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Columnist

Professional Development

Seven Deadly Habits

This sounds like a mix of the seven deadly sins and Steven Covey's seven success habits, and maybe it is.

How often do we blame other people or situations when things go wrong in our lives? I'm one who believes things happen to us from inside rather than outside ourselves. If we're struggling, it's because there's at least one area of our lives in which we're out of integrity.

So here's my list of seven habits we should eliminate if we want to move forward and achieve more success and happiness.

Procrastination. The Scarlett O'Hara "I'll do it tomorrow syndrome." Why do we put off doing what we believe we should do? Maybe the fact it's a "should" could be one reason. Ask yourself why you should be doing this. Is it because someone else or society thinks you should? Not a good enough reason. If it's something you feel you need and want to do, even if it's a chore, then putting it off only causes stress. Do it, delegate it, or dump it. Lord Chesterfield said it before Nike condensed it, "No idleness, no laziness, no procrastination; never put off until tomorrow what you can do today." Do just one thing today you've been putting off and you'll feel better.

Wasting time. This may be either a cause for procrastination or a result of it. It's not always a bad thing. When we've worked hard, we deserve down time and if vegging out is what feels best, then do it. What I'm talking about is a habit of wasting time rather than living up to our responsibilities. Benjamin Franklin said, "Remember that time is money," and aren't we good at wasting both at times? The difference is if we waste money, we can earn more. Wasted time is gone for good.

Blaming others. Who's standing in your way of getting what you want? Your parents, siblings, boss, co-worker, the government? If only he wouldn't or she hadn't or they didn't is a game we can't win. People treat us badly sometimes. They don't do what we want them to do. And we do the same to them. Is it your fault someone else didn't succeed? No, and it's not their fault you didn't. Jean Paul Sartre said, "...we are responsible for what we are..."

Judging others. I've said before I think this is a root cause of most of our troubles in the world. It is an irrefutable law of nature that what we give out, we will get back.

So the Golden Rule isn't a demand of what we "should" do. It's a beautiful way of expressing how to live if we want to reap rewards and justice for ourselves. "Judge not" may be the best advice we've ever been given.

Making excuses. Okay, I've got two puppies. Maybe the dog did eat your homework, but you can only get away with that one once. People see through excuses and don't respect those who make this a habit. Remember, everything we do is a choice, so best to own up to our failings and then not repeat them. I love Shakespeare's take on it in King John, "And oftentimes excusing of a fault doth make the fault the worse by the excuse."

"Yeah, buts." One time someone was coaching me on an issue and I was being stubborn in accepting her observations. She finally said to me, "Do you realize you're saying 'yeah, but' a lot?" I hadn't, but it helped me for her to point it out. A friend of mine once had this expression on his vanity license plate. It's so annoying to try to communicate with someone who "yeah, buts" everything we say. It indicates a negative, pessimistic outlook and who wants to be around people like that?

Negativity. Which brings us to the last and perhaps deadliest habit, the one that may be responsible for all the others. A habitual negative attitude is the sure way to fail. I'm talking of seeing the bad in people or situations rather than the good, expecting failure, fearing success. Negative self-talk is perhaps the worst thing we can do to ourselves. We do become what we tell ourselves we are. Say you can't or you can and you'll be right. So avoid "can't" and "cant" (whining, or insincere, meaningless talk) and have faith in yourself, your fellow men and women, and most of all – your Creator.

Make it a habit to be kind to yourself. These seven habits can be deadly, but don't despair if one of them is controlling you. Remember every day that we're all doing the best we can, even when we know we're not.

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