

TAKING INITIATIVE

Competency Development Guide

Taking Initiative Defined:

Work behavior characterized by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach, and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in pursuit of a goal.

SOURCE: The Concept of Personal Initiative by Doris Fay and Michael Frese

People who have initiative and make things happen are highly valued in the workplace. But, what is it? And how can you develop it?

Nothing happens until you make it happen, until you take action. Putting things off until you can get around to it, or until conditions are perfect, almost always results in failure.

Many organizations say they want their employees to take more initiative and be more innovative. Leaders long for their employees to be proactive and creatively take calculated risks to improve organizational performance.

However, those same organizations and leaders rely on organizational systems to drive performance - systems like performance reviews, merit increases, and bonus structures - that often promote behaviors that are not in alignment with risk taking, innovation, and taking initiative.

To really shift employees' mindset and encourage employees to take initiative, the process starts at the top with messages from leadership that growth is important—and that every employee can participate in it—and then is supported with processes and procedures that welcome and enable that participation.

One process is coaching. It promotes greater ownership and commitment on the part of employees.

In addition to coaching, real engagement in the work itself comes as a result of the trust you place in employees to take the right action using the resources at their disposal.

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The “it’s not my job” attitude is more than just an employee career killer; it’s a symptom of a much larger organizational problem. Workers who simply do their jobs and nothing more do not contribute to company growth.”

SOURCE: [Six Ways to Empower Employees to Take Initiative](#) by Joel Farfinkle, [Talentmgmt.com](#)



6 Ways Managers Can Empower Employees to Take Initiative

Tell employees what they want and why.

Be a role model.

Authorize teams to make decisions.

Provide a positive, encouraging environment.

Recognize efforts even if they fail.

Reward success.

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Supporting Behaviors

Self-Awareness: This is a critical foundational trait, characteristic and set of behaviors common among people who take initiative. People who understand their own strengths and weaknesses, seek feedback and understand that criticism can be helpful are people who are usually driven by a desire to improve themselves. When we are blind to the truth about our own ability, it's nearly impossible to learn new things.

What are their strengths? What are the challenges? How do they react to challenges and how can they overcome them? The chart below outlines reactive vs. proactive language outlined in the classic book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic," by Stephen R. Covey.

Reactive Language	Proactive Language
There's nothing I can do.	Let's look at our alternatives.
That's just the way I am.	I can choose a different approach.
He makes me so mad.	I control my own feelings.
They won't allow that.	I can create an effective presentation.
I have to do that.	I will choose an appropriate response.
I can't.	I choose.
I must.	I prefer.
If only.	I will.

Identify and Support Employees Strengths

Identify employee strengths, supported by specific examples. Try to highlight examples that reflect a variety of assignments performed under varying circumstances throughout the year. Also try to reflect different strengths, especially those reflecting growth and development since the time of hire or the last review.

Relationship and Trust Building

Take time to understand what challenges your direct reports are facing and express genuine interest in the direct reports' development. Show patience, model openness, follow through on promises and lead by example.

Adaptability: This is the extent to which people are comfortable with change and new ways of doing things.

Results Oriented: This is a set of behaviors and motivations that define people who thrive in challenging situations, and through resourcefulness and perseverance, deliver results.

SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

To identify competency skill gaps consider outlining key supporting behaviors that are important in your organization.

You can assign a basic Likert scale to each behavior statement (examples outlined below) and have the employee and the employee's manager rate proficiency.

CARING ABOUT DIRECT REPORTS:

Monitors workloads and shows appreciation for extra effort.

Treats direct reports equitably.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:

Initiates and participates in casual conversation.

Develops rapport with a variety of people.

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Development Activities and Suggestions

Setting Clear and Measurable Goals

Collaborate with direct reports in the goal-setting process. Consider using the S.M.A.R.T. method: setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Explore the current business priorities and main tasks of your direct reports and how new initiatives will support these priorities and tasks.

Challenging

Help your direct reports explore new possibilities. What are they currently doing, or not doing, that is getting in the way? What is the cost of not making a change?

Giving Feedback in an Engaging and Inspiring Way

Providing feedback is an important part of the assessment process because it promotes insight and self-awareness.

Recommended Resources from The BizLibrary Collection

Q&A: Delegating and Empowering

Motivating Employees: Creating an Inspiring Workplace

Using Emotional Intelligence (Part 3 of 8): Improving Your Self-Management

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SUPPORTING BEHAVIOR STATEMENTS

EMPOWERING OTHERS:

Allows others to make mistakes and take risks to learn and grow.

Gives others the freedom to have control of their tasks and duties.

Provides guidance and support for others as they take on new challenges.

MANAGING PERFORMANCE:

Adjusts work activity and desired outcomes based on changes in business strategy.

Establishes means of measuring performance and objectives.

RESULTS ORIENTED:

Seeks and gives performance feedback to others.

Pays attention to quality and quantity of performance.