

## DRIVE TO IMPROVE

### What is drive to improve?

**Drive to improve is the demonstration of the commitment to improving on or enhancing your last best effort.**

### Why is drive to improve important?

Having a drive to improve is about acknowledging the benefit of on-going personal and professional development and committing to it being an ever-present ingredient in your life. It is about progress, not perfection, i.e. it is a dynamic, on-going drive, rather than being a one-off effort to reach a specific state after which efforts cease. In this way the drive to improve could be seen as an aspect of our approach to life.

The drive to improve comes from the recognition that improvement is always possible and beneficial, as it brings enrichment and depth, so it is worth the effort. When you take on a strategy of continual improvement, then you open yourself up to opportunities to refine and improve your skills that you would likely miss if you operated without this strategy.

The fact is that no moment is ever the same, nor are people, or the services you provide to clients, therefore there are always going to be different ingredients and considerations each time we do something. By building up a habit of reviewing, reflecting on and self-evaluating how we delivered our service in each instance, we can identify areas where we can improve on a particular aspect of that service or service delivery. In this way we do our part in creating a different experience the next time that will give us different learning and improvement opportunities.

It is also personally satisfying to take ownership of doing things to the best of our ability and continually improving our personal best. And it is a way of ensuring we are offering quality services. This often results in us feeling more fulfilled and satisfied by our work and this has the knock on effect of shifting our whole outlook towards the positive.

Also very significant is the fact that customers will notice the difference between service providers who have an ethos of continual improvement and those who simply get the job done to the same level every time. Customers are far more likely to come back to the service providers who are putting in the effort it takes to continually improve, not only because of the higher quality service they receive each time, but also because of the respect that they feel when their input is used as feedback for us to improve our product or service.

### Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of drive to improve?

Sometimes we slip up in the area of drive to improve because we think it will take more effort and more energy than we have available to make the improvement. This can be due to a tendency towards perfectionism, for example, or due to us feeling overloaded by time poor. So this is where it is important to remind ourselves that progress is what matters; progress for the sake of enriching our experience of life, and the lives of those with whom we interact.

It's not about reaching the moon in one leap – it's not even about the destination - it's about taking the next step on the journey and gauging that step so that we meet our needs for satisfaction while not overextending ourselves. The drive to improve is best not seen as an all or nothing phenomenon. Like many areas of life, moderation provides the optimal outcome.

How much we stumble or succeed in the area of the drive to improve will likely be closely related to how constructively or not we receive feedback. For example, if we immediately jump to a defensive position when receiving critical feedback, then we are actually trying to invalidate the feedback before we've actually heard and considered it. And so the potential opportunity for improvement has slipped through our fingers. This is especially the case if the person giving the feedback has made the effort to deliver it constructively.

It is indeed the case that sometime people are clumsy in how they deliver feedback, not making a clear distinction between us and the behaviour or process that they are actually criticising. So we need to be clear within ourselves that feedback is always about our actions or behaviours, as opposed to being about who we are. If we do not separate our person from our behaviour i.e. if we take things as a personal attack, then we are liable to totally miss golden opportunities for improvement as we'll be far too busy trying to invalidate the person that the feedback has just come from.

At the base of how we deal with feedback is often a core belief about our ability to improve in any given area. If our self-confidence is low in some areas, then we are far more likely to receive feedback in these areas as criticism and not use it constructively. So not being aware of areas of low self-esteem and low self-confidence will make us more likely to react negatively rather than respond constructively to feedback. If we know where are weaker points are, we can take extra care when receiving feedback in these areas.

Some of us might have the point of view that there is nothing more to learn or that we have done what we think is required of us. For example we may excel at a particular task or skill, in the work that we do, and see no room for improvement. The problem with this position is that it can often lead to boredom, lack of fulfilment and stagnation. So, if we are indeed expert in our area, we could harness the drive to improve by setting our self the challenge of learning how to be a mentor, so passing on our expertise, while learning about the craft of mentoring. Or we could choose an area relevant to our work, in which we are not skilled, and work on learning in that area so that we broaden our expertise.

The problem with deciding we've 'arrived', and have no need to improve, is that, like any living organism, we are either growing or withering – there is no such thing as standing still. And it is probably therefore sensible to go for growth!

### Evaluate your own drive to improve

- What areas are you currently working on improving – either or both professionally and personally?
- What areas are you aware of that you have a sense would be beneficial for you to work on improving?

- What measures do you have in place to assess your progress and improvement?
- Do you actively seek feedback from other people about how you are performing and which areas they consider you could make improvements in?
- Do you have a 'personal development plan'? E.g. a set of goals and a plan of action that you follow in order to develop your personal strengths. This is a reflective process that assists you in recognising areas in which you would like to develop further. For example you may want to have more confidence in public speaking, in which case, joining Toastmasters might be step number one on your action plan. Whether your personal development plan is on paper or not you probably have some idea of things you might like to do; whatever form it is in, rate your personal development plan from a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is virtually non-existent, to a 10 where you have clearly stated goals with an action plan and steps worked out in order to achieve each goal.
- Do you have a professional development plan? Similar to the personal development plan above, this means that you have a set of goals and a plan of action in place that you use to "develop your professional skill set". Again this is a reflective process that is used to evaluate the areas in which you would like to develop further. For example you may have recognised that you would benefit from developing a skill to enhance the quality of the work you do, for example it could be how to promote products and services or how to implement a new computer programme for your business, and you have enrolled or are undertaking the relevant training. As you did above, rate your professional development plan from a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is virtually non-existent, to a 10 where you have clearly stated goals with an action plan and steps worked out in order to achieve each goal.
- Ask your self some concrete questions and be honest in your answer, such as:
  - Am I willing to look at where I can strengthen my personal and or professional skills/assets?
  - Am I willing to do take action to strengthen these areas?
  - Am I willing to seek out someone who can help me with this?
  - Do I believe I am worthy of giving myself the opportunity to development?
  - Can I see the benefits of harnessing a drive to improve?
- Think of someone you look up to as a role model who inspires you in the area of their drive to improve. How would you rate your own drive to improve in comparison to this person (if they were a 10, what would you be)?

### Improve your drive to improve

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

- Place a picture or photograph of the person who is your role model in the area of their drive to improve and place it somewhere prominent to constantly remind and inspire you of the positive qualities and aspects you are striving for.

- Write your own personal development plan; this is your personal commitment to which area or areas you are going to apply the drive to improve. Come up with specific actions to take, starting with small actions, such as making sure you return phone calls to friends more promptly if that is an area where you know there is room for improvement. It is important not to over-face yourself, but rather to slowly build up momentum and habits of continual improvement.
- Write your own professional development plan; this is your personal commitment to the areas of professional development you are going to focus on. Again come up with specific actions to take, starting with small actions, such as following up key emails with a phone call to check if any further information is required. Again remember that it is important not to over-face your self but rather to slowly build up momentum and habits of continual improvement. Whatever areas you focus on will enhance your skill set and will help with your confidence.
- Acknowledge that you may need assistance with putting these development plans together. Remember that you are investing in yourself and this is always a worthwhile investment both personally and professionally.
- Remember that having a drive to improve does not mean that you or what you do is not good enough, rather it is the driving force that can take you from where you are to where you want to go.
- If it feels appropriate, seek the services of a professional who will be able to help you develop in these areas.

## Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of drive to improve, the following books, courses and consultants 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.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.
- <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 “sustainable decision making” 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 Narelle Holland for her work on this document. Narelle is the Victorian State Membership Manager of High Ideals, a life coach, consultant and trainer and assessor. To find out more about Narelle, please visit her 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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