



SHIFT Your Way to New Habits



Your brain works in amazing ways to institute habits. Habits are great when you need to execute everyday tasks. Imagine having to learn how to wash your face and brush your teeth every morning. That would be like living in the movie *50 First Dates*! Our brain is hardwired to help us remember things that we do routinely so that we don't have to think about every small detail. At work, you use the habit part of your brain all the time. When you do something like opening and reading your email - you are unconsciously competent and you don't have to look up instructions or ask for help.

But, remember back to a time when you didn't know how to use a computer - when it wasn't a habit. You metaphorically cleared a path in your brain so that you would remember bits and pieces each time you navigated the PC and its software. Over time, you created a good sort of "rut" in your brain which holds the computer habit and now you are really proficient and can check email while talking on the phone and having a cup of coffee. Sound familiar?

Now, let's look at the opposite extreme - when habits are bad. The hardwiring I spoke about above is the reason habits are so hard to change. The "ruts" that you've created when you react to bad situations at work have to be filled in with new information which is more helpful. Have you ever tried to lose weight or quit smoking? If you have, then you know how quickly your brain remembers the old habits. Creating new habits involves getting rid of the old ruts, but more importantly replacing them with new ruts which are helpful.

You can use the *SHIFT* steps to help you respond more positively to annoyances at work like a bothersome coworker or complaining customer. The habitual responses you learned from your work beliefs and past experiences formed the old patterns that you will now release. With practice - and distance from the old habits - you will see great results and start to live the good life at work.

Here's how it works:

Aggravating Situation: A coworker calls out sick and you know you'll have to pick up the slack - or you are the manager who has to realign resources to cover the person.

S: Stop and breathe

By consciously stopping yourself before you go into "habit mode" - you teach your brain to create new ruts. The breath helps you focus and sends oxygen to your blood. It also keeps you from saying something you might later regret because you can't breathe in and talk at the same time!

H: Harness Knee Jerk Reactions

In this case, your knee jerk reactions might be to "kill the messenger" or to start bad mouthing the employee who called out. You might immediately feel sorry for yourself and start complaining about all the work you'll have to do today. Put a stop to these reactions before they get you in trouble.

I: Identify and manage negative emotions

Your negative emotions might include feeling sad, angry, exasperated, resentful... The list can go on and on. Take a few minutes to recognize what you are feeling. Then, and only then, will you be able to manage the emotions. I'm not suggesting you just put on a happy face. I'm suggesting that you manage the emotions through some of the options you will work on in the next step.

F: Find new options (come up with as many as you can before deciding what new path to take)

Make a list of what you absolutely have to get done today
Ask your coworkers to divide up the work load of the missing employee
Notice a couple of things you are grateful for
Read an inspiring quote
Complain for 2 minutes (set a timer) and then get back to work

T: Take one positive action

You get to pick. Just choose to create a new "rut" that will be more productive and achieve better results.

When you *SHIFT* on a regular basis, you'll create the hardwiring your brain needs for new habits which will put you on the road to Professional Paradise. Have fun!

Vicki Hess