

Maximizing Results Through People
A CEO to CEO Quarterly Newsletter

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A Creature of Habits

Dear Fellow CEO:

I don't like habits.

You see, in Predictive Index® (P. I.) terms, I am a lowest C. This measurement says I thrive under pressure, multi-task, prioritize on a LIFO basis; my preference is to alter processes rather than keep them the same; I need a steady stream of variety to keep my life interesting. That's all true. But, as much as I hate to admit it, I'm very much a creature of habit.

And the likelihood is that you are too, regardless of where your C is. I'm afraid we all are – whether we like habits or not.

The truth is, I have many habits – some good and some bad. Probably, the people who could chronicle those best are my family and those that work with me around the office. I come in at certain times. I leave at certain times. I respond in predictable ways to similar situations. Likely, there are phrases, jokes, looks and too many mannerisms to count, where many around me, could predict my response to a situation – over and over again. Habits.

And, as I age, I'm afraid those predictions about my behavior get easier and easier. As time passes, I get more stuck in my ways and, if anything, I get more predictable. It's not something one should get upset or frustrated about – it just is something that is and we've got to deal with it. It's a natural response to the reality that we all like doing things in certain ways and as time goes on we get used to doing them that way and the behaviors continue.

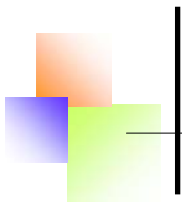
But what if some of those habits are bad and have to be changed? Then what? How do we build new habits into ingrained behaviors? How do we generate good habits and get rid of bad ones?

It's not easy.

We moved into our current office home in October of 2001. There were many things I liked about the building that made it attractive. It was a late 19th century “old Carmel” home that was turned into a restaurant in 1994. The former owner had done a nice job with the transition and my wife and I enjoyed eating there in its former life. It was less than a mile from our home. When the building became available, we jumped on the chance to buy because it offered so much of what we were looking for in a home for BWA. It had curb appeal. It had significant parking (which is atypical in downtown Carmel). It was close. It would likely hold whatever growth we could envision for the foreseeable future. And, it was two blocks from the Monon Trail.

For those of you who are not Indianapolis-based, the Monon Trail is a former railroad track that was turned into a jogging, hiking, biking trail / greenway that runs the length of Indianapolis and is widely used by people of all ages for their daily exercise.

I thought that the Monon would be a terrific place for me to build up a more robust exercise routine for myself (and anyone else in the office who wanted to avail themselves of the opportunity). To that end, I made sure that we had a shower installed on the second floor and waited for the day when our renovation would be complete so I could build another exercise into my regular routine.



The building got done, we moved in, and the Monon was two blocks away. I just never got on it. Every so often, I'd think about it. Maybe I could bring one of the bikes over this spring, I'd think. But, I didn't. The Monon stayed where it was and I stayed in my routines – for days, weeks, months, and even years. The inertia was virtually impossible to overcome. I had lots of habits and exercising on the Monon wasn't one of them.

One of my good habits (I have some), is that I go for a physical every year. I've got pretty good genes, so those meetings with the doc have generally gone well. The last couple of years, however, she has noted that my blood pressure has been in the "high normal" range. She asked if I exercised daily, I answered, yes, and that was that. Until about 18 months ago. That's when she said the "high normal" had to be brought down and that I'd have to start taking blood pressure pills. Yuck! That's definitely a habit I didn't want to start, but, oh well.

So, we tried one pill, then another. Then two. Then two different pills. It seemed that no matter what I was taking, the blood pressure stayed on the "high" side of normal. My last appointment was in April and there still wasn't a lot of progress. Then, I remembered the Monon. Another half an hour of exercise could be what I needed to get the blood pressure in line.

The next weekend I rode one of our bikes to the office and left it in the garage. I was going to start a new habit on Monday.

And I did. I rode for about 15 minutes in one direction, turned around and came back, ate a light lunch while I cooled down and took a shower. The only problem was that the shower that we'd put in didn't have heat control. Ouch! It was scalding.

But, I was sticking to the habit. We called the plumber, had the shower fixed and I rode that next day. And the next, too. And every day I've been in the office since. I'm happy to report that the blood pressure is down, the break in the day is enjoyable, and a new habit has begun – a pretty good one at that.

The problem really isn't shaking the bad habits we have. The problem is breaking into the inertia that rules our lives. We've got to do that in order to adopt the good habits we need. We make resolutions – new years' or any variety – but we don't turn them into habits. Is it because we / I view habits as a bad thing – something to be eschewed? What do we need to build the good habits of a better life where we can muster resolve but don't gin up the follow through to take the action and the follow up repetitive action to build habit?

Unfortunately, while the answer is simple, the solution is difficult. We've just got to develop the habit. Today, tomorrow, the next day and the day after that we've got to do what we intend. Habits can be good and when they are, they need to start today. Whether it's saying thank you for a job well done, remembering to smile when you see a friend or loved one, or that long put off exercise program; we've got to turn our resolve to action. Habits are a good thing - so long as we act on them. And today's as good a day as any to begin turning yesterday's resolution into today's habit.

Thank you for reading.

Bob Wilson, President
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