Initiating Action

Taking prompt action to accomplish objectives; taking action to achieve goals beyond what is required; being proactive.

Key Actions

- **Responds quickly**—Takes immediate action when confronted with a problem or when made aware of a situation.

- **Takes independent action**—Implements new ideas or potential solutions without prompting; does not wait for others to take action or to request action.

- **Goes above and beyond**—Takes action that goes beyond job requirements in order to achieve objectives.

Quick Tips

- Identify and fill any gaps (in rationale, details, planning, etc.) a project might have.

- Teach yourself to use new tools or try new procedures that will make your work easier and more enjoyable; share your experiences with others.

- Document how your ideas save the organization money, bring in new business, or attract potential customers.

- Volunteer to help others or to take charge of action items.

- Look out for obstacles that could derail your work; devise plans to remove them.

- Minimize the risks of implementing an idea or solution by building support for it among your colleagues.

Developmental Activities

**Self-Directed**

- Look for opportunities to solve problems affecting your department that others might normally address.

- Think of an area in your personal development that needs improvement. Create an action plan to enhance your performance as well as a time frame by which to complete your plan.
• Record all problems you experience on the job in the next month. Note the type of problem, its cause (if known), how it was handled, and the effect it had. At the end of the month, determine which problems you could have prevented or resolved. Use this information to address problems (or potential problems) in the future.

• Look for chronic problems that have been ignored and work on generating solutions. Set aside time to experiment with your ideas and record the results so they can be shared with others.

• Instead of looking for excuses not to act (e.g., “That’s not part of my job description.”), think about the new skills and opportunities you’ll be exposed to.

• Take ownership of problems and their solutions. Don’t wait to be asked. If you see something that needs to be done, do it!

• Volunteer to help others when appropriate.

**Partnerships**

• Periodically ask your leader and coworkers for feedback on your initiating-action skills.

• Ask a person who is skilled at initiating action to share tips and techniques.

• Gather information from others that will equip you to make intelligent decisions when problems arise.

• Have coworkers give you a list of work-related problems they have experienced in the past two or four weeks. Instead of trying to solve each problem separately, look for trends. Either independently or as a team, brainstorm ways to address these trends.

• Talk with your leader about the barriers you encounter when trying to initiate action (e.g., bureaucracy, politics, etc.). Discuss how to eliminate these barriers.

**Targeted Assignments**

• Volunteer for tasks and projects beyond your normal responsibilities.

• Offer to join (or establish) a process action team whose goals include improving work processes and eliminating recurring problems.

• Offer to learn a new task or process, then share the information with the rest of your department.

**Workshops**

Look for a workshop that addresses the following:

• Fostering an environment, attitudes, and conditions that yield improved performance.

• Originating action to achieve results.

• Looking for opportunities beyond your specific area of responsibility.

• Developing a proactive attitude.
Readings

Books

This practical handbook lists the strategies people need to move forward in their career. The authors maintain that recognition at work requires taking independent action and going beyond the expected. They also describe how to take action in various situations.


In this handbook from the Essential Managers series, the authors describe the steps involved in taking action quickly to achieve results. Especially useful are the chapters titled “Choosing to Act” and Making Things Happen.”


The author writes about the nine strategies he discovered in his research that are commonly used by star performers. The first of these nine strategies is initiative. Kelley uses real-life examples to explain the steps followed by employees who initiate action.


Through the use of case studies, examples, and exercises, this guide helps readers learn how to initiate action. Part I describes how to overcome real or imagined obstacles that might keep someone from taking action. The remainder of the book details how to take initiative and how doing so can make a difference at work for both the individual and the company.


In this short, easy-to-read book, Nelson addresses the importance of initiative in the changing workplace. He describes techniques that enable the reader to reach beyond what is expected and become a more valuable employee.

Articles

Although this article focuses mainly on how to bounce back from a business setback, the steps listed include the need to act quickly to recover and move on to the next goal.


The author discusses how executives must be flexible, adaptable, and proactive to survive in today’s competitive business world. He emphasizes the importance of initiating action to stay ahead of competitors.

Citing several polls, the author maintains that initiative is the most important attribute for getting ahead at work. This article lists several practical ways to help people become more proactive and, as a result, take more initiative.


The author discusses his “five levels of initiative”—a list of employee behaviors from the lowest initiative (“wait until told”) to the highest initiative (“act on own”). Although the article focuses on how managers can develop their employees’ initiative, it also illustrates how managers can keep employees from initiating action.