

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF GREAT LEADERSHIP: BE PROACTIVE! YOU HAVE THE POWER!

To be proactive means that we are responsible for our own lives and we take the initiative to make things happen. We are often able to engineer our own events or create new circumstances.

It involves anticipating situations or problems before they happen in order to discover and prepare solutions. Proactive people are always looking for solutions – ways to tackle the obstacles and make them work for them, not against them. They embrace challenges and take calculated risks. They choose not to wait around for life to happen to them.

It also involves being a part of the solution rather than the problem itself. In this way, instead of reacting, we realize we have the power to decide how we will act. Responsibility is simply having the power to make decisions – to choose how you will respond to what life throws at you. It's been said that how we get through life is only 10% of what happens to us and 90% of how we choose to deal with it. When we can honestly say with conviction, "I am what I am today because of the choices I made yesterday," we are acting responsibly.

Since a proactive person is driven by values, he bases his decisions on them. A reactive person, on the other hand, is virtually powerless because he blames his behavior on circumstances, other people, or past experience. His behavior tends to be based on his feelings rather than on values and he fails to take responsibility for his reactions.

It's important that we seize the initiative to do what is necessary, based on sound principles and personal values, to do what needs to be done in any given situation. Someone once said, "Winners make it happen, while losers let it happen." But those who wait for others to take the initiative often lose the opportunity to choose for themselves. Others or circumstances choose for them.

I like an illustration I read about the captains of two ships. The reactive one allowed the ship to flow with the currents and go wherever it wanted. The proactive captain determined that the ship would go where he wanted it to go. Sometimes we forget that we are the captains of our ships. To arrive at a desired destination, we cannot simply flow with life's currents. The responsible person will take the initiative to steer his life in the direction he wishes to go. At times, he must even sail against the currents, but he stays focused on his destination.

It requires initiative to create a balance in our lives, develop a personal mission, and practice sound principles. None of us are entirely reactive or proactive, but we can recognize the things that "push our buttons" and decide to respond more proactively. It requires practice because our natural tendency is to go with the flow and allow life to "act upon" us. Then we complain about other people, worry about the environment or political climate, or fret over things over which we have no control.

We tend to forget that there are areas over which we have control; we simply have not assumed responsibility or taken the initiative to focus on those areas where we can create change and make a difference. And the first place is within us. We have the power to choose and we have the power to change. To be proactive is to change from the inside-out. The focus is on *being*. When we create change within ourselves, we find that we influence others and initiate change in our external worlds as well.

Today you may be living with the consequences of poor choices, reactive behavior, or failure, but it is never too late to change course. You can learn from your mistakes and turn them into victories. But the first step is to assume responsibility; the second is to seize the initiative. In other words, be proactive! You have the power!

**There's a Hole in My Sidewalk:
Autobiography in Five Short Chapters**

by Portia Nelson

Chapter I

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes me forever to find a way out.

Chapter II

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place, but it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter III

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter IV

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter V

I walk down another street.