibility over your ability to respond to life's stimuli... In other words, when you fall down, will you stand back up and come back stronger? Or stay on the ground and let the ref count you out?

Blaming economic conditions, workplace conditions, or family conditions – however crappy they may be – is utterly useless. It doesn't move us forward in life or in business. We always have the freedom to choose our reactions to stimuli, even if everything else is taken away. You don't have to be (or remain) a reactive machine. Instead, you can become a proactive person. Decide on the former, and you're screwed for life. Decide on the latter, and you're set for life.

The quality of your language = the quality of your life

As Dr. Covey puts it:

“ *Between the stimulus and the response is your greatest power—you have the freedom to choose your response. One of the most important things you choose is what you say.*”

A proactive person uses proactive language—I can, I will, I prefer, etc.

A reactive person uses reactive language—I can't, I have to, if only. Reactive people believe they are not responsible for what they say and do—they have “no choice.”

How to become a Proactive person

Instead of reacting to or worrying about conditions over which they have little or no control, proactive people focus their time and energy on things they CAN control. The problems, challenges, and opportunities we face fall into two areas—Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence.

Actionable insights

Here are a few ways in which you can put this first habit into action:

① Be proactive by focusing on your Circle of Influence.

To become a Proactive person, focus your efforts within your Circle of Influence – the things you can do something about: like your health, your family, or work-related challenges.

② Avoid reactive behavior by staying out of the Circle of Concern.

To avoid becoming a Reactive person, understand that they tend to focus their efforts in the Circle of Concern – things over which they have little or no control: the weather, the national debt, Martin Scorsese's next big blockbuster, and so on. Don't waste energy on stuff you can't do anything (or very little) about.

③ Stop waiting and start acting.

Stop waiting for the things you want to happen to you, and take the initiative to make them happen yourself. Growth and opportunity are there for you if you ACT rather than wait to be *acted upon*.

④ Pay close attention to your language.

If you use a lot of reactive language, it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophesy in your life because you'll look for proof to support the feelings of helplessness and negativity that surround you. Learning to use proactive language will help you change your mindset—and ultimately your behaviors. Reactive language places responsibility for what is happening on circumstances or on others, while proactive language seeks creative solutions and alternatives to unfortunate circumstances. For example:

Replace: “~~He/she makes me so angry!~~”

With: “I control my own feelings”

Replace: “I can't” or “I have to”

With: “I choose to” or “I will”

⑤ **Create and focus upon a circle of influence in your life.**

All of us have a circle of concern that includes the things we focus our time and energy upon. Narrow the circle to include only the things that you can actually influence. By focusing your energy on what you can control rather than what you cannot, you become more proactive, and your energy becomes more positive and powerful.

⑥ **Change the way you think about mistakes from your past.**

These are outside of your circle of influence. The way you respond to mistakes in your life influences the direction your life takes. If you can learn to admit, respond to, and correct mistakes, you will experience personal growth and find it easier to be proactive.

Quick recap

To be proactive, practice using proactive language; limiting your circle of influence to the people and things you can truly influence; and make an effort to **respond** to mistakes you make wisely.

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