

VENTRAX BE TIMEWISE - APRIL 2018 ISSUE



5 ATTITUDES FOR AGING GRACEFULLY

One of the most popular marketing niches today is anti-aging. Yet no matter how much hype it gets, the process of aging is inevitable. The good news is that the effects and severity of the progression can be slowed down. But they can't be stopped.

Alongside the anti-aging phenomena is a field of science known as the sociology of age. One thing to note is that there is a difference between the phrases "growing old" and "growing older."

Growing old refers to a particular age group, and "growing older" is a description of everyone and can be applied differently to different generations.

Consider that in 1900 a 20-year-old man could scarcely look ahead to retirement at all. Today, such a person can expect to spend a quarter of his adult life in a retirement mode. In 1900, it was not uncommon for both parents to have died before the children reached adulthood. Today, it's not uncommon for parents to anticipate surviving together with their children for 40 or 50 years—maybe more. We live a large share of our lives with our children as "age-status" equals.

So even though we can slow down the aging process using cosmetics, exercise and nutrition, **it's good to keep in mind that anti-aging is not possible.** There are some things we can do to age with dignity, grace and fulfilment, though. These can be the best years of our lives if we approach them correctly.

Here are five attitudes for aging gracefully:

1. Accept the complexity that comes with longevity

We are living longer, which creates more complexity in our relationships. This is exacerbated with the increase in divorce and remarriage, and so the matrix of relationships amongst kin and step-kin also accompanies longer living. Add to this that longevity creates more complexity in our options, too. What should we be doing for the next two or three decades? Retiring at 65 and dying at 68 is not the majority experience anymore. Life is complex; it's a by product of an increased span of living. Accept it as a marvellous challenge.





2. Develop a positive attitude toward growing older

Our bodies develop more aches and pains, less flexibility, pinched nerves, joint issues and skin that's not quite as tight as it used to be. But our brain doesn't. There are no aches, grinding parts or pulled tendons in our brain. There is no outright deterioration as we age—at least there doesn't have to be. The brain has 200 billion neurons and 125 trillion synapses in the cerebral cortex alone, and it can actually significantly improve with age. According to Michael Gelb, the old paradigm was called "neurostatic." In other words, the brain didn't develop too far beyond childhood and began to

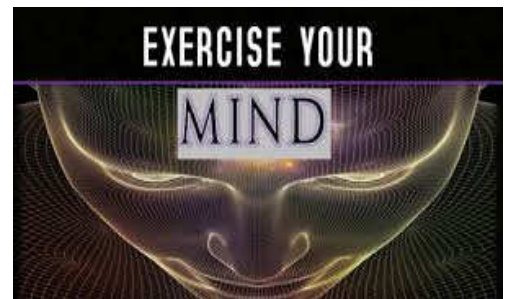
deteriorate after 30. Today, we know that the brain forms new connections and creates new cells. It's called neurogenesis.

We've been brainwashed into believing that the brain simply gets older. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. ***It's not a matter of brain capacity as much as self-imposed limiting habits that keep us stuck.***

A study was done on 660 people where the group was divided into those with a positive attitude toward aging and those with a negative attitude. It was conducted over a 22-year period. The positive group outlived the negative group by an average of 7 ½ years. Interestingly, Lower blood pressure and cholesterol increased life spans by four years. Exercise, weight loss and non-smoking added three years, but...A positive attitude toward aging had an even greater impact on survival.

3. Exercise your mind

Our brains are either growing or shrinking. As with our muscles, exercise keeps the brain healthy and growing. Scientists call it neuroplasticity. Our brains can change and reorganize by forming ***new neural connections***, not just when we are young but throughout our entire life. In fact, ***our minds are designed to grow, change, adapt and improve as we age.*** Some cells die when we get older, but only a fraction of our 100 billion cells are actually put to use. Brain connections can be strengthened and new brain cells can be generated and made available to be put into action. Cerebral growth happens when we challenge our learning and stretch our thinking.



4. Broaden your interests

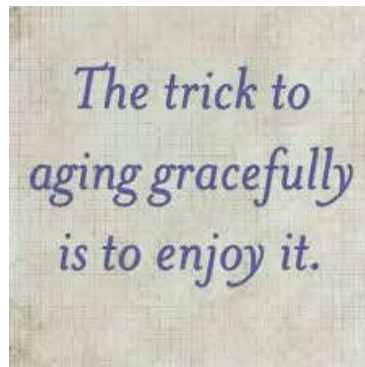
Routines can become ruts. When we do the same things we've always done, we stop learning and start living on autopilot, becoming limited as we age. But barring dementia, this can be turned around. ***A study was done on 100-year-olds that showed learning new things significantly improved their scores on memory tests, as new pathways in their brain were created.*** Our brains love stimulation. The result is a healthier, sharper mind.

5. Recognize and express gratitude

A Harvard study showed that those who age successfully worry less about cholesterol and more about gratitude (and forgiveness). They have a clear sense of the meaning of gratitude, and they are great at spotting it and generous in expressing it. The impact that gratitude has on the quality of life is overwhelming. And yes, embracing aging with gratitude increases longevity.



The topic of anti-aging is intriguing, but that should not be our focus. Our focus should be about aging wisely, intelligently and gracefully. **What do you think?**



10 SIGNS YOU'RE LIVING ON AUTOPILOT

The good news is that you can get your brain off autopilot and train it to wander less.

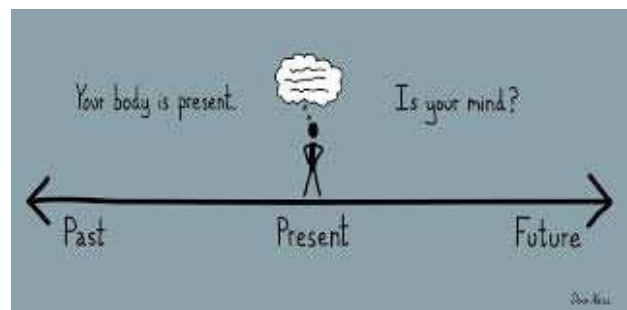
"A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind."

Do you feel lifeless, or maybe bored? Kind of like you're merely existing instead of really living? Ever had to tell someone the date, causing you to look back and reflect on where the days, weeks, months or years went?

This lack of lust for life may stem from living on autopilot—making unconscious, automatic decisions that don't align with how you want to work and live. And you're not alone! A recent study surveyed 3,000 people in which 96 percent of them admitted living on autopilot.

So what exactly does living on autopilot look like?

You've just driven home and stepped out of your car, but you don't remember stopping at any lights, switching any lanes or making that right-hand turn. The drive was a blur, yet you arrived home safe and sound. What about that time someone was talking to you but you weren't really listening so you had to ask them to repeat what they said?



That was your brain working on autopilot while your mind wandered—more on this in a minute! But first, let's get one thing straight.

We are creatures of habit and routine, which isn't always a bad thing. It actually serves us well at times. The scientific community suggests that we make about 35,000 decisions each day. Our brain can't possibly take the time to consider every single thing we do. Imagine if you had to remember to get dressed every day. Talk about decision overload!

Whenever it can, your brain will kick into an automatic decision-making gear to save energy, freeing up your conscious mind to work on other mentally taxing things. Your ability to think about what's not happening at any given moment is a cognitive achievement that makes life easier. However, when this automatic feature starts slipping into other areas of your life that need more forethought, it comes at an emotional cost—your happiness.

"Autopilot has gone from being an evolutionary protection mechanism that stopped our brains overloading, to our default mode of operating whereby we sleepwalk into our choices," Dr. Williamson says.

Another study done by two Harvard University psychologists, Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert, author of *Stumbling on Happiness*, revealed that the average person spends about half (47 percent) of their waking hours doing what they call "mind wandering."

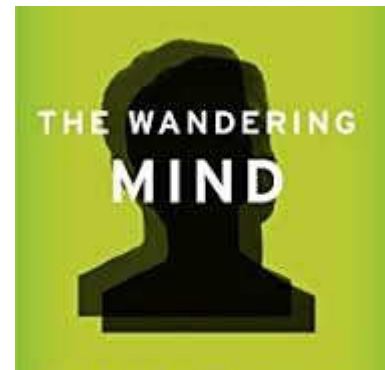
You read that right, HALF...

Mind wandering is when you spend time thinking about what isn't going on. They found that when people let their minds wander, whether it's thinking about events from the past, present or future, it makes them unhappy.

The problem with living on autopilot is that it can leave you sleepwalking through life's pivotal moments, making it difficult to make intentional decisions about how you want to work and live your life. Instead of making conscious choices about the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the people you spend time with, the things you buy, the work you do and the places you go, you make decisions on default.

Before you know it, you're living your life by default, not by design. Over time, these small mindless decisions can prevent you from reaching your definition of success.

Here are 10 signs you're living your life on autopilot:



dread every
moment of
the day ahead
of you

1. You dread the day ahead

You wake up and dread the day because there's nothing you're really looking forward to. You don't feel excited or inspired to get the day started because you have a pretty good idea of how it will go.

2. Your daily routine is predictable

You could practically tell someone how you'll spend your entire day a month from now. For example, you could tell them exactly where you'll go, what you'll do, who you'll see and what you'll eat.



3. You do things without thinking

You take action without stopping to think about what you're doing, how you're doing it and why you're doing it.

Your decisions and actions have become so automatic that it takes little to no thought at all.



4. You can't seem to put your phone down

You automatically check your phone for updates and mindlessly scroll through your emails or social media feed at any opportunity you get. (... Even though you just checked it!)

5. You stay deep in thought

You constantly catch yourself deep in thought, thinking about things that aren't currently happening when you're doing something else. Basically, you're mentally checked out in la la land.

6. You have a difficult time remembering

You're not fully present in the moment and don't remember doing activities like driving, eating or having that conversation you should have remembered. Let's just say you can easily forget the "little things" and feel mentally mushy at times.



7. You can't seem to let go

You do what's familiar even though you know it's not serving you anymore. For example, you keep the same unmotivated and unambitious people around, stay in the same career, hold onto things you've outgrown, live in the same old place, and do things that don't inspire you because you're used to it.

8. You're not making meaningful progress

You make little to no meaningful progress toward your goals as days, weeks and months seem to fly by. You're not focused on what's most important to you in life and feel down because of it.

9. You say "yes" more than you say "no"

You often agree to things that you don't want to do, then dread the decision after. Instead of carefully considering your options, you've made "yes" your default answer. For example, you say "yes" to working late, hosting the family gathering, watching the kids or going to the party when you'd rather just stay home.



10. You know there's a better life to be lived

You believe your life could be more joyous, but you feel stuck in your current situations. You know deep down that you've settled in too many areas of your life and wish you would've taken a different path.



If most of these signs resonate with you, there's a high probability you're living your life on autopilot. The good thing is that you can get your brain off autopilot and train it to wander less. This will result in conscious decision-making. If you want to turn off the cruise control and create a more joyful and fulfilling life now, you must take action.

The first thing you can do is create a life vision so that you're crystal clear on what you want your life to look like. Once you're aware of what you want, you can align your thoughts and actions. Next, you can practice living in the moment and being present.



Research has shown that we are happiest when our thoughts and actions are aligned. How you spend your day doesn't tell you much about how happy you are. Instead, your mental presence is a much better predictor of your happiness.

So the next time you're stuck in traffic, talking to someone, walking outside or eating dinner, take note of what you see, what you hear and how you feel in the moment. It's simple, yet powerful. This will help you be more intentional in all areas of your life, allowing you to live your life by design, not by default.

You can take back control and live a happier life now by simply being more mindful.



6 TIPS TO MAKE YOURSELF PROMOTABLE

An employee who thinks he deserves a promotion just because he's put in the time is misguided. The challenge for employees is that managers don't always provide exact guidelines to achieve a promotion, so the route can be unclear. Although every company is different, here is some advice to get you on the right track.

1. Avoid entitlement

The biggest mistake people make when they're trying to get a promotion is assuming they deserve it. An attitude of entitlement about receiving a promotion, even if it *is* deserved, is never going to work because a "give me" monologue, without any substance to back it up, will quickly become background noise.

Entitlement can also cause you to focus solely on the promotion instead of what you need to do to get it. When you think you're so great that there should be no doubt that you would get a promotion, you are probably ignoring the feedback previously given to you about what it will take to get that position.

Another common misstep people make is bypassing their managers to kiss up to more senior leaders, all in an attempt to show off or demonstrate their value. This kind of behavior is always noticed, but not necessarily for the right reasons. Whether it's by the direct manager, the senior leader, or both, this sneaky strategy will likely paint you as manipulative.





2. Know your why

It's common to feel as if a promotion is the next logical career step and to start moving blindly in that direction without thought to what the promotion will mean. Before you lock your sights on a position, take time to decide what you want and why you want it. If you don't know the why, a promotion just for the sake of a promotion doesn't make you a candidate and may lead you down an unfulfilling path.

Examine your motivation in this situation. Are you looking for a better title, more money, increased power, career advancement, additional responsibilities, team management, a learning opportunity, or something else? And how will the position satisfy these desires?

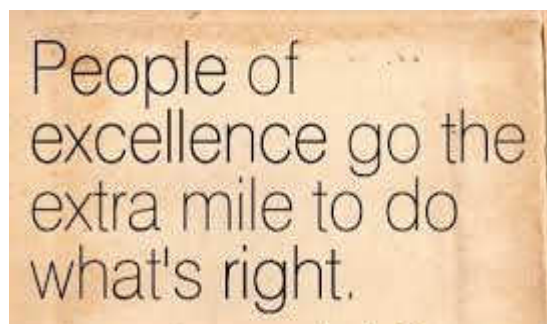
Then examine the position. Setting aside your desire for the title, consider the responsibilities of the job and how much time you will spend doing each of the tasks required. Is the job going to call for late nights? Spill over into weekends? Require you to be on call? What additional skills does the job require, and how many do you possess? What people and organizational skills will be needed in this position? Will you be comfortable with that responsibility?

Once you've taken the time to fully assess the position and your motivations, and if both fall into line, it's time to take steps to get noticed.

3. Go the extra mile

People who put in extra hours, take on additional responsibility without being asked and anticipate project needs will get noticed. If you don't step on toes, you could even start doing part of the job responsibilities before you get the position. One of my clients had an aspiring young employee who wanted a promotion to a position that didn't yet exist.

When his boss pushed back and said he wasn't ready, the employee came prepared to his annual review with a list of tasks he was already doing to fulfill that job. The boss couldn't argue since he was doing most of the job anyway, so the new position was created and he got the promotion.



4. Do your current job flawlessly

You're going for as close to perfection as possible. If you're functioning on autopilot or even neglecting parts of your job, you may be giving the impression that your work is sloppy or that you just don't care. And if you can't shine in the position you currently have, why would a manager choose you for additional responsibilities? Doing your current job well is part of proving that you're ready for advancement. I have a client who was recently passed up for a promotion due to the *perception* of poor administrative skills in her current job—a problem that could easily be fixed with a little more attention to detail.

5. Ask for it

Make your intentions known! If you want the promotion, make sure your manager knows. Ask what you need to do to get the job and get to work on those skills. Even if you don't get it this time around, you will be identifying yourself as a potential candidate for the future or even another position.

6. Don't be afraid to use a little self-promotion

Remind your manager of all the outstanding initiatives you've accomplished on the job. Don't expect your boss to necessarily know how great you are. You can fill in some rich detail, which is also likely to offset any perceived weaknesses.



Making yourself promotable takes time, strategy, diligence and commitment. *Define what you want* so that you are crystal clear when you ask for the promotion. Don't rely entirely on your own self-evaluation to accomplish this. Ask a trusted colleague or mentor for feedback and listen to what he or she tells you. A little self-awareness will go a long way.

Act as if you're already in the job you want, not the job you have. Acquire the skills that you need. Take some of the load off your boss' desk. Demonstrate creative problem-solving. And, *remember to ask*. It would be a shame to do all of this work and miss out because you didn't let your intentions be known.

3 WAYS TO TURN ADVERSITY INTO AN INSPIRED STATE OF MIND

Here are some insights I gleaned from times of personal strife that influenced and inspired our business:

1. Quiet the chaos

In our working lives, we're surrounded by information—tasks to complete, blogs to read, people to consult. When you're facing adversity in your personal life, that noise is still there, but learn to focus differently to find that flow.

Sift out the noise and set attainable goals that help you move through adversity and connect to the most important things in your life. The big-picture items you're pushing toward can be your treatment plan, your family, or—when you're well again—your vision for bettering the world.





2. Find your center

When you're in survival mode, life can feel completely out of your control. Everything in your orbit feels like it's in a precarious position, just moments away from veering off-kilter. That's why it's so important to incorporate achievable hobbies and actions, things that gratify you, into your daily routine.

Infuse your daily livelihood with joy and peace to find what inspires a quiet calm. Volunteer at a dog shelter; learn to code and start your own programs. Use your time to experiment with something you've never done before that brings you a sense of joy. Attaining that sense of calm can put you in the proper physical and mental space to face adversity head on and come out on the other side centered.

3. Appreciate every day

Since overcoming cancer, I work and love with more force and more joy than ever before. In times of personal difficulty, it's easy to feel like you don't have any choices. But how you seize the day is a choice that's forever yours, so seize it with resolve and gratitude. Any milestone in life, whether it's surviving cancer or turning 50, lights a fire under you and makes you want to seize the day.



Studies show that resilience is a powerful skill in the world of work. The ability to bounce back after adversity, to rely on yourself and to use your own mental resources to survive, has been shown to lead to greater staying power and success. In fact, U.S. employers are rapidly catching on to the value of resilience and are actively training their employees in it.

Use hardships to fuel your personal and professional goals, but don't be afraid to stop and smell the roses. Assess your own efforts and those of your colleagues and put each in perspective. Reward yourself for a job well done, but recognize the work of those around you, either with kind words or other incentives. Appreciating that effort shows how far you've come from those adverse beginnings and also reveals that you still have work to do.

Despite any discomfort we might feel when it's happening, adversity can lead to appreciation, hardships can spark creativity, and grief can give way to gumption when it's all channeled into positive efforts. Moving through challenges and coming out on the other side can inspire and influence your professional life as much as your personal one.



SELF IMPROVEMENT SEMINAR

BANKER'S CLUB

Date: 2nd May 2018

Time: 6pm – 8pm

Venue: Bankers Club Kuala Lumpur

(Amoda Building) Jalan Imbi

Opposite Berjaya Times Square

Topic

How to Stay Focused When You're Working From Home?



VENTRAX OFFICE PUCHONG

Date: 30th May 2018

Time: 6pm – 8pm

Venue: Ventrax Management Sdn Bhd

37 & 39 Jalan TPP5/I7

Taman Perindustrian Puchong

47160 Puchong, Selangor

Topic

Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time



Timely Inspiration

In this modern day and age, change is inevitable. Consumers are now demanding for better services and value. On top of that, we actually face a shortage of skilled workers – both in the country and also worldwide. The volume of responsibility being thrown at us has been growing for decades. The pressure to perform is intense and many are caught having to work long hours and still fend for their parents and children. This phenomenon is so wide spread that it has quickly transformed from being the exception to being the norm.

One implication of this ‘responsibility avalanche’ is that managers now have to be communications masters. They need to pass down information far quicker than before, while being more effective than ever just to meet the ever changing needs of the workplace. Service-related organisations are particularly hit as they need to find new ways to improve productivity to the customer, and at the same time, implement time saving techniques on the backend. This is crucial as consumer loyalty must be developed and cultivated due to increased competition in the market. The goal is to create lifetime consumers by building strong relationships with them.

(Extracts from “How long can you wait for results”)



5 SELF-SABOTAGING BEHAVIORS YOU SHOULD AVOID

**CHECK
YOURSELF
BEFORE YOU
WRECK
YOURSELF**

Let's be honest: Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. Too often we stumble into pitfalls of our own making. Some mistakes are inevitable, no matter how much time and thought we put into a plan. Other blunders are bred of laziness, rashness, inflexibility or plain arrogance. Honest mistakes are frustrating and can be costly, but mindless errors are especially galling. To know that a misstep could have been avoided—that's the bane of every thoughtful person.

When plans go awry, an insecure person points a finger at other people. A thoughtful person, however, owns mistakes and seeks to learn from them to avert them in the future. That often requires introspection and honest self-appraisal. With enough practice, you can learn to recognize your own thought patterns and change them before they cause bad behaviours.

As you try to build a better you, consider taking steps to course correct when you recognize the symptoms of these common troubling behaviours:

1. Comparing Yourself to Others

We live in a hyper-competitive society that can batter and bruise even the healthiest egos, but the damage is exacerbated when we constantly measure ourselves by other people's standards. While it's undeniably important to be aware of what the competition is doing, too much focus on others is bad for business and worse for self-confidence. To maximize success, try to tune out the outside world sometimes so you can focus on improving yourself. If you think of yourself as your chief competitor, and if you always work to beat yesterday's version of yourself, you'll go far and eventually learn to turn a blind eye and deaf ear to illusive rivalries.

**LOOK IN THE
MIRROR...
THAT'S YOUR
COMPETITION.**

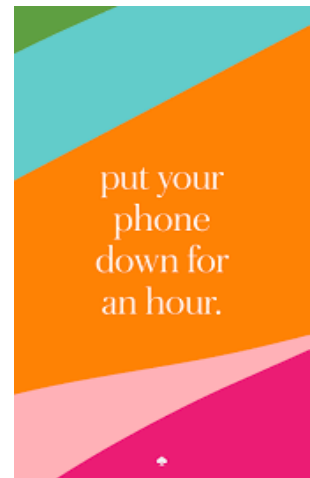


2. Failure to Take Risks and Consistently Challenge Yourself

After you've achieved a certain degree of success, it's easy to settle into a routine that is comfortable, but that comfort is usually limiting. The most successful people are always pushing limits and expanding boundaries. Past triumphs are important to future success in that those victories can equip you with the confidence you need to achieve your current goals, but if you're spending too much time being nostalgic about yesteryear's achievements, you're probably not challenging yourself enough today. And don't be afraid of failure. Sometimes taking risks means that you're going to trip and fall on your face, but those flops can teach you about yourself and about your process. Brush away the rubble of those failed projects and start building again using your newly acquired and hard-earned knowledge.

3. Succumbing to Distractions

Endless distractions are no farther than your pocket or your purse. A smartphone can be a wonderful tool for improving productivity and connectedness, but it can also be a horrendous time sink. Social media, viral videos, killer apps—they all compete for our attention every minute of every day. Don't let them steal your precious time! You can help yourself eliminate those distractions by giving yourself a specific deadline each day. After you've accomplished your goal, you can reward yourself with a Facebook or Twitter visit. You can also increase your ability to accomplish tasks by limiting your access to certain distractions. Make 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. diversion-free times. Put that phone away!



4. Inaction

Distraction and procrastination are like handcuffs that shackle your dreams. However, it's not enough to hide your phone if you don't also sit down and get to work. Part of the reason we procrastinate is because we look at big projects and we don't know where to start. "Chunking" is an effective way to manage those monstrous tasks. Break up those huge jobs into small, bite-size pieces. You might

even want to delegate parts or ask others for assistance. It's always harder to procrastinate when you're working with people who will hold you accountable if you don't finish a task within a specified timeframe.

5. An Unwillingness to Relinquish Past Mistakes

Don't be too hard on yourself as you work toward your goals. You will invariably make mistakes along the way, even when you wholeheartedly set yourself to the task. But you will also make significant progress. Learn from your flubs and challenge yourself to be better in the future. Then let that guilt go! You're not gaining anything by beating yourself up over past lapses in judgment. Try to tune out the negative self-talk. You wouldn't stand for someone to constantly berate you about past errors, would you? Of course not! So don't let your mind torment itself. Be kind to yourself. Remember, to err is human; to forgive yourself is divine.



If you can avoid these five common slip-ups, you'll be well on your way to achieving the vision you have created for yourself. Of course, it's easier to learn what you need to do to realize your dreams than it is to put that knowledge to work for you. It can take a lot of time and practice to break old habits, but the rewards will be well worth the effort.

5 Habits That Will Make You a Better leader

Improve the way you lead by practicing these habits.

The difference between good leaders and great leaders is the habits they master. Here are some behaviors you can develop to become a better leader:

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit."

—Aristotle



Habit #1: Manage your time

The Center for Management and Organization Effectiveness (CMOE) found that leaders spend an average of over five hours a day on email and phone calls alone. Along with daily interruptions, it can be extremely hard to make progress on critical projects. Working in focused chunks of time is more effective than allowing today's to-do list to manage you.

Habit #2: Learn to delegate

One shortcoming to being a better leader is trying to accomplish everything by yourself. There are plenty of reasons why. Maybe you're a perfectionist who feels it's easier, or maybe you feel your own work is better than that of your employees. A great leader knows that his or her most important task is developing others—teaching people how to think and ask the right questions. It is a skill that is the least developed in most organizations. The bottom line: If leaders don't delegate, subordinates don't learn to improve and organizations can't grow.



Habit #3: Walk around

Although email and texts are great for communicating across time and distance, effective leaders realize the value in talking face to face. One of the best ways to find out what's going on is to set aside time each week to get out of your office and talk to everyone—the receptionist, the supply clerk and team members, not just managers. You will uncover problems and opportunities you may never have learned of otherwise. When you ask people how they are doing, what's working well and what could work better, you not only get information but also increase the camaraderie between you and your employees.



Habit #4: Listen deeply

Richard Branson says leaders should listen more than they talk because that's how they learn what's going on. Great leaders learn to listen for context as well as content—what I call deep listening. Deep listening is being fully present in the moment with the person who is speaking, and not trying to judge or control the conversation. We let go of our assumptions to hear not only what is being said, but also the emotions, motives, needs and goals of the person speaking. This kind of listening builds trust and respect, and it encourages the sharing of information you need to make good decisions.



Habit #5: Be open to new ideas

The most successful organizations are the ones that do things first and do things best. A great leader is always looking for the next big idea—one that improves the efficiency of the current operation or makes a product better. The leader who encourages new ideas from everyone, who is not afraid to support the team to drive their ideas forward, is the leader whose team members

will create noteworthy innovation.

As with everything, some of these habits will be easier to develop than others. The real goal is to improve the way you lead, and with practice and time spent on the right things, you can become the leader you want to be.

10 HABITS THAT WILL DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

We often do the same thing — we chase after the things that we *think* will make us happy and don't realize that we're heading down a dangerous path.

One study found that the people who experience the greatest job satisfaction aren't the ones in the big, fancy offices; they're the ones who approach their work as a calling, even when that work involves menial labour.

Another study found that simply seeing fast-food logos makes people impatient. It's not that there's some intrinsic characteristic of fast food that makes people impatient; it's the habits we've come to associate with fast food, such as always being on the run, eating on the go, and never slowing down enough to enjoy a healthy meal, that bring out our impatience.

We have to be very careful in choosing our pursuits, because our habits make us. Cultivating the habits that follow will send you in the right direction. They'll help you to lead a more meaningful and fulfilling life, whereby you cultivate the best within yourself.



1. Stay away from people who erode your quality of life

If merely seeing a logo for a fast-food company can make you feel impatient, just think how much more impact a toxic person can have on your life. They might be unhappy about your decision to stay away from them, and they might tell you very loudly just how unhappy they are, but isn't avoiding them worth the cumulative effects of years of their negative influence? There are always going to be toxic people who have a way of getting under your skin and staying there. Each time you find yourself thinking about a co-worker or person who makes your blood boil, practice being grateful for someone else in your life instead. There are plenty of people out there who deserve your attention, and the last thing you want to do is think about the people who don't matter.

2. No more phone, tablet, or computer in bed

This is a big one, which most people don't even realize harms their sleep and productivity. Short-wavelength blue light plays an important role in determining your mood, energy level, and sleep quality. In the morning, sunlight contains high concentrations of this blue light. When your eyes are exposed to it directly, it halts production of the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin and makes you feel alert. In the afternoon, the sun's rays lose their blue light, which allows your body to produce melatonin and this starts making you sleepy. By the evening, your brain doesn't expect any blue light exposure and is very sensitive to it. Most of our favorite evening devices—laptops, tablets, and mobile phones—emit short-wavelength blue light brightly and right in your face. This exposure impairs melatonin production and interferes with your ability to fall asleep, as well as with the quality of your sleep once you do nod off. As we've all experienced, poor nights' sleep has disastrous effects. The best thing you can do is to avoid these devices after dinner (television is OK for most people, as long as they sit far enough away from the set).



3. Appreciate the here and now

Gratitude is fundamental to peace and happiness—not wealth, glamour, adventure, or fast cars, but simple appreciation for what you have. Just because you can't afford champagne and caviar doesn't mean that you never enjoy a meal. Hot dogs and beer on the back deck with your friends taste just as good. So, don't fool yourself into thinking that you need something that you don't currently have in order to be happy, because the truth is that if you can't appreciate what you have now, you won't be able to appreciate the "good life" if you ever get it.

4. Realize that things aren't always as you perceive them to be

This goes along with appreciating the here and now. That person you envy because they seem to have the perfect life might be dealing with all kinds of problems behind closed doors. That “perfection” could be a total mirage. Your employer’s decision to move the office might seem like a huge hassle when you first hear about it, but it could end up being one of the best things that ever happens to you. You’re not omniscient and you’re not a fortune-teller, so be open to the possibility that life might have some surprises in store, because what you see is not always what you get.



5. Get started, even though you might fail

Most writers spend countless hours brainstorming their characters and plots, and they even write page after page that they know they’ll never include in the books. They do this because they know that ideas need time to develop. We tend to freeze up when it’s time to get started because we know that our ideas aren’t perfect and that what we produce might not be any good. But how can you ever produce something great

if you don’t get started and give your ideas time to evolve? Author Jodi Picoult summarized the importance of avoiding perfectionism perfectly: “You can edit a bad page, but you can’t edit a blank page.”

6. Get organized

People joke about new ideas being in short supply, but I think that the one resource that’s really scarce is spare time. Do you know anybody who has some? Yet we waste so much of it by not being organized. We touch things two or three times before we do something with them (like tossing the mail down on the counter then moving it to the table so we can cook dinner) and once we’ve put them away, we spend even more time looking for them. Have a place for all of those little things you need to take care of when you get a minute, whether it’s your child’s permission slip for a field trip or an overdue bill, and then get to them in a timely manner; otherwise you’ll be searching through a huge stack of stuff for the one thing you need.



7. Start a collection of the things that truly resonate with you

Have you ever come across a quote or a meme that so perfectly summed up your feelings that you wanted to keep it forever? You know that it’s in one of those coats you wore five winters ago, and you really hope it’s not the one you gave to Goodwill. When you come across something that resonates with you — whether it’s something that expresses who you are or who you want to be — have a central place to keep those gems. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a spiral notebook, a leather binder, or a folder on Evernote, have a place to collect the things that matter so that you can revisit them regularly.



8. Do something that reminds you who you are

We all joke about having “me” time, but what is that, really? It’s making time for those activities that we feel most authentically ourselves doing, when all the masks are off and we can just *be*. Whether it’s going for a run or dancing around with your 80s favorites blaring at top volume, make time for those moments. They’re incredibly rejuvenating.

9. Say no

Research conducted at the University of California in San Francisco shows that the more difficulty that you have saying no, the more likely you are to experience stress, burnout, and even depression, all of which erode self-control. Saying no is indeed a major self-control challenge for many people. “No” is a powerful word that you should not be afraid to wield. When it’s time to say no, emotionally intelligent people avoid phrases like “I don’t think I can” or “I’m not certain.” Saying no to a new commitment honours your existing commitments and gives you the opportunity to successfully fulfill them. Just remind yourself that saying no is an act of self-control now that will increase your future self-control by preventing the negative effects of over commitment.

10. Stick to realistic goals

How many people start January by proclaiming, “I’m going to lose 30 pounds by March!”? Big, scary, crazy goals can be incredibly inspiring—until you fall short, and then, instead of inspiration, you’re left with disappointment and guilt. I’m certainly not suggesting that you stop setting goals that push and challenge you, just that you try to stick within the bounds of reality.



Bringing it all together

Your character is determined by your attitude and how you spend your time, and so is happiness. Stop chasing the things that you think will make you happy, and start realizing that your peace and happiness are entirely up to you.

reflections

