

How Intentional Are You?

We walk through every part of our day doing nearly everything by rote; automatically without thinking. Overall this is very helpful — we are leaving so many things to muscle memory and our powerful subconscious that we are able to navigate our day with some amount of success. Without all of this help, our conscious minds would overload, and we wouldn't accomplish anything at all.

So how does all this automatic stuff happen?

It happens because at some point in a given situation we found something that worked, or at least something that didn't get us killed and our subconscious said, "OK, there's the pattern, there's the approach, there's what to do in that situation." And with that, our subconscious takes over and builds a habit.

The problem is that once this happens without a conscious effort or thought, or something to question that programming, we never change that approach.

For something like tying our shoes, that is probably fine.

For something like brushing our teeth, it might be fine, based on how we got started and whether or not that was a good pattern to follow.

For something like how we set priorities, communicate with others and a ton of things we do at work every day, it could be far more problematic.

Enter intentionality.

When we are intentional, we do things less by rote or habit and more fully in our conscious mind. Here is an example.

We get promoted to leadership, and we follow the examples of those we have seen before us. Even if those approaches are suboptimal, and even if perhaps we didn't like them, in the absence of different input, those examples become our initial response. Then 6 months, 16 months or 6 years later, we wonder why we aren't getting the results we might desire.

In order to change the patterns of behavior, we must have something else to consider and then consciously work to do it differently. In other words, to change a habit or a programmed response, we must notice the situation and be intentional (in our conscious mind) about the response we take.

I work very hard at being more intentional more of the time; especially when dealing with communication, coaching and other interpersonal skills — in other words all the stuff that matters most as a leader. It is hard, and I don't always succeed. And when I do succeed in stopping the subconscious pattern, I still don't always make the right choice.

Intentionality is great, but it doesn't guarantee we make the right choice, only that we made an informed aware choice in the moment. More intentional choices make us more aware for the future, and hopefully we improve our odds as we go.

Here is what I know for sure:

As I have become more intentional in all parts of my life, I have become healthier, happier and more successful. And I know that as I continue to improve in overcoming the auto-responses of my subconscious, I have an even better chance of creating new patterns that serve me as a business owner, leader, parent, husband and human being.

Being more intentional gets us better results.