



**KnowledgeCity®**

Learning Solutions

# KnowledgeCity® TAKING INITIATIVE



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**"There are three types of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who wonder what happened."**

- Mary Kay Ash, American businesswoman

## Introduction

### Making Things Happen

Did you know research has shown that individuals who take initiative are more employable and earn more rewards, promotions and higher salaries? They even receive better employment evaluations and lead their organizations to improved overall performance.

In today's workplace, it is imperative for professionals to be able to identify opportunities and proactively pursue them. How can you become a person who makes things happen? Start by understanding what initiative is and how it leads to greater success at work. Examine your own personality type and determine how you can change it to become more proactive. Find out what the barriers are to take the initiative and staying motivated when the going gets tough.

Taking the initiative at work can come in a variety of ways - from anticipating change to keeping abreast of the latest educational updates and trends in your field. It is a chance to introduce your ideas and become a valuable member of the team.

If you are not sure how to begin the process, let's start by defining what initiative is and how it helps empower you for success.



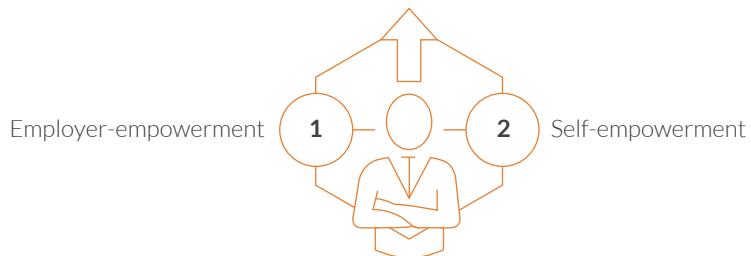
## Initiative and Empowerment

Has anyone ever told you to show some initiative? Initiative means having the ability to take on responsibilities or duties independently without having direction from others. It means being proactive in the face of difficulties and obstacles. Persistence and going the extra mile to complete a task outside of your normal activity singles you out as a leader instead of a follower who is satisfied with the status quo.

Many employees do not want to do more than what is required by their job description. This type of mindset makes it difficult to be a contributing team member. Taking the initiative means taking a calculated risk that is worth it. It puts you in control of your own destiny and empowers you to succeed.

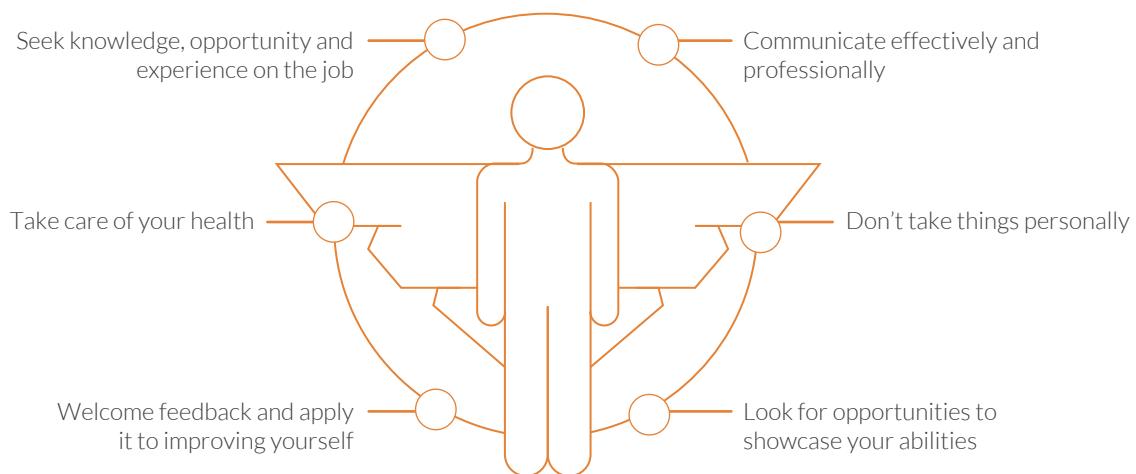
Why is it important to be an empowered, engaged employee? The bottom line is simply one reason. Disengaged employees cost their employers in terms of lost productivity. Engaged employees are more committed to helping their organizations succeed and benefit from their suggestions. Empowered, engaged employees are more likely to be proactive and show initiative.

### Empowerment Comes From Two Sources:



Your employer gives you a certain level of power in your job. Yet, it is the second source (above), self-empowerment where you are in control. You set your own goals, identify strengths, weaknesses and overall capability.

### Here are some steps to build your self-confidence to become empowered:



As your confidence soars, managers will notice, and more opportunities will arise to show you can take the initiative. How do you do that? Let's find out.

## Take Initiative With These 6 Steps

Have you had the opportunity to take the initiative in your current position? Think back to a time when you found out about a project and knew your skills or specialized knowledge would be a good fit. Did you pursue this, or did you feel it might not be worth the effort?

In many positions, an employee's skills, strengths and knowledge are underutilized when they could be providing benefits to the organization. If you do not take a proactive stance, no one will be able to know you possess these attributes that can help improve a system, solve a problem or bring fresh, new ideas to a program. The hard part is identifying and approaching the right people and opportunities.



Getting started is half the battle, so let's look at being proactive and how this trait can help you develop a career plan.



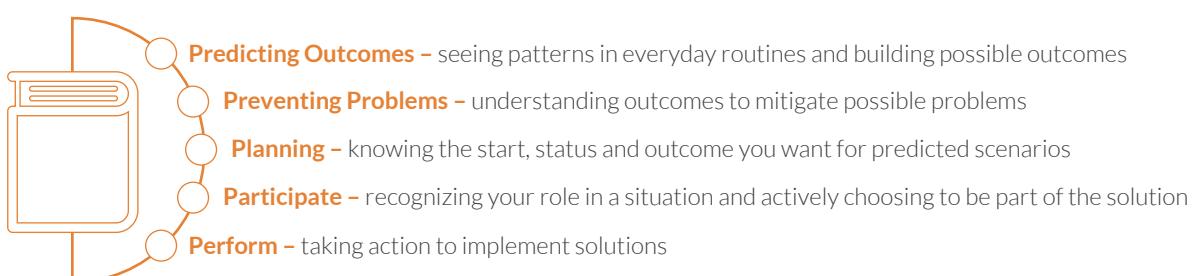
## Proactivity and Career Plans

Is your normal response to a negative work situation proactive, passive or reactive? Let's say you are constantly missing deadlines due to others not taking them seriously. If you are a passive responder, you probably just want to avoid confrontation, so you say nothing and possibly even stop working on the project.

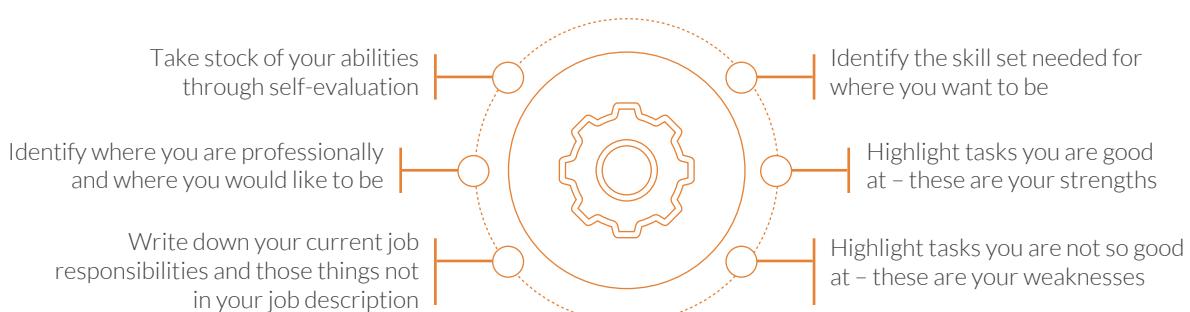
A reactive responder gets angry and frustrated and may even yell at others. This may end all communication and the project will be stalled, maybe permanently.

A proactive responder will still feel angry or frustrated, but instead of lashing out, they will seek solutions that allow control over the situation. For example, you may want to call a meeting to discuss missed deadlines and the impact that they had on the project and the company. Proactive people cause things to happen instead of responding to things after they happen.

**According to the book, *The Proactive Professional* by Chrissy Scivicque, here are the five “P’s” of being more proactive:**



**If you want to be more proactive in your career, you need a career plan. Here are the steps in the process:**



Weaknesses are not necessarily a bad thing. They are areas of opportunity where you can use initiative to succeed by improving your skills.

**You can improve your skills by:**



The last step is to develop a plan of action based on where you are, where you want to be, and how you want to get there. Now, you need to implement your plan by taking the initiative to put it into motion. You might register for a class or volunteer for extra duties. Find opportunities in every situation that will further your career progress and open doors.

## Personalities and Opportunities

One chief aspect of understanding yourself is to return to the idea of personality types: passive, reactive and proactive. If you have identified yourself as a passive or reactive personality, how will you move toward becoming more proactive?

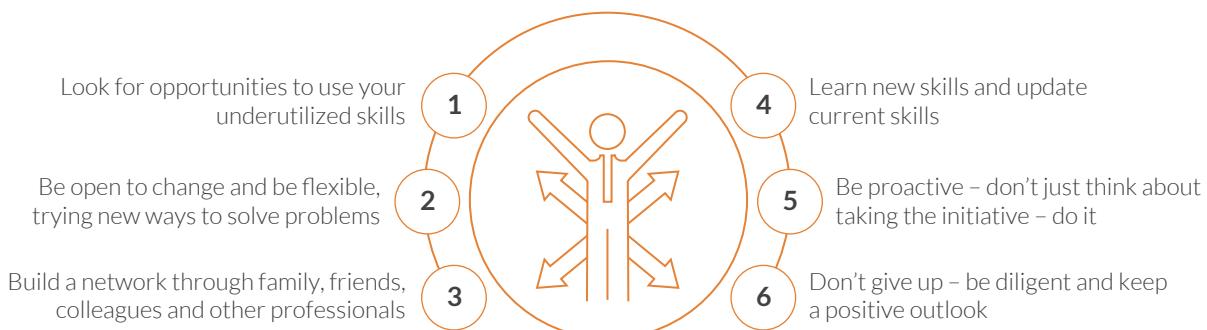
First, seek out opportunities to take control of situations. You may find you need information from others by a certain date. Do you patiently wait for the information to come to you without any prompting? How do you feel when it does not arrive and you now dread having to ask for it? How could you turn this into a proactive situation?

In this case, you can become proactive by asking for the information well before the date you need it, giving your co-workers ample time to deliver. Follow-up is easier because you are not feeling pressured.

What if you heard another co-worker complaining about picking up the slack for someone else in order to meet the above deadline and refusing to do it, thus, creating an unpleasant atmosphere in the workplace? You could check your schedule and see if you could help him or her out by providing the information. You've seen an opportunity to become proactive and contribute to a better workplace. You've become a problem-solver, and it is noticed by managers.

Opportunities to be more proactive and take initiative in the workplace. Be flexible about finding opportunities and take advantage of them.

### Here are steps to find opportunities:



You may be thinking all this sounds great but what about obstacles you might encounter? Let's look at some barriers that can impede initiative.



## Overcoming Barriers to Success

You've got your plan ready to implement when you hit your first obstacle. What should you do? You start by looking at the barrier as a challenge and a learning experience rather than a roadblock. A solution may emerge, and you may even gain new skills as you handle the obstacle.

It's natural to feel disappointed when you hit a barrier. This is the point where you need to S-T-O-P. This doesn't mean you stop working toward your goals.



Using this process allows you to reanalyze the situation and modify or change your end goal. Barriers are a natural part of this process, so accept the problem and develop a plan to move past it. Break the barrier down into doable parts to move forward. If you encounter an impassable barrier, re-evaluate your goals and efforts and create a new plan.

Breaking down barriers is not easy, but there are ways to overcome them. **There are three different types of barriers:**



### How do you begin to break down barriers?

- Question the barrier** – is it really an issue?
- Identify the barrier details** – who, what, when, where and why
- Determine the consequences of the barrier** – who is affected and how
- Take control** - determine what aspects of the barrier are within your control
- Gain perspective** – brainstorm and ask questions about solutions
- Ask for help** – discuss the barrier with others to find positive solutions

Barriers can appear daunting at first, so understanding how they work and how to stay motivated are important factors in taking the initiative. Let's explore these ideas.

## Staying Motivated

It is not always easy to know what sort of barriers you will find as you continue your journey toward taking initiative. Think about a day at work when you felt stymied by circumstances. What happened that day? Were you late for work because of the weather or an accident? When you finally got to work, you found a note on your desk saying you did not follow the proper procedures when completing a task. At this point, you probably wished you'd stayed in bed, and instead of finding out what happened with the improper procedure, you just put it off until another day.

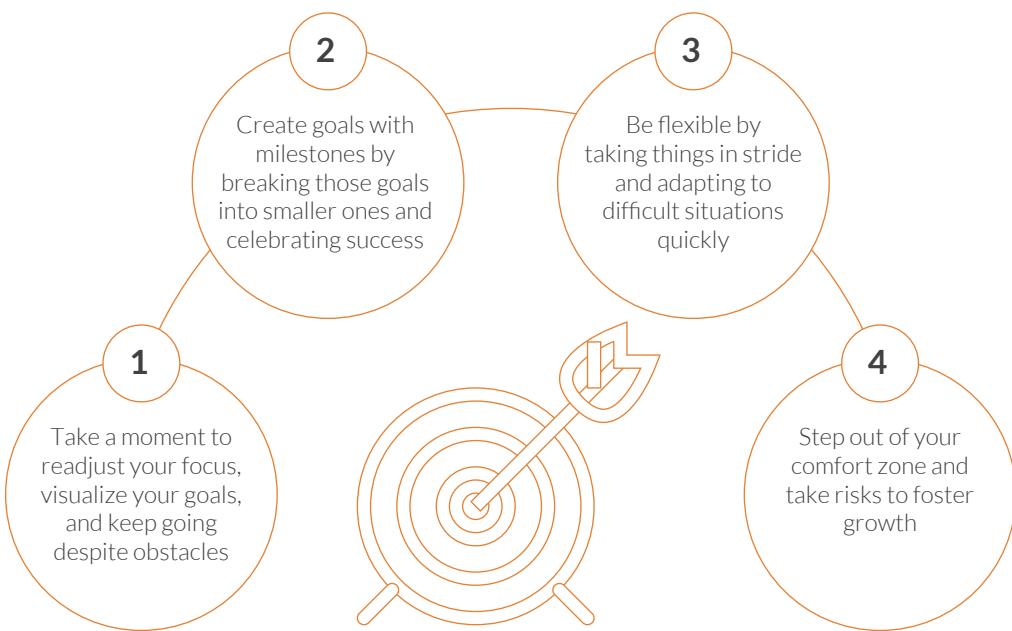
Let's examine these ideas using the external, internal and habitual barriers model. Remember, external barriers are those things that are out of your control. Weather and unforeseen accidents fall into this category. Although, if you knew about the bad weather beforehand, you might have thought about leaving earlier or avoiding the accident site by taking another route.

Improper procedures are internal barriers. You may have done the task correctly and not been aware of a change in the process. This is something within your control as you can ask for information and assistance to do it correctly the next time.

Procrastination and putting off tasks are habitual barriers. If you know you are a procrastinator, you need to work hard to change that behavior. In this case, instead of feeling sorry for yourself, after a bad start to the day, you could review the task and immediately find out what happened and how you can fix the problem. You'll be amazed at how empowered you feel by taking control of the situation.

There will always be days like this, so how can you stay motivated? Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, says, "Motivation is fire from within."

### Four Steps To Motivate You:



Barriers may present detours on the way to your final destination, but if you have a map, you will find your way. In the process, you can create a new map to reach your goals.

Are you ready to take initiative on the job? Let's find out what works.

## Taking Initiative at Work

Change is inevitable in the workplace, whether from external factors, such as the economy or new technology, or internal factors, such as staff changes or new business strategies. The change should be anticipated as part of staying relevant in the job market. Anticipating change makes you better prepared to adapt and think about the future challenges ahead.

Even though no one really likes to change, it is sometimes inevitable in order to be more productive or competitive.

### What Ways Can You Anticipate Change?

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Determine the present technology situation  | Research new trends that impact company growth                                    | Plan meetings with co-workers to find out their interests and ideas               | Introduce new ideas that represent employee input                                 | Invite specialists and experts to demonstrate new products, services and trends     |

Anticipating change helps a company maintain goals and profit margins. It also opens lines of communication and encourages exploration of new ideas for products and services.

One way to take initiative is to educate yourself about changes in your business area. What skills do you need to move upward? Plan so you know where to best use your skills and how to build on them.

If you need to learn or update your skills - education is now available 24/7 online through massive open online courses, known as MOOCs. You can opt for the traditional route of college classes or continuing education or choose online training that is on-demand, self-paced and relevant to the skills you need. The key is to assess your skills, identify what you need and find the best format for you to learn and master these skills. Then, take the initiative by signing up.

Being part of a team offers abundant opportunities for you to take the initiative and introduce your ideas. Let's examine some thoughts about these areas.



## Teamwork and Ideas

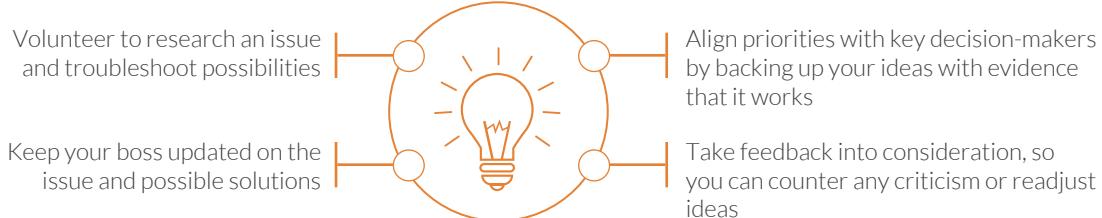
Teams are an integral part of doing business in today's workplace, whether they are at your work site or are a virtual team scattered around the world.

**In order to be a great team member, there are certain attributes critical to success:**

- 1 Commit to the team and the team's success
- 2 Communicate effectively to inspire members and identify pros and cons clearly and professionally
- 3 Volunteer without being asked and contribute something creative
- 4 Find areas that need improvement by researching industry trends
- 5 Seek ways to improve company processes, products or services

When you bring your A game to the table, others will notice and look to you for leadership. Your involvement with finding ways to improve processes can also inspire others to seek solutions to problems. As a team member, you want to be the person who is willing to go the extra mile to ensure the team's success.

Exploring trends will lead to ideas you will want to share with others. **If you are not sure what reception your idea will get, here are some steps that will help the process along:**



Your boss will appreciate you taking the initiative and will continue to look to you for answers to other problems. Make sure your idea fits in with the mission of the company and that the solution is a viable one that will make a significant difference to a process or product dilemma.

Taking initiative is not easy and does not happen overnight. Putting into practice what you have learned about the process will help you move forward faster.

## Conclusion – Initiative Success!

Employees take initiative are more successful. They seize every opportunity to show their skills, knowledge and expertise in an appropriate way that will benefit the organization.

Being proactive is a process that starts with a plan for success, overcoming barriers, and introducing your ideas, so they will get noticed – and you will, too. Remember, knowledge is power. You can enhance your personal growth by expanding your expertise and making a commitment to position yourself as a leader through continued education.

The power lies within you to act on your plan to incorporate initiative into your job every day. Start with the small things first. Then, work your way up from there. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day, and as you embark on this journey, celebrate every milestone along the way. Before you know it, you will be basking in the light of respect from your co-workers, supervisors and company leaders.





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## Taking Initiative



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