The EAB Daily Briefing

The 7 worst workplace habits—and how to shake them

You can't stop deflecting blame on others, for one

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You're probably guilty of at least one bad habit that's holding you back at work, according to David Maxfield, the vice president of research for the corporate training organization VitalSmarts.

Based on his interviews with hundreds of managers, Maxfield says that 97% of them have at least one habit that is limiting their careers. According to Maxfield, the most common—and detrimental—bad habits in the workplace are:

- Being unreliable;
- Being negative;
- Cutting corners;
- Procrastinating;
- Deflecting blame;
- Refusing to change; and
- Not staying organized.

If you're guilty of at least one—or maybe all—of these habits, workplace behavior experts recommend taking the following steps to overcome the habit and be more successful in your career.

Be honest with yourself

To make any progress in shaking your habit, you need to "be willing to say, 'This is me; I do this sometimes,'" says Maxfield.

If you're uncertain whether any of the habits apply to you, Maxfield encourages you to look for outside opinions. But, he notes, make sure the people you talk to feel comfortable giving you honest feedback. Other studies have found that most people are anxious about giving negative feedback, but criticism can be a powerful tool for improving your career.

Make concrete goals

Once you've identified a habit to work on, the next step is to break it down into concrete goals that are easy to track, Sabina Nawaz writes in the Harvard Business Review. For example, Nawaz explains...
that one of her clients wanted to work on listening better, so the client made a goal to attend at least one meeting each day without any devices.

**Track your progress**

Once you've identified your bad habits and decided on a goal for improving them, both Nawaz and Maxfield encourage you to take careful notes of when you meet your goal—and when you fall back into the bad habit.

Nawaz recommends keeping a simple calendar and noting each day whether you met your goal or not. If you've structured your goal correctly, this should be easy—in the example above, her client knew when he'd attended a meeting without a device and when he hadn't.

**Beware of your bad habits in emails, too**

**Look for patterns**

After taking notes for a few weeks, you may start to identify specific days and circumstances where you end up falling back into your bad habit. Or you might notice that it's time to set a more challenging goal.

Nawaz' client noticed that he successfully attended one meeting each day without a device for several weeks, so he decided to make it two meetings per day, then three. Within a few months, he had made a new habit of always attending meetings device-free (Grenny, *Harvard Business Review*, 7/5/16; Nawaz, *Harvard Business Review*, 2/10; Vozza, *Fast Company*, 3/6).