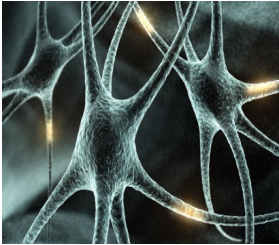


## THE LEADERSHIP TOOLBOX

Welcome to the Leadership Toolbox – a reference focused on enhancing professional success. This is an on-going Bulletin designed to provide you with practical and useful tools, techniques and tips that you can immediately implement to increase your effectiveness. For this edition, we are going to focus on something we all experience daily – habits. Habits are routines of behavior that are repeated regularly and tend to occur subconsciously, without one's directly thinking consciously about them.

### AREA OF FOCUS: HABITS

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**How Habits Are Formed:** Habit formation is the process by which a behavior becomes routine. When you learn something new, your brain makes connections that create pathways for neurological activity. When you routinely perform the same mental or physical actions, your brain learns this pattern and sets up a pathway. This pathway becomes a more efficient way for the brain to process routine actions, as opposed to a new series of tasks. That is a simplistic description of how habits are formed in the brain.

Computer memory is a good analogy. The computer stores commonly used actions in cache memory where it can access and process those common actions faster. The brain does the same thing. Creating these pathways is quite simple. With consistent repetition, you can create a new habit in as little as 10 days but realistically, it can take between 21 – 28 days or longer. Habits can be either good habits or bad habits (or at least they are regularly perceived as such).

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### CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DEMONSTRATING HABITS EFFECTIVELY

Bad habits can have a vise grip on both mind and behavior. Notoriously hard to break and devilishly easy to resume, the consequences for having and/or demonstrating bad habits can be staggering personally and professionally. The loss of self-effectiveness, the loss of the ability to influence others, the loss of building or maintaining trusting relationships, and the loss of a job can be the outcomes of demonstrating bad habits. A key factor in distinguishing a bad habit from an addiction is the element of willpower. If a person has control over the behavior then it is just a habit. Good intentions are able to override the negative effect of bad habits but their effect seems to be independent and additive, the bad habits remain but are subdued rather than cancelled.

### BENEFITS OF DEMONSTRATING HABITS EFFECTIVELY

Habits help us through the day eliminate the need to strategize about each tiny step involved in completing routines. Habits give us more mental space to focus on new activities and responsibilities rather than old ones. Effective habits can assist with efficient time and project management. Developing an athletic skill, like a golf swing is a good example. Beginners slice and hook the ball and are inconsistent. With practice, a lot of practice, one can swing the golf club and make a good shot without thinking about it ... you are unconsciously competent.

### ENHANCING THIS SKILL AREA

#### Tip: Recognizing Habits

Understanding what a habit is and how it is formed is the first step to establishing good habits and breaking bad ones. The second step is to recognize what habits you demonstrate daily. Habitual behavior often goes unnoticed in people exhibiting the behavior, because a person does not need to engage in self-analysis when undertaking routine tasks. An effective method one can use to learn about what habits one demonstrates is to ask others to identify them. Using a focused 360° questionnaire to illicit this type of feedback with others can be useful. A second technique is to write down the process you use to complete both simple and routine actions throughout the day and then try to modify them in some way. The more routine the set of behaviors, the stronger the habit. Another method of recognizing habits is to try to do everything differently than you have done in the past – from your morning routine to getting into bed each night. The stronger the pull to do something one particular way, the stronger the habit and the more energy it will take to modify that habit.



### Tip: Defining The Habit

After you have a list of personal and/or professional habits, you need to determine if the habit is beneficial or detrimental to you, or to others. If the habit does not produce negative outcomes for you or for others, why change it? Evaluate other habits that may have detrimental consequences. If you perceive the habit to be detrimental, what are the specific consequences to you or to others? Understanding the consequences, especially to others can increase the motivation to do something about the habit.

### Tip: Modifying The Habit

Okay, now that you are aware of a bad habit and its consequences, what is your motivation to end or modify the habit? Using a scale of 1 – 5 (1 = Not Motivated and 5 = Extremely Motivated), if your motivation level is not at a 4 or 5, then you might want to choose a habit that is higher on the scale. Why? Because changing a habit takes focus and energy and if your motivation is not strong, going back to demonstrating the habit after a few weeks is the typical outcome. Also, work on only changing one or two habits at a time. Why, because it takes a lot of energy and tenacity to change a habit and you need to work on consistently implementing the modifications for at least 3 – 6 months if not a year for a new habit to become cemented in your daily behavior. If you try to implement too many changes, you will end up demonstrating past behaviors in no time.

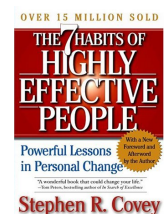
### Tip: Taking Action

In taking action to change a habit, you will want to write down your overall goal as well as the specific steps you are going to take to modify or end the behavior. Also, list what it will be like when you have actually changed the habit. What will success look like? How will others know you have changed something to increase your effectiveness? This detailed description of success can help you measure where you currently are against goal attainment (behavior modification).

### Tip: Replacing Bad Habits With Better Habits

Essential to a successful outcome of modifying behaviors is replacing old behaviors with new behaviors. It is much easier to substitute one behavior for another as opposed to simply doing away with a behavior altogether. For example, if you typically have a glass of milk when you are thirsty but want to stop drinking milk, you need to implement a substitution for that milk. If you empty a full glass of milk and don't substitute with something that can quench your thirst and get thirsty - you will look for your glass of milk to quench your thirst. You might even go to the store in the middle of the night to get milk because that is what you have always had when thirsty. But if you empty the glass of milk and replace it with a full glass of water, then when you get thirsty, you'll have water to replenish your thirst and rely on that milk less often. In the end, a healthy new habit has replaced an old bad habit. So now, it's time to think about what behaviors or habits you would like to start demonstrating more often. Write them down and next to each, put a motivational number from 1 – 5 (1 = low motivation and 5 = very strong motivation). Now take one habit and put it in on your calendar as a To Do item each day (every other day, weekly, etc.) for three months. If you are able to consistently demonstrate this new habit, it should become part of your normal repertoire in this amount of time.

***The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*** is a very popular self-help book written by Stephen R. Covey. It has sold over 15 million copies in 38 languages since first publication. Each of the chapters is dedicated to one of 7 habits that Covey believes are essential to both personal and professional success: Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, Put First Things First, Think Win/Win, Seek First to Understand then to be Understood, Synergize, and Sharpening the Saw. If you have this in your library, you might want to dust it off and review. It's got some really good tips for success!



### Summary

So track your behaviors through the day and make a list of all the habits you carry out. Then, assess those habits – are they positive or negative for you and/or for others? If negative, then find alternative or substitute habits you can implement and practice one or two at a time until you don't have to think about doing those behaviors. This action of self improvement will keep you effective, efficient and influential.

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### QUOTES ON HABITS

A habit is something you can do without thinking - which is why most of us have so many of them.

*Frank A. Clark*

Bad habits are easier to abandon today than tomorrow.

*Yiddish Proverb*

Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become character. Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

*Unknown*

Habit, if not resisted, soon becomes necessity.

*St. Augustine*

Habits are safer than rules; you don't have to watch them. And you don't have to keep them, either. They keep you.

*Frank Crane*

The chains of a habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.

*Samuel Johnson*

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### TO RECEIVE PAST BULLETINS...

If you are interested in reviewing past Toolbox Bulletins, visit:

<http://www.lynn-and-associates.com/Bulletins.html>



If you are interested in talking with Lisa or Jim on how to implement any of the tips, tools or skills within this or other bulletins, please feel free to contact us anytime!

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We hope the information presented in this bulletin has been practical and helpful. Please let us know what you think and how it could be improved or if there is a topic you would like us to talk about in an upcoming newsletter. Make it a productive day!

The Lynn & Associates Team