

12

Show Drive and Initiative

Your commitment and dedication to your organization are critical to achieving goals. By showing strong drive, taking initiative, staying productive, and not being afraid to take on new challenges that stretch your abilities, you will achieve higher results and open the door to future opportunities.

As a leader, you set the standard for performance. You also must set the standard for balance while keeping

projects on track, developing new ideas, and making sure people have the resources they need to meet those objectives.

Your direction and leadership in setting priorities, being enthusiastic, and having a can-do attitude influence the people you work with. Success follows intention—and being clear on what you want and need to achieve is the first step.

Show Drive and Initiative

In this chapter, we will cover the following areas:

- ▶ Commit to your organization
- ▶ Aggressively pursue organizational success
- ▶ Establish aggressive goals and drive for results
- ▶ Convey a sense of urgency when it is appropriate
- ▶ Tackle problems head-on and work to resolve them without delay
- ▶ Bring issues to closure
- ▶ Set high personal standards of performance
- ▶ Seek out new work challenges
- ▶ Take on additional responsibility when you're asked to
- ▶ Maintain a consistent, high level of productivity
- ▶ Put in extra effort and work to accomplish critical or difficult tasks
- ▶ Persist in the face of obstacles
- ▶ Overcome procrastination
- ▶ Handle multiple demands and competing priorities; make efficient use of your time
- ▶ Process documents efficiently

Commit to your organization

Be a role model. Show your commitment to your team and your organization. Show that you care about individuals beyond the contributions they make.

Being committed to your work and your organization is essential for your success on the job, and it results in higher job satisfaction. It also improves work relationships, because relationships are strained when people are in jobs or at organizations they do not like. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ If you do not find satisfaction in the work you do or with your coworkers, figure out what changes you need to make. Many organizations are open to job changes.
- ▶ Decide whether you are committed to your organization. Start with the reasons you decided to work there, what you hoped and expected to accomplish, and what you have accomplished. Look at what you like and dislike about your work and the organization. Consider future opportunities and directions within your organization.

Aggressively pursue organizational success

Success rarely just happens. People prepare for it, plan for it, work for it. Even if they just happen to be in the right place at the right time, they know enough to take advantage of the situation. To pursue organizational success, consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Focus on performance and execution. Link performance goals to business goals so people understand how their efforts affect organizational success.
- ▶ Devote yourself to critical projects that directly affect the organization's success. Use these opportunities to stretch your leadership skills. For example, volunteer to launch a new product or implement an organization-wide process change.
- ▶ Constantly look for opportunities to grow the business. Study market changes, competitor moves, customer needs, and emerging opportunities. Discuss these issues with your manager and peers, and come up with ideas on how your organization could respond. Together, take action on your ideas.

- ▶ Talk with people in other organizations to get a realistic idea of other organizations. It helps to get a fresh perspective.
- ▶ Pay attention to how you pursue initiatives. Don't sacrifice your integrity or that of your company to reach your goals. Aggressive is one thing; illegal or unethical is another.
- ▶ Discuss with long-term employees why they have stayed at the organization.
- ▶ Talk with people who understand where the organization is headed and what the future looks like so you can visualize possibilities for yourself.
- ▶ Look at the match or mismatch between your values and the organization's values. It is difficult to stay at an organization whose values you do not respect.

People want to trust their organization and have confidence in it. Listen to their perceptions of and concerns about the organization.

Establish aggressive goals and drive for results

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As a leader, you are not measured on your intentions; you're measured on results. People are counting on you and your area to achieve your goals so that you can make a strong, positive contribution to the organization. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Clarify the results you need to achieve. Make sure your expectations match those of your manager and senior leaders. You don't want to spend time and effort going in the wrong direction.
- ▶ Set aggressive, measurable goals and objectives with your team. The more specific and detailed your goals are, the more meaningful and attainable they will seem to others. People with a clear understanding of goals are more likely to achieve results.
- ▶ Emphasize the need for results, not just activities or long hours. Find out if people try to look busy by spending a lot of time on low-priority issues. When you talk about project updates, focus on driving results, not a long list of activities.
- ▶ Develop accurate and responsive measures to monitor your area's performance. You need data that not only help you monitor your area

and make adjustments, but also allow you to demonstrate the impact your area has on the organization.

- ▶ Align your reward systems with the results you want to achieve. Sometimes reward systems unknowingly or unintentionally reward the wrong results or behavior. Make sure your employees and teams understand what they need to do to achieve meaningful results.
- ▶ Seek feedback from others on your ability to balance process with getting results. If you tend to be overly focused on how things get done, others may see you as not focused enough on achieving results.
- ▶ Show your employees how their efforts contribute to the bottom line and to organizational success. Make results meaningful and understandable for others by explaining them clearly and showing the impact they have on the entire organization.
- ▶ Celebrate accomplishments and use them to motivate and drive more progress. Without minimizing your accomplishments, challenge yourself and others to keep improving.
- ▶ Focus on results, not activities. Make sure your team has measurable goals that can be tracked. Discuss with your people how their results contribute to the bottom line and to organizational success. Discuss what you and your team are or are not doing to affect the organization's results.

Set clear goals with people, so that you both know what is needed and what will be delivered.

Convey a sense of urgency when it is appropriate

Urgency is a double-edged sword. If you fail to convey a sense of urgency, people may miss deadlines. If you give the impression that everything is urgent, people may not prioritize their work appropriately. Either approach is problematic. To convey an appropriate amount of urgency, consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Prioritize your group's projects so you can calculate how much urgency you need to express on each one. This will enable you and others to focus appropriately.
- ▶ Determine how often and how well you convey urgency. Communicating the same amount of urgency and importance

Show Drive and Initiative

on every initiative can create unnecessary stress and resentment. Here are some questions to get you started:

- ▷ Do you convey urgency on the right projects?
- ▷ Do you convey urgency on too many projects?
- ▷ Do you convey urgency only on your own projects?
- ▶ Seek feedback from your team about how you communicate urgency. Solicit specific information about when you display appropriate urgency, when you show inappropriate urgency, and any patterns you seem to follow.
- ▶ When you introduce a new initiative, clarify its importance and give specific deadlines. Once people clearly understand what must be done and the urgency behind it, they will be more motivated to achieve results.
- ▶ Share the responsibility for communicating urgency with others. People may respond best to messages from other stakeholders, process owners, or leaders. Identify situations in which you should step back and allow someone else to convey the message.
- ▶ Make sure your reward systems motivate your employees and teams to get results. Consider creating informal rewards for individuals. For example, a good-natured contest to quickly bring an issue to closure can keep people focused on urgent work.

Talk with your team about increasing its pace when necessary. When the organization needs to operate faster, you should set that expectation.

Tackle problems head-on and work to resolve them without delay

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Issues and problems are guaranteed in business. In most cases, the sooner you tackle them, the better. Confronting problems early keeps them from getting out of hand and conveys the message that you are willing and able to resolve tough issues and problems. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ When you learn of an issue that could or will affect your group, assess the seriousness of the situation. Do you need to respond personally, or can you ask someone on your team to look into it? If you delegate responsibility, be clear about how quickly you expect the issue to be resolved.

If people are unable to solve problems themselves, it often signals an organizational issue. Explore this possibility.

- ▶ Set a time frame for solving a problem. For example, set deadlines for investigating the problem and implementing a solution. Record these dates on your calendar and follow them closely.
- ▶ If people tell you about a problem, clarify what they expect you to do. Are they simply informing you, or do they expect you to solve it? If you agree to get involved, tell them how you plan to proceed. If you don't respond, people may conclude that you are unconcerned or reluctant to address the problem.
- ▶ Deal with personnel problems when they occur. Leaders lose the respect of their peers and employees when they are not willing to deal with people who negatively affect the team's effectiveness or morale.
- ▶ If you are reluctant to move quickly on an issue, determine why. You might lack information or time to process it, be unsure of what action to take, or fear negative consequences. Once you have identified the obstacles, determine how you can address your reluctance and move forward.
- ▶ If a problem recurs, you probably have not addressed the root source. Take some time to determine why solutions did not work in the past and what would solve the issue permanently.

Bring issues to closure

Ask people about any unresolved issues and how they are going to bring each to closure.

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Unresolved issues vary in the disturbances they cause, but they all have one thing in common: they take up time and energy. To resolve issues in your area, consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Communicate the urgency and importance of resolving the issue. Explain how it affects performance, productivity, morale, and so on. Then challenge others to help you resolve it.
- ▶ Take time to investigate the issue and identify the real cause. Avoid quick fixes. A solution that addresses only immediate, visible symptoms will not be sufficient to handle long-term repercussions.
- ▶ Create a plan, with specific dates, to deal with the issue and bring it to closure.

Show Drive and Initiative

- ▶ Follow through until you resolve the issue. Persistence sends a strong message that you take the issue seriously and are willing to do what is necessary to resolve it.
- ▶ If the issue exists within a team, gather everyone involved and set the expectation that a resolution must be found. Give all parties a chance to share their views through discussion, e-mail, or an online forum. Identify areas of agreement and then facilitate a discussion to resolve areas of disagreement. If necessary, seek a neutral third party to intervene and negotiate or arbitrate a solution.

Set high personal standards of performance

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Let people know what is expected of them. Recognize accomplishment and appreciate effort. Encourage people to go beyond what they think they can do.

Organizations look for individuals who are committed to excellence and willing to invest themselves in their work. Achieving and maintaining high personal standards can be satisfying for you and beneficial to your organization. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Determine what is most important to you. What do you value? What do you want to accomplish? Write a personal statement of goals and standards to which you are committed. These are the goals in which you're going to invest your time and energy.
- ▶ Guard against underestimating your potential when you set performance standards. People often don't realize their own abilities, or they feel that setting high standards will set them up for failure. Be bold: set standards that you find challenging.
- ▶ Review the goals and results that the organization deems important. Determine how you can set performance standards that fulfill both your priorities and the organization's.
- ▶ Meet with the individuals on your team to discuss goals and your expectations for their performance. This will give each person a chance to share his or her perspective and bring your attention to any information that affects your expectations.
- ▶ Ask each individual on your team to identify stretch objectives that exceed the job requirements and are challenging yet attainable. The more input people have in setting performance expectations, the more energy they will put toward achieving them.

- ▶ Take time to congratulate yourself and others who accomplish a goal or meet a higher standard. Hold a team party to celebrate team accomplishments.

Seek out new work challenges

▼ Who should seek out new work challenges? Anyone who wants to enrich his or her job, learn new skills, gain visibility, meet new people, and become excited again about coming to work. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Talk with your manager about your willingness to take on challenging assignments and your desire to expand your career. Indicate your interests and ideas, and discuss possible action steps.
- ▶ View your career in terms of the type of work you'd like to do, not just in terms of specific roles that you know currently exist. Instead of following a familiar path, you may be able to create a new path that takes advantage of your unique skills and interests.
- ▶ Find a mentor who can help you locate opportunities for increased responsibility and handle them successfully. A mentor's guidance and objectivity are invaluable.
- ▶ Watch for opportunities to work in other functions, such as special projects or task forces. This will broaden your skills, increase your cross-functional knowledge, and help you learn about further opportunities.
- ▶ When you identify an assignment that you would like, talk to people who are currently in that role. Learn about the knowledge and skills that you would need to be successful in it.
- ▶ Be realistic about your commitments. You may become so enthusiastic about a new challenge that you take on more than you can handle. As you take on additional assignments, make sure that you still manage your current job responsibilities capably.
- ▶ Consider being a coach. Preparing to teach others and help them work through issues will enrich your skills.

Let people know when you want them to take initiative—especially if your organization has a history of avoiding risks.

- ▶ Take the initiative regarding activities and responsibilities. This will demonstrate your commitment to the organization and increase the variety and challenge of your job. Talk with your manager about your desire to broaden your range of responsibilities. Indicate your interests and discuss possible action steps. Adopt the view that your responsibilities include identifying and seizing opportunities beyond your specific job accountabilities.

Take on additional responsibility when you're asked to

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Ask people about new opportunities and challenges they would like to have in their work. Discuss how they can prepare for new responsibilities.

There may be times when you are asked to take on work that falls outside your job description. Even though it may not fit your plans, it can be an opportunity to enrich your current role and learn skills for a position you would like in the future. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ When you are asked to take on new responsibility, consider the request carefully. It is likely that you were asked because there is an immediate need and people believe you will do a good job. Your response may affect not only your current role, but also whether you will receive future opportunities.
- ▶ If the additional work is unusually thorny or unpleasant, focus on what needs to get done. View it as a temporary assignment and do your best work despite the circumstances. People will remember your attitude in a difficult situation.
- ▶ Look at what you can learn from the additional responsibility. Talk with your manager about whether he or she views this as a good opportunity for you, and whether it is work that needs to be done.
- ▶ Understand how your answer, whether it is yes or no, will affect how people view you.

Maintain a consistent, high level of productivity

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Being productive often isn't as difficult as being consistent. Both are possible if you plan well, stay flexible, and monitor your progress. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Get feedback from your manager and colleagues about your productivity level. Do you display a high energy level and accomplish a lot of work? How does your productivity affect your team and other employees? How does it affect your area's reputation?
- ▶ Monitor your personal productivity. At the beginning of each day, create a detailed plan of the work you expect to complete that day. List the tasks according to priority and estimate the amount of time you expect each to take. At the end of the day, determine how much of the work you accomplished and how long it took.
- ▶ If you find it difficult to maintain high energy on the job, you may want to assess your fitness level. A balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and periodic breaks during the day are integral to sustaining energy on the job.
- ▶ Determine which activities you spend most of your time on. Do you focus on things that are important, that are most easily done, or that appear to be most urgent? Consistently focus on the most important activities first.
- ▶ Identify distractions and recurring problems that affect your area's productivity. For example, an inefficient process may be causing you to use more resources than necessary. Work with your team to brainstorm ways to reduce or eliminate these problems.
- ▶ Track your area's accomplishments. Evaluate how productive the week, month, or quarter has been. Keep a continuing record of your progress and that of your employees.
- ▶ Create backup plans to maintain productivity during crises or problems. For example, figure out how your area can accomplish its responsibilities if you lose key personnel. Maintaining consistent productivity is often a matter of planning and readiness.
- ▶ Become savvy about process. Work with a process specialist to review your work processes to ensure that they are as efficient and productive as possible.

If people are not satisfied with their team's results, challenge them to resist making excuses and to take responsibility for improving results.

Put in extra effort and work to accomplish critical or difficult tasks

▼ When it takes extra time and effort to complete a critical project or solve a difficult problem, persist and demonstrate your commitment to getting results. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Estimate how much time and effort it will take to achieve a goal and plan accordingly. An accurate estimate can help you pace yourself and stay on track, especially on lengthy projects.
- ▶ Readily put in extra time to deal with a crisis or meet a tight deadline. Critical goals require a serious commitment from organizational leaders. When you cannot work longer hours, find other resources to meet the need.
- ▶ Putting in extra effort does not necessarily equal putting in extra time. Your contribution can also be in resources or expertise. Identify alternative ways to maximize your contribution.
- ▶ Don't ask your people to work long hours or put in extra time if you are not willing to do so yourself. But also guard against expecting others to consistently work long hours even if that is what you choose to do.
- ▶ Be candid with yourself, your team, and your family and friends about the time and effort it will take to accomplish a goal. Explain why the goals are important and why they require so much time and effort. A shared understanding will help you neutralize negative reactions.
- ▶ If there are questions about how much time and effort you're putting in, prepare a summary of your accomplishments. This may help people focus on your results instead of on the number of hours you worked.
- ▶ Focus on the benefits of reaching your goals, especially when the going gets rough or the hours get long. There is often a phase during a long project when things seem bleak. Keep your eye on the goal and keep working. Even if it seems like you're inching along, you're making progress.
- ▶ Develop strategies to maintain your motivation and energy. For example, develop a network of supportive colleagues and friends who can encourage you, and take time to exercise and eat healthy foods.

Evaluate whether people regularly work less than others and determine whether they need to make more of an effort.

- ▶ Celebrate when you reach your goal. It is important to acknowledge what you accomplished.

Persist in the face of obstacles

▼ You can count on obstacles appearing as you pursue initiatives. How you handle them depends on your persistence and your attitude. If you have a positive attitude, you will be more likely to keep trying and to believe that there is a solution. If you have a negative attitude, you'll be more likely to become cynical and give up. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ When you run into an obstacle, assess the situation. What is the problem? What is causing the problem? How is the obstacle affecting your ability to get results? Develop a solid understanding of the obstacle to get a better idea of how to address it.
- ▶ Think positively. Instead of telling yourself that overcoming the obstacle is impossible, tell yourself that a solution exists and will eventually come to you.
- ▶ Remember that there are multiple ways to approach problems. Your method is not necessarily the only way. Ask others to help you analyze the issue. Invite input from people you don't usually ask, such as vendors, customers, or friends.
- ▶ Talk to supportive peers about the obstacle. They can give you additional perspectives, tell you how they handled similar obstacles, and help you brainstorm possible solutions. They can also help you keep your spirits up.
- ▶ Maintain a strong network with people within and outside your area. Removing obstacles can be difficult, especially if removing an obstacle in one area creates an obstacle in another area. If you have strong relationships, you can work collaboratively to identify potential solutions and likely consequences.
- ▶ Encourage employees to think of new or innovative ways to address obstacles. Because they are closer to the work, they often have the best ideas for removing obstacles.

Monitor how people speak about a problem. Do they refer to it as a challenge and an opportunity, or as a problem and a headache?

- ▶ Realize that some obstacles are not going to be overcome quickly. You may need to develop an interim solution and revisit the issue later.

Overcome procrastination

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Discuss how to have a candid discussion about the effects of procrastination. Many procrastinators do not realize the havoc they create for others.

People procrastinate in different ways, to different degrees, and for different reasons. In each case, the consequence is the same: stress. Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Determine why you procrastinate. For example, you may lack confidence or skills. You might think routine reports are a waste of time. Interpersonal conflicts might make you uncomfortable. You might be stymied by ambiguity.
- ▶ Reframe undesirable work. Instead of focusing on what you dislike, focus on the sense of accomplishment you'll feel after you finish it.
- ▶ If you put off projects that seem difficult or overwhelming, make a list of the small steps involved in the project and do them first. Build momentum that can carry you through more difficult work.
- ▶ Tell yourself you'll work on a project for half an hour to see how it goes. By the end of the half-hour, you may have found that the work isn't as difficult as you thought.
- ▶ Reward yourself along the way—a coffee break after writing the introduction to a report, or a short walk after a meeting.
- ▶ Ask your team how your procrastination affects them. Make a note and keep it in sight as a reminder that your delays and/or lack of action have consequences for other people.

Handle multiple demands and competing priorities; make efficient use of your time

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Do you often reach the end of the day feeling as if you've worked hard but accomplished little? People frequently spend time on things that reduce the tensions of the moment instead of things that relate directly to achieving goals. To determine whether you are using your time wisely, consider the following suggestions:

Recommend time management programs and resources to help people who have difficulty managing their time.

- ▶ Identify your A (most critical); B (important); and C (least critical) priorities. Ask the following questions:
 - ▷ Which tasks will most benefit my organization?
 - ▷ Which tasks support organizational or departmental priorities?
 - ▷ Which tasks does my manager consider most important?
- ▶ For the next week, keep a detailed record of how you spend your time. Each day, write down what you do and for how long. Analyze your results to determine whether you are devoting the bulk of your time to your high-priority work.
- ▶ Divide your workload into phases to make it more manageable. Determine what should be done tomorrow, next week, and next month, then plan accordingly.
- ▶ Schedule time for essential work. Block out time on your calendar so it won't get filled with other appointments and meetings.
- ▶ Delegate less important tasks to others, or let them go undone.
- ▶ Ask yourself, "If I ran this organization, would I pay someone my salary to work on what I am working on right now?"

Process documents efficiently

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At times, documents seem to take over your life. Every day they fill up your e-mail, arrive in the mail, and spill over the sides of your desk. People copy you on memos just in case you're interested. You print or save documents and convince yourself that you'll read them. How can you deal with all of this information? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ Identify the information that will help you accomplish your most important objectives and responsibilities.
 - ▷ Glance through each piece quickly to get an initial understanding of its contents and impact on your work.
 - ▷ Sort the documents in order of importance.
 - ▷ Read carefully, highlighting key points.

Show Drive and Initiative

Recommend that people find others on the team who are good at organizing documents and pick up some tips.

- ▷ Make notes to yourself or others. Cross-reference other documents that relate to this piece.
- ▷ Take action, or delegate or redirect the material.
- ▶ If follow-up is necessary, add a reminder to your calendar and save the document where it will be easier to find.
- ▶ Every six months, spend a few hours deleting unnecessary electronic files and recycling paper files that you no longer need. You can generally eliminate files older than six months.
- ▶ To reduce your e-mail load, remove your name from distribution lists that are no longer useful or relevant.