

Achieving Results

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Persistence vs. Insanity

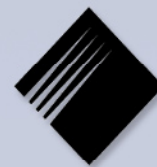
We've all probably heard and even repeated the quote "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results." I know I have. But it wasn't until I sat down to write this article that I did some research to find out who actually said this.

According to Wiki.answers.com, this quote has been attributed to Benjamin Franklin (I hadn't heard this before,) Albert Einstein (yes, I've attributed it to him,) and an old Chinese proverb. (I've attributed it to the old Chinese too.) However, the quote is first found in writing in the book *Sudden Death* by Rita Mae Brown (1983) with a variant, "Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results," appearing in the *Basic Text of Narcotics Anonymous* which was copyrighted in 1982 and later published in 1983.

I find this to be interesting in and of itself. Not knowing the truth, somebody down the line misattributed the quote. It was repeated by another and before long the falsehood was written down, put on the Internet and repeated again and again until it is verified as "truth." But I diverge – just a little.

My executive coaching process is based on helping my clients break negative habits and replace them with positive behaviors. Their negative habits weren't intentionally developed; rather they happened quite by accident just as a falsehood repeated over and over becomes a "truth."

But why would anyone develop a negative habit? The answer is simple: they receive a reward for the negative behavior. At the root of all negative habits are positive benefits—however short-lived—that serve to reinforce the negative behavior. Repeated



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Are you disappointed with your results and wondering whether your persistence is really a form of insanity? Black Diamond Associates can help. We work with clients to help them reassess where they are, where they want to be, whether they are on track and then execute the plan to realize their vision. Our holistic approach brings a new perspective to old problems.

While we're not licensed to practice psychiatry, we can help you deal with organizational insanity. Give us a call.

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"Never let your persistence and passion turn into stubbornness and ignorance."

~ Anthony J. D'Angelo

often enough, the behavior becomes a habit and is repeated without conscious thought but rather as a result of certain stimulus. Stimulus, response, stimulus, response and the habit continues.

Good habits, on the other hand, are developed with more conscious thought because the rewards are typically more long term while in the short term there are costs. Consider the examples below:

	Short-term Cost/Benefit	Long-term Cost/Benefit
Bad Habit - Overeating	Satisfied taste buds, relieved boredom	Overweight, unhealthy
Good Habit - Exercise	Sore muscles, tired	Physical fitness, energized
Bad Habit – Snapping at your spouse	(S)he backs off, stops annoying you, or does what you want	Damaged relationship
Good Habit – Listening to others	Delay in your immediate agenda, run late,	Greater understanding, new ideas, better relationships
Bad Habit – Interrupting others	Your idea is shared, you feel smart, important, or in control	Others avoid you, you hurt others’ feelings or morale
Good Habit – Saving money	Can’t buy everything you want	Financial stability

Organizations, like people, can develop bad habits that impact their long-term success. For example:

	Short-term Cost/Benefit	Long-term Cost/Benefit
Bad Habit – Any business is good business	Revenue	Operating inefficiencies, marketing/brand confusion, poor product/service quality, bad reputation in market
Good Habit – Honoring core values	Saying “no” to certain opportunities, cost to follow through on commitments, increased time to fill vacancies	Favorable market reputation, customer loyalty, increased employee productivity and morale
Bad Habit – Misrepresenting capabilities	Make the sale	Damaged customer relationship
Good Habit – Process Improvement Practices	Investment in defining, documenting and measuring processes	Increased process effectiveness and efficiency

Whether or not we like to admit it, our bad habits are reinforced by some immediate self-serving motive. More often than not, positive habits can have delayed rewards which required conscious thought to overcome the negative immediate costs. This is where persistence comes in.

If you Google the definition of persistence, you will find: “Firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition.” Persistence involves resolve, steadfastness, dedication and purpose. It certainly may be considered insane to continue on a course that leads to the wrong outcome. On the other hand, if the long-term goal is clearly what you desire, staying the course is an appropriate response.

The difference between persistence and insanity is found in your long-term goals where progress can be measured by the obstacles you overcome and your advancement toward goal achievement. The key then to persistence is keeping your eye on the desired outcome and measuring your progress toward your goals.

In the February, 2011 issue of *Achieving Results*, we highlighted the qualities of the *Level 5* leader, as defined by Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*. According to Collins, a *Level 5* executive “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.” It is that second characteristic—professional will—that reflects the *Level 5* leader’s ability to establish the vision for the organization and accept nothing less.

Too often, an alternative form of insanity prevails. That is, when problems or obstacles arise in the pursuit of goal achievement, people question the goal instead of solving the problems! The result is wasted energy, poor morale, increased confusion, lack of trust and failure to make progress.

Treating organizational insanity becomes a function of having clear goals, solving problems as they arise and measuring results so you know if you are on track. Simple as it sounds, we’ve all done business with crazy companies before. Is yours one of them?