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# GOT ATTITUDE?

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

In the book, *Fail-Safe Leadership*, the authors, Linda L. Martin and Dr. David G. Mutchler, provide what they call a “quick-leadership temperature check” through a series of conditions. Some of these conditions are:

- ☹ “Can’t do” attitudes
- ☹ Lack of personal accountability
- ☹ Unacceptable results

These conditions reflect the organization’s culture, which in turn, equals the leadership. Organizational culture encompasses these elements:

- ☹ Attitudes
- ☹ Beliefs
- ☹ Behaviors
- ☹ Philosophies
- ☹ Practices

The thoughts and actions of the employees equal the thoughts and actions of those in leadership roles, especially the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

This is where you as an individual, regardless of title or position, must do your own temperature check regarding your “attitude” and subsequent elements. The reason is simple. If you cannot lead yourself, you cannot lead others.

Henry Ford said, “*Whether you think you can, or you think you cannot, either way, you are correct.*” All those “thinks” return to your thoughts. Each day, according to the National Science Foundation, the average person has between

12,000 and 16,000 thoughts. What is even more revealing, and potentially alarming, is 80% of those thoughts are negative and 95% are the same thoughts as the day before.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them.” If 76% of our daily thoughts are repetitive and negative, how can we think differently? When, where and how do we start to change this cycle and stop being the “hamster in the wheel?”

Much is written about attitudes. Years ago, I read Zig Ziglar who wrote, “attitudes are habits of thought.” The National Science Foundation appears to have confirmed Ziglar’s statements.

Our attitudes are truly a symptom because the real issues are our beliefs, which for the most part are unconscious. The studies of many cognitive neuroscientists indicate only 5% of cognitive activities are conscious while 95% of those same activities are beyond our conscious awareness. Our beliefs, mostly subconscious, drive our attitudes and those attitudes are reflected in our behaviors.

Changing our attitudes requires changing our beliefs. If we think we cannot (this is a belief), then we just limited our ability of “can do.”

Many of our beliefs were planted decades ago when we were children. These beliefs are the same beliefs our parents had and their parents had. I believe the origin of some of these beliefs was in the desire by our parents to keep us safe.

Most of us have heard the parental “Don’t Commandment” of “Don’t talk to strangers.” Our parents issued this commandment to ensure our safety. There were other “Don’t Commandments” such as “Don’t cross the street” or “Don’t go where you are not invited.”

For sales professionals possibly the disdain for cold calling is because of these early “Don’t Commandments.” Cold calling requires talking to strangers or going where you are not invited.

By embracing When, Where and How (WWAH), we can begin to change our attitudes. The **WHEN** may be in the late afternoon before leaving



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## STOP BEING THE HAMSTER IN THE WHEEL?

work, in the evening before retiring or early in the morning. To successfully accomplish the When is the **WHERE**. The Where is a quiet place with no interruptions. This means turn off the Smart device and the television; close the door so you are alone with your conscious thoughts. Finally, the **HOW** is the simple action of reflection. Of course, reflection is simple though not necessarily easy.

Each day schedule 5-10 minutes to reflect (think) upon what happened during the day. Consider answering these questions: What went well today? Why did it go well? What could have happened to make it go even better? What didn't go well? Why didn't it go well? Why didn't it go better? What could have happened to make it go even better? What did I fail to do? Why did I fail to do it?

Reflection improves self-awareness and through self-awareness internal self-control and emotional control are also improved. With 1,440 minutes in a day, scheduling 5-10 minutes is less than 1% of your total daily time.

Just imagine how much better your daily life could be if you invested some time in reflection. Beyond just investing the time to reflect, consider taking this strategy and tactic of reflection to the next level by writing down your reflective thoughts.

Journal writing improves memory through the process of encoding. Additionally, other research suggests people who engage in writing down their goals have increased their ability to successfully accomplish their goals by 1.2 to 1.4 times more than people who don't. There is also research that

suggests people who take notes during an interview process have increased their chances of being hired.

For me, something magical happens when I write. I firmly believe, and have said so for years, “the more you write, the better you think; the better you think the more you write.” Writing unites the ability to assess your daily thoughts and behaviors and then provides you a means to clarify what is important, not important and totally irrelevant.

When we reflect, we are thinking about the results of our beliefs, which are the behaviors that are the outward expression of our attitudes. Over the years, we unfortunately direct many of those behaviors toward what we cannot control or influence. This focus on what we cannot control sometimes consumes us and continues to stoke the fire of repetitive and negative attitudes.

One quick example is “road rage.” How often do we become irrationally upset over the driving behaviors of others? Can we control their lane changing, their tail-gating or their inability to use turn signals?

Another example is filling up the gas tank at the self-service pump. You press the button for “Yes for Receipt” and then are told to see cashier for receipt. All of a sudden, your negative attitude rears its ugly head. “You don't have time for this!” So, you quickly stomp into the convenience store, go to the cashier and abruptly state, “I didn't get a receipt for Pump 10.” The cashier prints out the receipt and may state, “Sorry.” For you the sorry doesn't mean anything. Now you jump into your car, potentially filled with

irrational anger. What started as a good day, a bright morning is now dark and gloomy.

One of my executive coaches shared this example with me and then asked the questions, “What would happen if you thought this incident was just a ‘minor inconvenience’? How would that change your approach to the rest of the day?” He recognized that by allowing a situation of which no one has any control to shape the rest of the day was rather foolish.

By replacing anger with this “minor inconvenience” thought, suddenly the day is not ruined. To this day, I employ this thought when I am confronted with “see the cashier” and yes, it has become a habit of thought. Maybe this is what Epictetus meant when he said, “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.”

Wayne Dyer’s words of “*Change the way you look at things*, and the *things you look at change*” are often quoted. Changing how we look at things is all about changing our habits of thoughts and our attitudes.

Just as I shared about changing “see the cashier,” I changed the rest of my day. I truly realized that I have no control over the fuel pump printing the receipt.

When working with clients, I realized how much of our daily behaviors focus on what we cannot control or influence. Sometimes, it appears we are consumed by what we cannot control and yet, we continue digging that deep hole.

Reflection is one way to stop digging and to start changing our attitudes by embracing the positives instead of the negatives. William James who is considered the father

of American psychology shared these wise words, “*The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitudes.*”

Years ago, in his comic strip, Pogo, cartoonist, Walt Kelly Pogo, made this statement, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” For each individual, negative attitudes are the enemy.

Each of us has the ability to change our attitudes. Mahatma Gandhi realized this when he said, “*You must be the change you wish to see in the world.*” **N**

*Leanne Hoagland-Smith is a Clarity Strategist, solving people and process problems. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, she turns tomorrow’s goals into today’s results. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.*