

Habits

Habits – good or bad, they dictate our living and our lives

I once read a saying on one of these motivational posters you find in corporate offices and it stuck with me. What it said was :

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit”.

Who out there do you know would not want to excel? Who out there do you know would not want to have a deep sense of achievement and self-actualisation? And thus the question begs – if excellence is based on habits, what habits do we need to live by in order to excel?

Well, I would guess that this question depends on the person and the goals that have been set but I also realize that not many excel in what they do or set out to do, primarily because of the barrier – the human barrier – that prevents them from reaching their level of self-actualisation.

Picture this – 5 minutes before midnight on the 31st December glass of bubbly in hand and with a boisterous and courageous voice the following resolutions are made :

- “This year I’ll run the Comrades, watch me!”
- “This year I will lose 10k’s!”
- “I know I’ve said it before, but this year I’ll quit smoking – this in fact is my last cigarette!”
- “Come hell or high water, this year I’ll finish my degree!”

Probably no later than end-January, these resolutions fade away and we find solace by saying that next year, I’ll stick to it. And sooner or later we have to come to accept that we are all prisoners; prisoners of our own habits – bad habits at that.

In the mid-1940’s the challenge was on to break the sound barrier. From a technological perspective this was a reality but the big question was, what happens on the other side of the sound barrier? Some experts concluded that both plane and pilot would disintegrate, and other predictions included that the pilot would revert in age, lose his voice or be severely buffeted.

The experiment was looking for guys with “the right stuff” because someone would burst through the sound barrier – the airplanes were built to fly that fast – the question was who would be the first pilot to fly Mach 1.

Enter Chuck Yeager. On October 14, 1947, he was the first pilot to crack the sound barrier when his plane, the Bell Aviation X-1 attained a speed of 700 miles per hour, Mach 1.06. Six years later he would fly at 1 612 miles per hour at Mach 2.44 and I would imagine that in today’s aviation classes, the sound barrier and the past myths that surrounded it, is not given much time.

After experiencing flight at Mach 1 and realizing that the flight actually got smoother, Chuck Yeager later said “ I was thunderstruck. After all the anxiety, after all the anticipation, breaking the sound barrier was really a let down. I realized that this mission had to end in

a let-down because the real barrier wasn't in the sky, but in our minds, our knowledge and experience of supersonic flight.”

In astronautics we learn that more energy and power is expended during lift-off and in clearing the earth's gravity than in navigating a million kilometers and returning again to earth.

The same also applies to us when we want to rid ourselves of bad habits. It requires much energy, tenacity, perseverance, and guts. It is much easier giving in to earth's gravity, it's much easier falling back on one's old habits.

To succeed at breaking old habits and making new ones, one has to learn how to handle the “pull of gravity”, the restraining forces and harness the driving forces to achieve the daily and often, private victory.

Twenty one days. That's what I have been told. It takes 21 days to convert an old habit to a new habit; to convert a bad habit to a good habit. The difference between saying one will lose weight and starting to lose weight, is 21 days. The difference between smoking and being an ex-smoker is 21 days. Twenty one days of consistency, vas-byt and determination is the point where gravity, or restraining forces, give way.

Overcoming the pull of the past or shedding the bad habits, one must of course have a clear idea and vision of what the future entails or what new habits one wants to form. Knowing who you are and what it is that you want to accomplish is key in this process. I am merely repeating what all the wise folks say, start with small steps before you decide to run and be disciplined to take it one step at a time.

Stephen R. Covey defines discipline as the ability to make and keep promises and to honour commitments. It is at this point that I want to remind you of the promises and commitments you made when you were inducted as a Lion in your Club. Can you recall your pledge? Let me remind you –

“I, _____ in the presence of the members of the _____ Lions Club, take this solemn obligation to abide by the constitution and By Laws of the club and that of Lions Clubs International, to attend all meetings regularly, to support and further the interests of the club in all its undertakings, and to contribute my fair share towards the financial support of the club.

I further declare that I will assist in maintaining, building, and strengthening the membership of the club.

Furthermore, I will help the club by actively serving on committees and in other capacities where my efforts are needed, and that, I will practice the principles of the Code of Ethics and the Purposes of Lions Clubs International.”

Are you still living up to your promises and are you honouring your commitments – or are you ill-disciplined?

If you are, or you know a Lions whose heart is still in it but the will seems to be flagging, then this series is for you. I personally hope that you will follow this self-development process to enhance your habits when it comes to **Lions stuff** but the habits you chose are yours and this self-development process work just as well in your private life, your work, your marriage, or your new-year's resolutions.

In my personal pursuit of life-long learning, I have learnt (from Stephen R Covey) that learning is a process and it is best mastered when the process is followed in the following fashion.

- First, capture the content of the material , the essence of what is presented – seek first to understand the basic principles;
- Second, expand on what you have learned – adding your own ideas and thoughts;
- Third, teach the material – sharing what you have learned with others to increase understanding;
- Fourth, apply the principles – putting them to the test in your immediate circumstances; and
- Fifth, monitor the results.

The next chapters appearing on this site are by no means my own work and applying the above process, I will lean heavily on the works of the likes of Stephen R Covey, Stephen M.R. Covey, Og Mandino and a few more, whom I will duly credit.

For now I want to end off this introduction and say :

Remember the 21 days, start with small steps and when you find value in this self-development process, I humbly request you advise others to follow it too. But, most importantly, I truly hope that you will find the light within you again and that such light will shine through your eyes every time you meet with fellow and prospective Lions in our combined effort to serve our community.

Your homework :

“Highly effective people carry their agenda with them. Their schedule is their servant, not their master. They organize weekly and adapt daily. However, they are not capricious in changing their plan. They exercise discipline and concentration and do not submit to moods and circumstances.”

Business guru Peter Drucker was once asked what future generations will say about the today’s generation, what value will today’s generation add to mankind. His response was that the one thing that will set today’s generation apart from those that preceded us, is our realization that we have the power to make choices AND act on our choices.

Thus you now have the power to chose what habits you want to form AND chose to actually act on them. Think about them carefully and list them.

I was kind enough to start your list, feel free to complete it

Habit	Reason	Outcome
Get up the moment the alarm rings	Less stressed when running out of time	Small beginning, great victory
Schedule Lions meeting and attend	Meet my obligation	Get involved again