



Chatsworth Consulting Group

## Ten Steps to Actually Doing What You Say You're Going To Do

The other day I presented a few leadership tips to a group of small business owners and senior leaders of organizations. They all listened patiently, politely, and even with a great deal of engagement. A few even took copious notes – as if to remind themselves of the personal and professional changes they truly wanted to, and planned to, make. And then one extremely honest individual raised his hand.

“These ideas are great,” he shared, and then he paused. “The problem is,” he then continued, “that no matter how many times I decide to do something about these things, I never do. As you shared with us earlier, human habits and behavior are extremely hard to change...so how can we actually do something?”

The group nodded in agreement, as did I as well, because that truly is the problem. Most of us have the best intentions about changing our behavior and doing what we know is “right.” And yet, these changes can be so difficult, if not nearly impossible, to make. We swear we’ll no longer swear, and then slip out a “bad word” without even thinking about it. We determine to manage our temper at work, and quickly find ourselves steaming, if not downright yelling at our colleagues or direct reports. We promise ourselves we’ll stop interrupting, speak up more in meetings, give our team more feedback, help out more at home, be open to others’ perspectives...our list of all that we truly intend to do can be endless, but how do we actually do what we say we are going to do? The good news is there are steps we can take.

### Step #1 – Say it loud

Speaking it makes it real. The first step to doing what you say you’re going to do is to tell others, many others, about the behavior or attitude you want to change. State out loud, to as many people as possible, your new intention, because the spoken commitment to others and the setting of an expectation of changed behavior will increasingly compel you to make the changes. It is amazing how much we are driven to do something if we have told someone else we will, especially if we have announced it publicly. If you promise to have a report finished by Tuesday’s team meeting, and you’ve shared with your colleagues that you will, come Monday night you’ll most likely be finishing up the report (if you haven’t already) in order to face your team in the meeting the following day. You are simply much more likely to do what you say you’re going to do, if only to save face.



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I won't necessarily say that guilt is a good thing, but it can be useful, if only to keep you to the promises you make to yourself about the ways you want to change.

### **Step #2 – Find an accountability partner**

In order to even more strongly induce yourself to do what you say you're going to do, take the first step even further. The second step to keeping your promises is to find someone who will hold you accountable, and even check in with you on your goals. While you may actually be able to ignore any guilty feelings you have if you don't keep your word – it is only an internal, personal sensation – you are less likely to ignore someone who is actively following up with you to see what you have actually done (or not done). Therefore, in order to set yourself up to succeed it is exceedingly helpful to find a “partner in crime” who will hold you to what you say you're going to do, and remind you if you somehow forget.

### **Step #3 – Reward yourself**

While steps one and two are more about “negative” reinforcements, positive reinforcements, such as rewards, can work just as well. These are the reinforcements that are used in successfully training animals, and they can be used just as successfully to train ourselves. If dolphins can be trained to balance balls on their noses and dogs can be trained to jump through hoops, surely by rewarding yourself for each small action, each movement towards a new behavior, each success no matter how small, you can train yourself to hold your temper, listen more carefully, or share positive feedback and compliments more often with your team. Therefore, the third step to doing what you say you're going to do is to find a way (or multiple ways) to reward yourself for any and all behaviors and changes that move you towards your goal. Find something that you look forward to – like the delicious little fish that the trainers slip to the dolphins when they jump high from the water – and give yourself that treat once you've taken an action, remembered to hold your tongue in a heated argument, or even simply placed a phone call that will get you one step closer to accomplishing what you've set out to accomplish.

### **Step #4 – Try chunking**

Even with all of this reinforcement, it can be extremely difficult to change behaviors and attitudes – the goal can just seem so insurmountable. Therefore the fourth step to doing what you say you're going to do is to break your goal down into bite-size, attainable pieces. By chunking your goal into actions you can take (or not take) on a minute-by-minute, daily, or weekly basis, you make it much more likely that you will stick to your goal and achieve what you desire – especially when you reward yourself for the bite-size movement you've taken. Stretch goals can be inspiring, but a goal that seems unattainable is extremely demotivating. “Why bother,” we think as we stay seated on the couch rather than getting up to exercise – perhaps the goal to lose twenty pounds seems unrealistic. “I just can't speak up when I'm in a crowd,” we mutter to ourselves as we sit quietly in a meeting rather than add our thoughts to the discussion at hand – perhaps we'd be more successful if we found a safer space in which to speak up first. When we break down goals into reasonable and doable pieces, we support ourselves to actually achieve what we set out to achieve and do what we say we're going to do.

### **Step #5 – Make it habitual**

One of the easiest ways to change behavior is to make the new behavior a “habit” – something that you’ve done often enough that it feels normal and familiar. Therefore the fifth step to doing what you say you’re going to do is to do something EVERY day. Once you’ve broken your goal down into tiny, bite-sized pieces, make sure that you can bite off at least one piece on a regular, daily (if not even more regular) basis. If your goal is to stay in better contact with friends and family, make sure to place one phone call or send one email each day. If you’ve promised to lead your team more thoughtfully by taking the time to think through what you’re doing, why you’re doing it, and HOW you’re doing it, schedule daily thinking time into your schedule...and make certain you pause at least once every day to ask yourself how you could be more thoughtful with the situation at hand. Go out of your way to intentionally make an absolute habit out of the new behaviors you want to adapt, and it will soon feel uncomfortable to NOT do them.

### **Step #6 – Celebrate**

As we start to take all these steps, we actually start to move in the direction we’ve set out, but we can unknowingly set ourselves backwards if we’re not careful. Because change can be slow and, at times, seemingly painful, it can be easy to lose motivation and give up before we reach our desired goals. Therefore the sixth step towards doing what you say you’re going to do is celebrating your steps along the way. Celebrations can be similar to rewards in that they’re motivating and encouraging, but they are different. A reward is a specific gift you give yourself – a piece of chocolate, a hug from a friend, a chance to enjoy a latte before your next meeting. Celebrations on the other hand are more of an internal mindset. They are the intentional moments when we pause to notice the positive movement, the recognition of a job well done, the “way to go’s” that we can give to ourselves and receive from others. Little celebrations along the way – simple acknowledgements of the work that’s been done, changes that have been made, and promises that have been kept – can keep you challenged and engaged in achieving your goals and in doing what you say you’re going to do.

And don’t celebrate alone! It can be even more effective to find someone else to celebrate with you as well – their excitement and encouragement can continually move you forward (and any accountability or guilt you may feel towards them will continually fuel you as well).

### **Step #7 – Solicit support**

Even with all of the above steps, change can be difficult to manage alone. And while it is great to have someone hold you accountable, it is even more effective to find a true “partner in crime” to work with you and support you. Therefore the seventh step towards doing what you say you’re going to do is to build a support system – be it a friend, colleague, loved one, coach, or all of the above.

People who want to make sure they’ll get to the gym at 5:30 each morning often ask (or coerce) a friend to join them – the guilt of not showing up for the other person acts as fuel, and the camaraderie strengthens resolve (and muscles) through the hardest of workouts. Leaders who want to improve their public speaking skills enlist an associate to offer feedback after a speech (and, at times, hand signals from the back of the room) so that self-defeating behaviors can be

noticed and eliminated and desired changes can be reinforced. Team members who want to speak up more (or less) in team meetings recruit their colleagues to challenge them to take the actions (or inactions) they need to take, and help them celebrate when they succeed. Many individuals who want to truly hold themselves accountable partner with a coach to help them think through situations, brainstorm multiple options, and move forward to do what they say they want to (and are going to) do.

### **Step #8 – Assess your situation**

So often when we try to make changes we don't take the time to truly think through why we're doing what we're doing, what might stop us, and what we need to do (or set up) to be more successful. Therefore the eighth step in doing what you say you're going to do is to assess – to dig down to find out “what's in it for you” to make the change, what's potentially standing in your way, and what you can do to get around any obstacles.

When you know your “why” – what you'll get out of achieving your goals and doing what you say you're going to do – you've unleashed internal and personal motivation to power you towards staying with your stated plan. When you know what obstacles you may face, and especially when you have a plan to move through the obstacles, you've armed yourself to be more successful. With all of this you prepare yourself to do what you say you're going to do, to be who you say you're going to be, and to act in the way(s) you say you're going to act.

### **Step #9 – Schedule it**

Often we claim that nothing changes, or that we don't change, because we simply don't have enough time. There isn't time in the day to exercise. There isn't time in the day to stop and think. There are simply too many crises and immediate fires to put out – and no time for anything else. While this may seem true, it is often merely an excuse. You can use your schedule for you, to have it help you keep your word, to have you rule it rather than it rule you – and this will forward you towards your stated new behavior or change. The ninth step towards doing what you say you're going to do is to schedule – schedule time for your goal, schedule specific actions you will take (and when you will take them), schedule planning, reflecting, and savoring time if necessary. To write down what you plan to do to move you towards your goal and put it in your calendar. To put up sticky notes and task reminders. To do anything you can to use your electronic and paper reminders to remind you of something you have identified as important. Clients who have determined they want to give more feedback to their team members have actually scheduled “impromptu” feedback sessions...and the feedback has happened. Clients who have identified a need to think more strategically for their business and life have scheduled out of the office thinking time...and their strategic approach has increased. Clients who have decided to increase their outreach and networking have scheduled phone calls and email sessions...and achieved their goals for greater connections. Scheduling the time for what you need to do helps compel you to actually do it – to do what you say you're going to do.

### **Step #10 – Forgive yourself**

The tenth and final step towards actually doing what you say you're going to do is a simple step – and an extremely important (and not always easy) step. The tenth step is forgiveness – to be easy on yourself. Be easy on yourself if you don't hit perfection. Be easy on yourself if you take two steps forward and one step back (or even two steps backwards and one step forward at times). Be easy on yourself if you seem to be continuously staying with old behaviors, attitudes, and actions – if you're getting nowhere close to doing what you say you're going to do. As they say, the road to Rome wasn't paved in a day, but it was paved. Deeply ingrained behaviors can be difficult to change...and they can be changed. By choosing not to beat yourself up when you're not achieving all you want to achieve and changing all you want to change, you actually support yourself to keep moving towards your goals – to getting closer and closer to doing what you say you're going to do.

Contrary to what that one extremely honest individual was thinking and feeling when he admitted that he often decided on changes he wanted to make and behaviors he wanted to adapt...and then did nothing, it IS possible to change deeply ingrained behaviors, and it is possible to do what we say we're going to do. It is difficult, but it is possible. By saying it loud, finding an accountability partner, rewarding yourself, chunking, making it habitual, celebrating, soliciting support, assessing your situation, scheduling, and forgiving yourself, you can change your behavior and truly do what you say you're going to do.