



# PROFESSIONAL GUIDE: INITIATIVE AND PROBLEM SOLVING



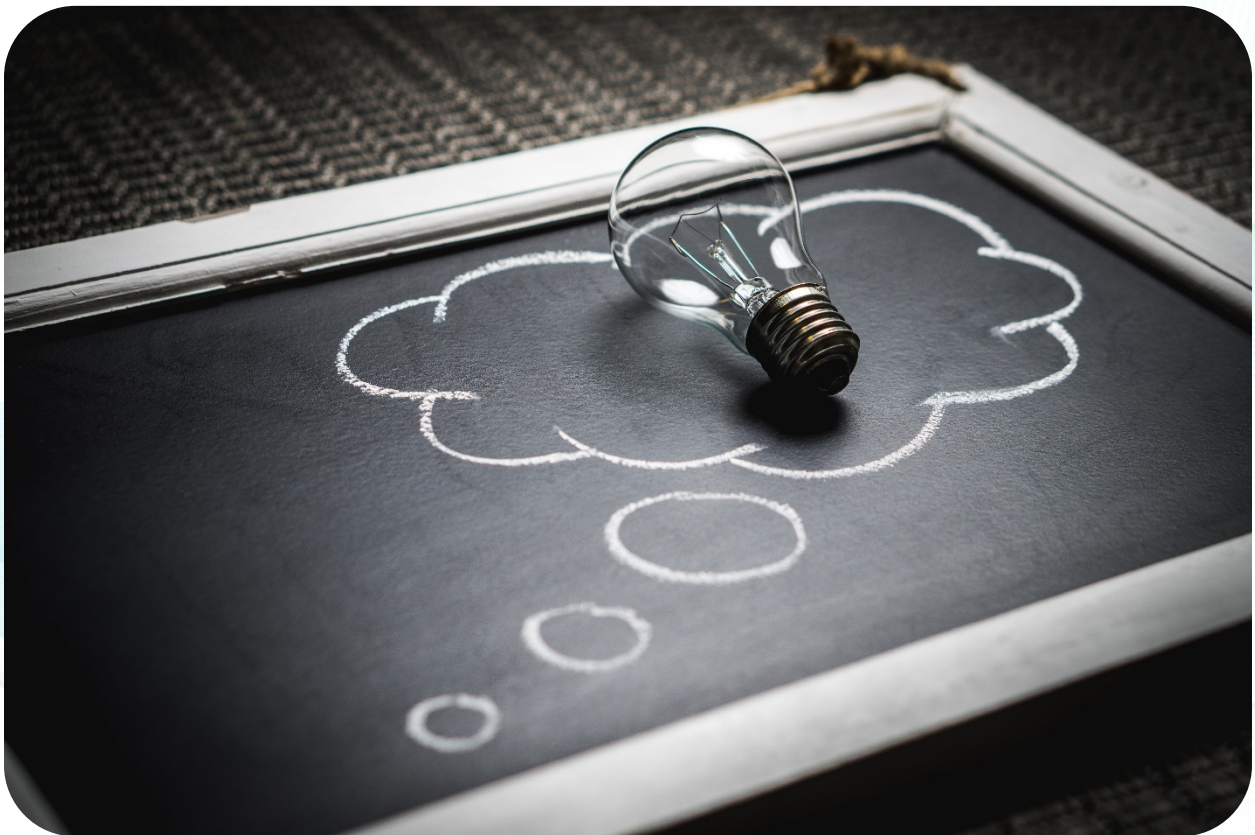
**PROMASTERS**

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# A Game Changing Habit: Cultivating Initiative

- The habit of initiative entails seeing something that needs to be done and either doing it or figuring out ways to do it.
- The more you work on initiative, the easier it becomes. The key is finding ways to be resourceful and taking action or doing something before others do it or before you are told to do it.
- Taking initiative shows the hallmarks of a leader in the making.
- Taking initiative helps to build and strengthen your decision making skills and analytical skills where you get to analyze pros and cons of different courses of action.





# What Does Taking Initiative Mean?

- Taking initiative means going the extra mile or going above and beyond your normal job responsibilities to make things happen.
- Taking initiative means the ability to see something that needs to be done and deciding to do it out of your own free will without someone else telling you to do it.
- Doing something that needs to be done out of your own personal drive with a desire to make things better than they were before or improve processes and ways of doing things.
- Doing more than your normal work duties and adding a little unexpected surprise for others at work.

# How to Develop Initiative Skills

- Developing your initiative begins by knowing what you want to achieve in your career, what things you have to and are willing to do and how fast you want to achieve your career goals.
- Learn how things work and figure out efficient ways of working. Look for opportunities in problems.
- Persevere and be willing to start small. You don't have to dive into a big project immediately; build your initiative muscles one step at a time.



# Ways to Have Initiative at Work

- There are many ways and opportunities to take initiative at the workplace.
- Typical ways to demonstrate or show initiative at work include the following:
  - Seeking more responsibilities.
  - Tackling challenges/solving problems.
  - Training others/sharing knowledge.
  - Helping your coworkers.
  - Providing regular status updates.
  - Building strong working relationships with coworkers.
  - Doing things and projects that others avoid.
  - Volunteering to work with different teams and departments.
  - Stepping in when someone is unavailable or absent.
  - Being innovative/improving systems, processes and procedures.

## 1. Seeking more responsibilities

- Begin by doing your actual job exceptionally well and then identify areas where you can contribute over and above your normal tasks.
- When you have identified specific work-related tasks and projects that you can do, run these by your manager to let them know what you want to work on and reassure them that this will not affect your regular roles.

## 2. Tackling challenges/solving problems

- In a typical work setting, problems occur every now and then. It is vital to work on building one's skills and confidence in problem solving so that you can identify problems, come up with options and choose the best solution.
- The first step in problem solving is to clearly understand the problem so that you can come up with correct solutions.

## 3. Training others/sharing knowledge

- One way of showing initiative at work is by being a fast learner and training others or explaining things to others.
- For example: When new staff are hired in your team, you can give them orientation training regarding your department and the company and help them to settle in quickly.

## 4. Helping your coworkers

- You can empower others by sharing your tips, routines or efficiency methods that work for you.
- Ways of helping coworkers can include being responsive, helping to clear backlog, assisting in coming up with solutions, helping to explain complicated processes.

## 5. Providing regular status updates

- Aim to provide regular progress updates to both internal stakeholders such as your boss and coworkers on one hand and on the other hand keeping external stakeholders regularly informed as well such as other departments, clients, customers, funders etc.

## **6. Building strong working relationships with coworkers**

- Building strong working relationships with coworkers goes beyond small talk. It requires genuine effort and takes time to achieve.
- Make a sincere effort to get to know others by asking respectful questions, learning what they do, inviting them for lunch or a walk and getting to know their interests both at work and outside work.

## **7. Doing things and projects that others avoid**

- In any organization, department or team, there are usually some specific activities or tasks that most people shun from doing. These are typically low priority tasks that when left unattended can turn into major priorities over time.

## **8. Volunteering to work with different teams and departments**

- This enables you to learn what other teams do, create new working relationships and raise your visibility in the workplace because others will in turn know who you are and what you do.

## **9. Stepping in when someone is unavailable or absent**

- Demonstrate willingness to step in when needed during times when a colleague is unavailable or absent.



## 10. Being innovative/improving systems, processes and procedures

- Innovation at work can take the form of coming up with new ways of doing things or improving existing systems and processes.
- Ways of developing your innovation skills include the following:
- questioning the way things are, asking how tasks can be done better,
- inventing unique solutions to problems,
- looking at unrelated industries and professions for inspiration,
- combining unrelated ideas to come up with new methods,
- asking colleagues for tips,
- suggestions and ideas and dreaming big and visualizing expected outcomes.

# How to Take Initiative as a Team

- Ways of taking initiative as a team consists of problem solving as a group, brainstorming ideas – presenting a raw idea to a team can result in a much better idea after input of different people, and volunteering on an internal or external activity as a team.
- Other ways entail working collaboratively on designing manuals, standard operating procedures, guidebooks, flowcharts etc. for others to use and teaching each other through formal or informal learning sessions.

# Qualities That Can Help You Take Initiative

- The following 10 traits can aid you in the pursuit of initiative:
- 1 Action-orientation
  - Planning and then taking action.
- 2 Ambition
  - Knowing what you want to progressively achieve in your career and deliberately taking steps to get you closer to your career goals.
- 3 Caring
  - Concern and consideration for not only the well-being of the company but also about the well-being of colleagues.
- 4 Collaboration
  - Teamwork, cooperation and working well with colleagues, bosses and customers.
- 5 Courage
  - Boldness to take smart risks and having confidence that what you are doing will have a positive impact.
- 6 Curiosity
  - Interest in how things work and trying to figure a way to make things and processes better.
  - Reading widely. Keen observation to see different perspectives and connecting the dots.

- 7 Decisiveness
- Not agonizing over making decisions and choosing options. Thinking on your feet.
- 8 Determination
- Persevering even when the going is tough or when it takes a long time to reach the desired result.
- 9 Goal-orientation
- Set targets for yourself and actively work on meeting and even exceeding your goals.
- 10 Good attitude
- Having a good attitude complements all your other traits.

## What is a problem

- Scenario not matching the desired situation needing improvement-Challenge/Opportunity
- Anytime actual performance does not match expectations
- Problems don't occur without a reason
- In any situation with a problem, there must be an historical point, when actual performance started to deviate
- Something happened at the time x which caused the problem to occur
- It is important to distinguish between symptoms of a problem and its causes



# Barriers to problem solving

- Failure to recognize the problem not sure the problem is
- Conceiving the problem too narrowly, not sure what is happening
- Making a hasty choice, not sure what you want
- Failure to consider all consequences, not enough resources
- Failure to consider the feasibility of the solution
- Failure to know to communicate what is possible
- Failure to define what YOU did that was responsible for your success
- Team attitudes like complacency, ridiculing others' ideas, lack of accountability, dysfunctions, fear of change, lack of trust and doubts

## Problem solving

- Six major steps to implement solutions to almost any kind of problem. The steps are:
- Information Gathering to understand before proceeding. Determine what type of information it is
- Problem Definition, identify the proper questions: What Why Who How When Which Where
- Generating Possible Solutions using various tools
- Analyzing Possible Solutions, or determining the effectiveness of possible solutions before proceeding
- Selecting the Best Solution(s)
- Planning the Next Course of Action (Next Steps) or implementing the solutions (s)