



Keystone Habits That Lead to Business Success **By Ann Golden Eglé, MCC** **April 2018**

George is living the good life. He was recently promoted to a leadership position at work and just finished his first marathon. He was a complete different picture of physical and professional health three years ago. At that time, he was 60 pounds overweight, smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, drank heavily and had never held a job for more than ten months at a time.

Melonie finally received her sought-after COO position after ‘six’ previous tries over the past ten years had failed.

Michael, who was about to be fired one year ago, has just been named most valuable leader.

What do all these success stories have in common? Each individual took a hard look in the mirror and asked a few powerful questions.

Who they were at their core? What lives were they creating? How were they impacting others? Were they living the life they had envisioned? What habits had they formed? How were these habits serving them?

A Duke University study showed that on average, 40 percent of our actions throughout the day are habit. In other words, our actions are hardwired in our brains, so we don’t have to think of each step in each action. The challenge is that our brain can’t tell if a habit is good or bad for us.

We all want to change our habits from time to time. The mistake we make is to attempt to change too many habits at once. For example, we decide to get to work early, exercise, cut out sugar and spend more time with family and friends. All are valuable habits for form yet attempting to do all at once is a definite path to failure.

Each of these successful individuals decided to change *just one* habit. George stopped smoking; Melonie stopped watching upsetting news each morning before work that put her in a foul frame of mind that affected everyone with whom she interacted. Self-promoting Michael decided to become a better listener.

In the book, *The Power of Habit*, author Charles Durhigg explains that changing just one habit, which he calls a ‘keystone habit,’ leads to a chain reaction of other positive changes over time.

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There is a three-element habit loop that we all experience daily. We have a 1) cue, 2) routine habit, and 3) reward. For example, Michael’s cue was interacting with someone he wanted to

impress. His routine habit was then to talk solely about himself and his accomplishments. His perceived reward was to gain admiration, thus (in his mind) building relationships.

Our cues and rewards will typically remain the same. So, our key to changing habits is to change the response to the cue. For example, Michael changed his routine response (habit) to the cue of interacting with someone new to asking more questions and listening more deeply. His reward remained the same. He built relationships and gained admiration.

Positive habits that my clients have added or changed, producing remarkable results are:

- **Top '6':** prior to leaving work on any given day, list the top '6' items that are most important to accomplish the next day. Your subconscious mind can then go to work on how to make this happen.
- **First hour at work:** rather than fumbling through emails and their to-do list; eating something unhealthily; gossiping or complaining, they chose to jump right into their Top '6' list. Their 'Golden Hour' then centered around the most important tasks of the day from creating new approaches, to important correspondence, to prospecting.
- **Technology boundaries:** set tech-free-zones during the day to allow freedom to focus on your own thoughts and aspirations. Anyone who has turned their iPhone off during a meal or meeting knows how irritating it is to hear the constant buzz of those who have not, along with the rudeness of those who constantly glance at their devices.
- **Morning Meditation or Exercise.** The benefits of exercise or meditation to begin your day are well documented. While we know this, it's far too easy to procrastinate. This is a commitment to oneself. The rest of the day may be for others. Mornings are for you.
- **Consume 100 ounces water.** Sounds too simple, I know. This is a commitment to oneself that provides nourishment throughout the day. It gives you pause to breathe.
- **Go outside in nature during each work day.** Especially during high stress times when you don't think you have a moment to spare. This provides perspective, emotional centeredness, room for fresh, creative ideas to appear.
- **Weekly goal to meet new people.** Gain new perspectives through constantly expanding your social or professional world to those with whom you don't normally interact.

Other keystone habits that Durhigg recommends in his book are: having family dinners; making your bed each morning; tracking what you eat; developing daily routines; having strong willpower. Durhigg also explains how Procter and Gamble, Starbucks, Alco, the NFL and other organizations changed companywide habits that resulted in immensely increased revenues.

It takes honesty, insight, dedication and will power to change a habit that may not be in your best interest, or in the best interest on those whom you influence.

As you read this article, surely a habit that you have wanted to change has come to mind? I challenge you to make a commitment to yourself to begin that change today.

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