

DILIGENCE

What is Diligence?

Diligence refers to the consistent demonstration of the ability to apply yourself to your work with tenacity, purpose, determination and the intent to give each task your best attitude and effort.

Why is it important to be diligent?

The first and most important distinction for us to make up front is that diligence doesn't automatically mean 'work hard', as it's not necessarily about how many hours you put in or driving yourself to unrealistic deadlines and expectations.

Instead, diligence is about being focused, organised and committed to achieving your own objectives and to meeting the expectation of others in line with any agreements that you have made.

A diligent person is generally very clear about their vision and purpose and, therefore, they are driven to put in the necessary attitudes, energy, effort and actions.

For some, it's a matter of 'work ethic' which dictates a level of responsibility to perform at a level in line with a reputation they want to have while also respecting the needs of others, including employers, staff and customers.

To be diligent, one must understand the objectives and the strategies required to achieve them, have a list of activities required, know how to prioritise well, be good at monitoring one's own performance and be able to maintain an effective level of focus on a relatively consistent basis.

The outcomes of such behaviour is that objectives are achieved, activities are completed in the necessary order, others' expectations are more easily negotiated and honoured, and such things as procrastination and laziness have less of an overall effect on the productivity requirements.

It can also be argued that if someone is diligent in their professional life, they have the capacity to be diligent in their personal life; and that these areas of focus can work exceptionally well to allow the person to have a sense of balance overall. When this is done well, the person can also be a role model to others so supporting them in achieving similar outcomes for themselves.

When we look at related terms such as 'due diligence' we see that the benefits from being thorough, organised and using critical thinking to make wise decisions, supports the concept that diligence is about putting in the 'right kind of effort' to achieve the desired results.

Our personal and professional lives seem to have ever increasing demands in terms of productivity, or 'getting things done' and often we feel the pressure is on to 'get more done in less time'. Therefore being diligent and applying critical thinking, and good organisation skills, can help us achieve this new level of expectation.

So diligence isn't just working hard, it's working wisely.

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of diligence?

There are a number of variables which could get in the way of someone either being diligent in the first place or being able to sustain a necessary level of diligence:

- Not being clear on vision, purpose or objectives
- Not being focused on achieving the objectives, even when they are known
- Not believing in the vision and/or purpose, and therefore not being inspired to achieve it
- Not understanding the priorities of the objectives, strategies and tasks
- Not knowing how to accomplish the necessary work, and not asking for help or support
- Not organising schedules well (notice that 'time management' as a term isn't being used because it is impossible to manage 'time', however it is possible to perform well at 'schedule choices management').
- Procrastination (note that everyone does this to some extent as there's often something a bit more interesting to do in any given moment).
- Laziness (although a harsh sounding term, there are times when it is a common sense observation that the behaviour being exhibited is simple laziness).
- Giving up because 'it's all too hard'

Tips for being diligent

- Develop a vision, mission and values statement. Be exceptionally clear about what drives you. You may also want to establish a list of supportive behaviours, that when demonstrated consistently, would achieve your vision. Having such clarity could support you in sustaining diligence over a period of time.
- Understand your objectives/expectations and the objectives/expectations of others well. If unsure, get clarity.
- Develop excellent habits around schedule choices management. By doing so, you'll be able to comfortably say 'yes' to new opportunities when they fit in well, and to be able to say 'no' respectfully when it is appropriate to do so.
- Set daily performance targets about what you want to have accomplished by the end of the day. Ensure these are reasonable targets to reach and, at the end of each day, celebrate what you have achieved. This can increase your confidence in your ability to focus and deliver, and is a process which can be easily replicated.
- Practice the skill of 'getting started' to curb the temptation to procrastinate. Procrastination can often be beaten simply by taking the first step of the activity.

Characteristics and/or Behaviours of a person who is diligent

- Has clarity about their own goals
- Has clarity about the expectations of others
- Is driven
- Has a reputation of having a strong work ethic
- Gets things done
- Meets deadlines
- Negotiates new deadlines if the previous one is unrealistic and/or if new variables are present
- Takes care of their own needs, including rest, to ensure they are at a low risk of burnout
- Responds in a timely manner to correspondence and phone messages
- Is well organised
- Has the ability to organise others well and can often give good advice on organisation skills

Evaluate your own perspective on diligence

- What does 'diligence' mean to you? How do you recognise the attitude AND behaviours when you see them in yourself and/or others?
- What are your strengths in terms of being diligent? How do you leverage these and for what purpose?
- What are your opportunities for improvement in terms of diligence? What specifically could change and who would benefit from the change and how?
- What reputation do you have in terms of diligence and/or work ethic? How did you earn this reputation, regardless of whether it's positive or negative? How do you feel about this reputation?
- What feedback have you received from others about whether you are diligent or not? What have you done with that feedback?
- What's the greatest lesson, personally and/or professionally, you've learnt regarding diligence and work ethic? What did do with, or how to you apply that lesson?

Improve your degree of diligence

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Seek out a person (or persons) who you believe consistently demonstrate “diligence”. Interview them and ask them questions about their own development process to get to where they are now. Consider that this is a mentoring session where it may be expected that you will make a commitment to this person at the end of the interview and that it’ll be necessary for you to follow through.
 - What’s one thing you could do to improve how you’d rate your own diligence that this person does?
- Ask for feedback from your colleagues, staff, vendors, partners and customers about how they see your professional attitudes and behaviours regarding your work ethic and diligence. Give them permission to be honest, acknowledge and thank them for their feedback and make commitments to them about what you will do with the feedback. You may need to prepare yourself for the possibility that you’ll be asked to make agreements with various stakeholders so that they can be more involved, be listened to and that their needs will be met more consistently in the future.
- Consider getting coached or mentored on this area (or any other area you’d like to develop) and work with the coach to determine the actual habits which are effective and those which are negatively impacting your performance, diligence and/or work ethic. If you’re not sure where to start to look for a coach or mentor, the High Ideals member directory includes members who offer these services, which may be a good place to begin your search as you’ll know that those practitioners have also achieved the High Ideals credentials.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of diligence, the following resources may be worth considering.

Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources, the list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- <http://www.goodcharacter.com/ISOC/Diligence.html> - This is a resource site for tools to teach young people about developing good character, including being diligent. Although this may seem like a programme for children, there is value as an adult to look at such topics from a very basic foundation and then expand from there. The site includes questions, discussion points and activities for further self-exploration.
- **It's Called Work for a Reason! Your Success is Your Own Damn Fault** – by Larry Winget- This is a no holes barred look at what it means to work for a living and earn one's pay. Larry looks at management styles, employee attitudes, customer service and a wide range of things all focused on challenging you to be as amazing as you know you are. The author acknowledge that people may not like ever part of the book and yet challenges them to put their whining aside for a few moments to see if they get the real message here. A very interesting perspective on work ethic that is practical, common sense and relevant to today's busy work environments and heightened employer and customer expectations.
- **Work Like You're Showing Off: The Joy, Jazz and Kick of Being Better Tomorrow Than You Were Today** by Joe Calloway. The author shares that the key is that success is an inside job, meaning that it starts with the right attitude and mindset and that "showing off" can be a very useful mindset to have. One of the benefits of such a mindset is that it generally means a large number of people receive value from the effort you choose to put in and that can only be a good thing.
- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else. Consider checking out the resources under the heading of "Time Management" as a useful place to start.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as "personal accountability" and you'll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

Author and editor acknowledgement

High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Noel Posus for his work on this document. Noel Posus is the Director of Training, Research and Development for High Ideals as well as a professional coach, educator and author. To find out more about Noel, please visit his profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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