

These 5 Bad Habits Are Hurting Your Business – Here's How to Break Them



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In the old days, when I was much younger and inexperienced in business, I often found myself getting defensive when someone disagreed with me. I would say, almost automatically, “You’re not listening to me!” I finally saw this knee-jerk reaction was a habit I needed to break; the other person usually was listening but just didn’t see things my way. I changed that bad habit by turning it into a question – “Why do you think that way is best?” – which made all the difference in the tone of the conversation.

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Negative habits equal negative performance

Acting without thinking, as I did in those situations, is the very definition of habitual behavior. When the habit is negative, it can do great harm to work performance, especially when you don't see the damage you're doing because you're so accustomed to engaging in the behavior. You may not even think it's a habit. A few minutes of social media won't hurt, right? Maybe not – until it turns into a few hours.

I never like to see anyone doing anything without thinking, but the damage done by bad habits – to the one practicing them and those they work with – is worse than just the fact you're engaging in rote action. I have seen first-hand how bad habits negatively affect people. Wasting time leads to sloppy last-minute work. Bad attitudes drag everyone down.

I've found the best way to fix a bad habit is to replace it with something positive, like I did with my "You're not listening" complaint. Asking the other person to explain their point of view shows respect and replacing "You're not" with "Why?" turns a negative attack into a positive inquiry. (And, getting the other person to defend their opinion can also lead them to realize you were right after all!)

Before you break a bad habit, of course, you must admit you've developed one. Here are five bad habits that could be hurting your business and advice on how to help yourself break them.

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Wasting work time on social media

This is almost a redundancy; unless you're the social media manager for your company, any time spent on Facebook, Instagram or other networks is a waste of time. The problem is that we often think we're "just going to check" these social networks – the next thing we know, we're still online and the day is half over.

Break it: Set a time for social media consumption and stick to it; set a timer if you need to. Turn off all the alerts and stay offline in meetings. You might want to put your phone in another room if you're on Zoom, so you don't get distracted.

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Interrupting

It's disrespectful and you can lose essential contributions from the person you interrupt. The problem starts when we are thinking about what we're going to say in response to the speaker, instead of listening to them and then answering.

Break it: Wait until the speaker finishes and then offer your opinion and response. Or, for a day or two, you could try saying nothing at all until someone asks what you think.

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Multi-tasking

We used to think this was a superpower. "Wow, she's so productive!" Now we know better. Our brain needs time to readjust as we switch from one task to another.

Break it: Do one thing at a time and do it well. Give yourself

a chunk of time – at least an hour, maybe two – to focus on the tasks of each project, and don't let the other projects interrupt.

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Skipping lunch

Another “macho” business habit that's been debunked. If you're so busy you can't take a break to refuel, you're doing something wrong. This is one of several health-related habits to break: drinking to excess, smoking (in any amount), eating poorly, getting no exercise. You wouldn't let your laptop or cellphone keep going without recharging; your body and mind won't be any good either if you neglect them.

Break it: Take the off time you're allotted, have a nutritious lunch and relax. Take a couple more breaks during the day to walk. You might even solve that business problem when you get away from your desk!

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Complaining

Negativity drags you down and takes everyone with you; positivity leads to success. We have a manager who used to think he was always being honest and transparent by sharing bad news. This is terrible leadership, as the negativity spreads and gives everyone room to complain. We are changing this, and he now has a better understanding of the effect his attitude was having.

Break it: Before sharing bad news or a negative opinion, ask yourself if your listeners need to hear it. Will it make anyone's job easier or their day better? If you must share it, just give the facts and don't make it sound worse (or better)

than it is.

Now, because I believe in positivity, I'll leave you with a *good* habit you should cultivate. Be a "good finder," as the author and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar used to say. It's easy to get caught always finding the mistakes in yourself and others but make a habit of looking for the good in everyone, too.

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