

Take That Initiative!

Embracing the Right Mindset for Even Greater Career and Personal Success

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Expanding People Potential

Taking initiative. Why bother? Isn't it easier to sit back and let others brave the unknown?

It may seem so. But where's the growth or the fun in that? Plus, that's a surefire way to risk career stagnation – and, as you know, no assistant worth his or her salt these days can afford to let that happen.

Initiative is a skill that's every bit as important to our profession as effective communication and keyboarding speed – and one that any assistant can hone with practice.

What's more, you can reap the rewards of taking initiative even when you don't aspire to advance to the next job level or move into management, but instead want to excel in your current position. Initiative launches us on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment, no matter where we are in our careers!

2 Kinds of Initiative

The best thing about initiative is that it makes things happen! You can take the initiative to change your career path, manage crises before they occur, or think in new, creative ways for even better decision-making.

I've identified two kinds of initiative that top-notch assistants today need to know about:

- "Deliberate" initiative. This means proactively taking an action we know will benefit ourselves or others, including our managers.

For example, let's say your employer is revamping its mission, vision and values. After recording the minutes of several planning and brainstorming meetings, you realize progress is slowing and the team assigned to this task is frustrated.

To take *deliberate initiative*, you might suggest the team consider an off-site retreat – and even offer to organize it for them. You could also research group exercises that promote creativity, teamwork and effective goal-setting so they're able to achieve their assignment in an effective, timely manner.

- "Realization" initiative. This results from the "aha moments" in our day when, simply by being observant, we're suddenly aware of an opportunity to make a positive difference and then act on it.

Here's a story to illustrate my point:

I knew an assistant several years ago who noticed her boss was struggling to complete a major report on deadline because of multiple interruptions resulting from his well-known "open door" policy.

From her desk, she put his phone extension in a “do not disturb” mode. Then she got up, walked over to his office, smiled and closed his door.

Such a simple thing, right? But after filing the report, her boss made a point of thanking her, saying he hadn’t realized the open door policy was hindering his ability to work. This, in turn, led them to schedule “closed door” time every day!

Think of a recent opportunity you took to improve your job performance or someone else’s. Which kind of initiative would you say was involved? Being aware can help you identify and act on opportunities more quickly, with more confidence and even better results.

Beyond the Comfort Zone

Now let’s say you’re happy with everything about your job. You get up each morning, read the paper, have a cup of coffee, get the kids to school and head to the office where your performance is excellent. You’re praised for your work, glad to have a good job and have no immediate plans to seek a promotion. What, then, is the value of initiative for you?

Answer: Initiative is paramount to keeping you energized and working as productively, effectively and efficiently as possible. It keeps work fresh, challenging you and moving things forward. It compels you to “kick it up a notch” by looking for new ways to do more tasks better and faster.

True, this will shake up your comfortable work life a bit, creating some “discomfort” and a little risk. Still, whether you decide to take on new job duties, ask your boss to attend staff meetings for the first time or create an admin team, you must be willing to extend yourself beyond your normal comfort zones.

The good news is that the initiative we’re afraid to take often leads us in exciting, new directions. You might realize that your current job isn’t as satisfying as you thought, and you may decide to seek other positions or educational opportunities.

Scary? Yes! Worth it? Absolutely! Relay on your instincts and good judgment and take that plunge.

One important thought. Avoid letting anything or anyone prevent you from taking an initiative you believe is beneficial. Whether it’s other people’s expectations, or your own fears or doubts, push on through – and consider finding “champions” and “cheerleaders” who share your vision and can support you through whatever plan of action you undertake.

4 Ways to Take Initiative Today

Now that we’ve explored initiative, its benefits and its value to your current and future job aspirations, let’s explore some of the best ways to hone this skill starting today:

- **Be your own best advocate.** Believe in yourself and develop an inner confidence so that when those opportunities for taking initiative come up, you don’t shy away. You’re ready and willing to step forward with tact and diplomacy.

- **Make colleagues and co-workers feel like the heroes they are,** especially managers you support. Building up others will reap great rewards over time, as well as support for future initiatives.
- **Develop an attitude of anticipation.** Be aware of problems that might need solutions, and try to solve them yourself, if possible. Assistants who take this kind of initiative are invaluable to their employers and often advance their careers quickly.
- **Remain proactive and positive with others.** This takes an effort – and effort is, in a way, initiative. You will find that with the right attitude, you can achieve even more, and you will inspire those around you to do the same!
- **Above all, believe in yourself,** in all that you're capable of, and discover the opportunities that await when you look for them! A "can-do" attitude toward taking initiative works wonders. It's what leads to success, and a desire to take even more initiative.

So, what extra initiative are you ready and willing to take today? What's stopping you?