

Do You Want to Be More Effective?

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Do you want to be more effective? Really? If so, are you willing to change?

Becoming more effective means you will act, and most probably think, differently than you do now. And “different” requires at least a mental and a physical change, and maybe an emotional one.

By the way, you may be thinking differently because of an insight you’ve gained, and “insights” was the topic of my most recent article. (Look back at the August 25th issue of the *Savannah Business Journal*, or look on the archives page of my website. See below for the web address).

If your change is to be intentional (because you surely don’t want random change), you must start by acknowledging the reality of “what is.” For many of us, that’s not easy (though you might think it should be). I know that when my behavior is less effective than I’d like it to be, I quickly rationalize and justify my actions. For example, when my wife asks, “Why are you complaining?” I respond without thinking, “I’m not complaining, I’m just describing what I experience!”

Let’s say I get beyond the façade, and I confess that I really don’t want to complain. To change, I have to examine my typical response, consider alternative options, choose a different approach, and then execute that new behavior the next time a similar situation occurs. That’s a lot!

Further, that’s rarely easy! Why? Because I’m a creature of habit. My patterned response is so deeply ingrained, it just comes out before I have a chance to even consider other possibilities. I have to unlearn my historical, instinctive retort, perhaps analyzing where and how it developed.

Here’s the key. I have to genuinely want to change! I won’t change simply because my wife (or if I’m at work, my boss) wants me to behave differently. In fact, her dissatisfaction with the way I act currently might even subconsciously strengthen my resistance to change!

One more thing that makes the change difficult is that when I genuinely want to change, I expect to flip all the way over to “perfect.” If I mess up again next time, I can be deeply dissatisfied with myself. I’m so disgusted, I berate myself and attack with all kinds of deprecating self-talk. I go into a funk, losing sight of potential future improved behavior because I’m now stuck, paralyzed in my anguish.

Perhaps I need to learn that becoming more effective would occur more easily in small steps than in a single leap from “unacceptable” all the way to “flawless.” It would be better if I celebrate the incremental steps of progress, acknowledging movement toward the objective I ultimately desire.

A colleague with whom I could be completely honest, and who would be completely honest with me, would certainly help. My friend could support and encourage me when I make progress, and he or she could provide independent, frank observations when I’m not even aware that anyone is paying attention. Further, when I get down, my ally could remind me of my forward movement.

Be careful that you don’t minimize the effect of your emotions on your in-the-moment decisions and resultant behaviors. I’ve probably underestimated my awareness of “how I feel” for most of my career. I’ve considered emotions to be of minimal importance. The more I study emotional intelligence, however, and the more I find myself continuing to behave in ways I dislike, the more I question my logical, analytical assessment of situations and my allegedly rational response to them.

I've been very autobiographical and transparent in this article, believing for this topic that "physician, heal thyself" is wise counsel. Though I have the privilege of influencing leaders, I'm human and I'm still learning and growing. I believe, however, that what I've described about becoming more effective is rather universal.

As you've read this article, you've likely read all of the "I" pronouns thinking "Dennis." Now I invite you to go back and deeply consider the "I" pronouns to refer to you. Where and how do you genuinely want to improve? Consider asking those who know you well and work with you daily, "In what ways have you observed that I might become more effective?" They live with your behaviors routinely and are likely the most reliable sensors of your current ineffectiveness.

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