



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings: Routine Maintenance

I've been thinking about all the ways having a routine increases my productivity. How and when I exercise, what I have for breakfast, and when I meet with clients have all become routines for me. The prior planning that goes into these routines ensures I have time for what is important. My gym bag is always packed and ready to go so I won't dawdle or be tempted to do something else. And having a set breakfast and pre-made salad means I can grab meals quickly before heading off to work.

But when does a routine become a rut? And do we lose creativity and spontaneity if we have too many routines?

While our routines can reinforce positive habits, they can also bolster negative ones. Always having wine with dinner could lead to excessive drinking. Stopping for a fancy coffee each morning can become costly both monetarily and calorically. Do you really want that glass (or two) of wine or that double-shot cappuccino? Or are you mindlessly sticking to a habit?

Always taking the same route home may seem efficient, but with experimentation, you might find a shorter route, or less traffic, or just a more interesting drive. Learning new things can rewire our neural pathways, keeping our brains flexible with alternative paths.

Take a look at your routines and decide which ones serve you and which might be due for a change. Determine what your goals are and make sure your habits support your goals.

Sandy



Ask Sandy

Directive or collaborative

Some leaders have a collaborative and empowering style; they don't want to solve their managers' problems for them. Other leaders prefer to be directive, managing all aspects of the work. When is it better to be collaborative and when would a directive style be appropriate?

I worked with Kwami, a leader of a tech organization who is naturally directive. He is very clear about what he wants, how he wants it done, and when he wants it. This has served him well until recently. He is taking on a more senior leadership role that will leave him less time to guide his organization. But his managers are all dependent on him to tell them what to do. To wean them off Kwami's directive management style and become more empowered, they need to take ownership of decision-making and become more responsible for how they run their teams. Kwami can facilitate this shift by sharing his vision with his managers and discussing how they intend to implement the vision. It will take a while for all of them to learn how to work differently. To support him in the change process, Kwami has asked his managers to push back when he is being too directive.

Laura has been promoted to run a customer support organization of over 200 people. Her collaborative nature has served her well in the past because she needed to work cross-functionally to achieve her goals. Her peers love working with her because she engages them, builds on their ideas, and looks for win-win solutions. But in her new role, she has been tasked with making substantive changes to the way the organization works. Her team doesn't share her vision and working collaboratively is taking too long. They need more direction than she is used to giving, so she is starting with a collaborative approach and then shifting to directive when the team struggles.

There is no one right way to be an effective leader. Flexibility in approaches offers a leader to choose what style to use depending on what works best for the situation.

Learning for Leaders: Assess your managers' ability to take responsibility for achieving their organization's goals. Encourage them to own the success for their area.

Coaches Corner: Ask your leaders how they know when to be directive and when to be collaborative.

If you have questions, you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



SAYING NO FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

When you think of someone saying no, what images come to mind? I think of an angry person bellowing, "No-o-o!" or a toddler having a meltdown. Is it any wonder we are uncomfortable saying no?

The ability to say no is an important element of a leader's success. According to change expert Darryl O'Conner, the difference between good companies and great companies isn't their ability to define priorities, but rather their ability to say no to very good options for the sake of committing to the best option. When we have too many priorities, it is difficult to focus our efforts on accomplishing the key ones, so all suffer.

Define what matters

Before turning down a request, it is important to be clear on what you would say yes to. Having a clear vision of what success looks like for you and your organization is an important first step. The vision starts the process for goal setting, followed by establishing clear objectives to reach the goal. To stay focused and not be distracted from what is important, successful leaders keep their goals close at hand—whether tattooed in their mind, framed and hung in their office or scribbled on a Post-It note stuck to their computer.

Create support structures

Equally important is setting up structures to help you stay aligned to your goals. The head of a network operations center, Matt's first task when he came to work every morning was to review company emails he'd received overnight. But he was often interrupted by staff members coming to chat or asking for help. Next thing he knew, it was lunchtime and he hadn't gone through the previous emails or even read his new ones. With half the day over, he'd done nothing toward reaching his goals.

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