



## BE AGGRESSIVE AND PROACTIVE

Proactive people become successful. On your road to success, one of the key skills you need to learn is to be proactive. The proactive person is ahead in almost every aspect of life. It is one of the essential skills that differentiate the high performers from the rest. It enables you to anticipate the things that will happen and be prepared.

Being proactive means to actively participate, anticipate various permutations in our plans, and influence the change toward our goals. This is an important trait that is found in most high performers. High performers are people who are very good at reading the future and influencing it. They are people who are prepared to act on opportunities before others. If you are the first to capitalize on an opportunity, you will get the most out of that opportunity.

Being proactive gives you the chance to get ahead. Though you might not know what the future holds for you, being proactive helps you prepare for the events and the opportunities that come your way.

Another argument for being proactive is to influence the change you need. You won't have control of all the factors that drive your success, but you can certainly influence them. You need to be able to take control of your future by doing what you can to influence it.

### **What Does It Mean to Be Proactive?**

Quite simply, being proactive means to actively participate and anticipate opportunities: being prepared for all the opportunities that come your way and staying focused on your goal regardless of the obstacles and the unplanned events.

Being proactive is being prepared for the known as well as the unknown events so you can capitalize on and handle every situation efficiently and effectively. It is about anticipating every permutation on the road toward your goal and making sure that nothing keeps you from achieving your goal.

It is about planning for contingencies. Contingencies are possible deviations from the goal. If you are a project manager, you know about this very well. Projects are all about achieving a specific objective, just like life goals. To achieve a project's objective, a project manager will plan for all the contingencies that he or she can think of.

In the world of business, if you are not proactive, your competition will eat you alive. Companies such as IBM (not anticipating the rise of the personal computer) and Kodak (not anticipating the digital camera) are case studies in how not being proactive can kill a profitable business. These principles can be applied to real life. Sometimes, life should be handled like a business.

### **Why Should You Be Proactive?**

The first benefits of being prepared are better quality of results and better quality of life. When we set goals, we all want to achieve a quality result. What is quality? Quality is essentially achieving what we expected from doing the project or the task. We all know what we expect does not always happen. In order to achieve what we expect, we need to anticipate things that could go wrong and be prepared for them. By doing this preparation, we can achieve our goals according to our expectations. Being proactive leads to a quality life.

In your journey towards success, you will always face competition from other people. By preparing yourself in competitive situations, you will always have an edge. People who are better prepared always make it first. Most others are usually not prepared. It is in our nature to push things until the last moment. It is rare that people



consciously anticipate and plan for problems. At the same time, by being prepared for different opportunities, you can capture those opportunities before others even know that there are opportunities. Luck is when opportunity meets preparation. You will always be ahead of the curve by being prepared.

By being prepared, you eliminate stress. Stress is a fact of life. We always get stressed, no matter how competent we are. How we manage stress differentiates the high performers from the rest. Stress is primarily a physical reaction to situations that we are unable to control. Some people work well under stress, but most do not. Stress has very harmful effects on our health; therefore, we need to manage it as much as possible. One of the key ways to control your level of stress is to be prepared. When you set a goal, you know things are going to go wrong. There will rarely be a plan in this world that will not have obstacles. Think through these obstacles, from the most remote to the most likely deviations. Then plan for them so that when these events happen, it will be very easy to correct the situation.

On the same note, being proactive gives you confidence. Your confidence has a tremendous impact on how you associate with people. Though you don't realize it, it is something that comes through in your body language. By being proactive and prepared, you will be confident, because you will be ready to handle most unexpected events. Confidence brings you so much respect from others and is a trait of charismatic people. When you are prepared, you will know you can handle most of the situations that are thrown your way, and it will show in the way you walk and talk. When you are prepared and proactive, you will have this level of confidence and therefore a better self-image.

### **Contingency Planning**

Being proactive is a lot about planning. You have to plan for the known and anticipate the unknown to be proactive. This is called contingency planning. You are essentially planning for activities that might happen but not have happened yet. If all goes well, the activities might not happen at all and you will be in good shape. However, if you are not prepared to handle the unexpected situations, then you will not have to worry about them. It is like the insurance policy that you take; the effort that you put in by preparing is like the premium that you pay for insurance. Contingency

planning is about planning for things that could go wrong in your plan.

How do you plan for contingencies? You need to concentrate on things that could go wrong. All of us have the tendency to think that we will achieve the goal without a problem. But when it comes to contingency planning, you forget about the goal and try to think of ways that would make it difficult to achieve it.

This is mainly a brainstorming exercise. Try to jot down all the ideas that you have, ranging from minor incidents to major incidents such as earthquakes. Once you have all your ideas down, try to short-list the ideas into the most probable things that could derail your goal and the ones that would have the worst impact on your goal.

The next step is to take each of those ideas and come up with alternative ways to stay on track. It is very important that you think through this process. If, for some reason, there are things with very high probability of happening, in addition to high-level planning, you should also try to do detailed planning and gather the resources you would need.

Let's say you are studying for an exam while doing a job. You planned to study 15 hours a week at your desk for this exam. However, one of the very likely contingencies is that you could have a really big assignment at work that will drain you. When you come home, you would have no energy to study. What do you do?

You need a solution to this contingency as it is very likely that it could happen. One option would be to plan to take a day off work to catch up on studying; a second could be to plan to put the exam off to another day, if possible.

Similarly, you need to think of all the permutations that could derail you from your goal. It does not matter whether it is direct or indirect. If something could keep you from achieving your goal, you need to plan for it.

Contingency planning is all about being proactive. You prepare for the things that could go wrong. So, when the unexpected happens, you know what to do. You can start to execute your contingency plans rather than figuring out how to tackle the situation.

### **Analyzing Your Competition**

Most things in life entail competition. The resources in this world are limited. We can never have everything we want in life. Take your job. I am sure you would like to move up



the ladder, get a promotion, or get a raise. There are always fewer positions than there are qualified people. Thus, you have competition.

A proactive person anticipates competition and plans for it. It is very similar to contingency planning. Your competition always tries to get ahead of you. If you are not prepared for these situations, you lose out and will not have time to respond to most of these plans. A proactive person tries to predict these plans and prepares for them in advance. When your competition makes a move, be prepared to get ahead of those moves.

Imagine for a moment that you are aiming for your boss's job. You know that your colleague is also interested in the same job. You have competition! The job requires you to be a trained manager. Your colleague might take a management course to better prepare him for this role. If he does, when the opportunity comes, he will be the best candidate. So, if you are aiming for the same job, you need to do the same before he does and prepare for the next promotion. This is being proactive: anticipating the next move your competition could take and preparing for it.

Let's not forget that, while we want to succeed, the rest of the world also wants to succeed. Though you don't want to look at life and career as a race, you still have to monitor your competition. Opportunities are scarce, and we have to compete for them. If there are any opportunities that are not drawing competition, they will either soon draw competition or they are not worth pursuing. This is the nature of things, and this is human behavior. We cannot go against human behavior, and we need to factor these in our road to success.

Having competition does not mean that we take a cutthroat approach to dealing with our competition. It is not correct to win at all costs. Everyone needs to win. When we win, we need to win keeping the long run in mind. Also, it does not mean that we give the world away to our competition. You need to succeed in the opportunities that are critical for your success. Life is a delicate balancing act, and there is no surefire formula to living life and succeeding. You need to know how to play it well.

There are also times when you need to think several steps ahead, not just about the immediate step. This is when you have competition that is also proactive. Most of the time, you will not have to deal with this situation. However, most high performers do respond quickly.

To be proactive, you need to prepare for tomorrow today. I know the concept is simple and obvious, but most people generally don't follow this principle. In order to prepare for tomorrow, you need to know what will happen tomorrow. This is not an easy thing to do. Anybody can say what they think will happen tomorrow; knowing what truly will happen tomorrow is the difficult part. On your road to success, it is imperative that you have the ability to see what will happen in the next several years. It is certainly a guess, but it has to be an educated guess. You can always see the signs of tomorrow today.

As an example of how to read tomorrow today, let's look at tomorrow's technology and work trends. We know that cell phones are in everybody's hands and that people can do a lot of things with them. At the same time, it is now a connected world. Almost every device is able to connect to the Internet without a single wire being connected. It is obvious based on these few trends that tomorrow's workforce needs to be mobile and will be accessible wherever they are. I don't foresee 9 to 5 workdays in the future, but I do see wireless handheld devices figuring prominently. If I am to succeed tomorrow, I need to get familiar with cutting-edge mobile technology, not just that used to make calls, send e-mails, and listen to music but also to perform normal online functions such as banking. It means getting out of the comfort zone of your normal desktop or stack of papers and getting used to using small devices and being able to work anywhere. Although this is an obvious trend, try to understand some of the more subtle trends that are happening in your workplace and around you.

Once you identify these trends, start preparing for them. Get used to trying new things and stepping out of your comfort zone. Take the cell phone example that I just gave: If you are used to working on a desktop computer with a nice big screen, you need to get used to doing your work on a screen one-tenth that size and typing on much smaller keyboard. Today's generation is already doing it. Give up what you already know to learn what you don't know. This will make you uncomfortable, and in the beginning, you will struggle with some of the new change. However, it will make you prepared for what's to come. When change comes, you will be ready. Change is the only certainty in life.

Most of us change out of necessity. We are forced to change and adopt new ways. It is often not voluntary. In



order for you to use to be successful, this change and learning needs to happen voluntarily. As easy as it is to say it, it is a lot more difficult to do. This is something I have to continuously remind myself as my comfort with what I know takes over. It is an uphill battle every day to make ourselves change, but this is what life calls us to do. In order for us to be successful, we need to learn to swim against the current.

### **Influencing Change**

Another aspect of being proactive is influencing change. There are many times when you have to make change happen. You need to take things into your hands and give your goals a big push, because the goals are yours, not anyone else's. A lot of times, people expect the world and circumstances to fall in line so that they can achieve their goals. They blame their fate on the circumstances around them. If we are to be proactive, we need to start owning our fate and destiny and do what is necessary.

If you want something, you can't wait for it to come to you. Very few things in life will come to you while you wait. You need to move forward and get it.

Let's say you want to attend a training session, yet you are feeling shy to ask your manager. You are hoping that she will see your need and offer training. Most likely, she will never realize it as she is busy doing her job. You need to make the move and ask for the training. We shouldn't wait without acting because we fear the worst. In most situations, the worst never happens, and we end up succeeding. All we need to do is simply step forward and influence the change.

Realize that the world has its own priorities and wants. If you are to be successful, you must make sure your goals and aspirations get priority as well. This means influencing the change that you want. You have to take your goals and go out there to make your goals happen, despite the obstacles.

For example, if you want to have your manager's job and you are expecting that a senior management will see you as a possible candidate, you are letting

circumstances control your destiny. You need to be proactive and let your senior management know that you are interested when the position becomes open. You need to build your network of contacts and canvass the correct decision-makers so that when the opportunity comes, they think about you first. If you don't meet the requirements, at least you can work on meeting the requirements to do your manager's job. Being proactive means influencing the change you need by going out there.

Following up is another example of being proactive. The people who are in the places that can help you achieve your goals have their own priorities and agendas. When you ask for something and they agree to it, most of the time you need to follow up and put your request in front of them again.

I believe there are two types of people when it comes to success: people who ride the wave and people who ride against the wave. People who ride the wave are successful when the circumstances are going in their direction. For example, when the market is doing well, these people make money, but when the market crashes, they drop like flies. They blame their fate on the market and wait for the next wave. Then there are people who ride against the wave. These people will do what needs to be done to get the job done. When the market is crashing, they will do whatever is required to ensure survival. Though they don't always get great results in tough times, when the market turns, the hard work that they did will start paying dividends. They work hard to influence the outcome. You need to be someone who will influence the outcome and do what needs to be done to ensure you meet your goals.

### **Conclusion**

Being proactive is all about planning, planning and planning. It is about anticipating the next move and being prepared for it. At the same time, being proactive should not be an excuse for inaction. Action needs to be taken always. You should be prepared to act, and also prepared for your competition.

### **Need Help? Have a Question?**

Call Greg's "Wonder Woman" assistant Christal. She will assist you in with booking information or answering your questions. Call her at 304.400.4703

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