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COMPETENCY

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For Your Improvement

**A Guide for Development
and Coaching**

**FOR LEARNERS, MANAGERS,
MENTORS, AND FEEDBACK GIVERS**

5th Edition

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1 Action Oriented

The world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation.

The hand is the cutting edge of the mind.

Diane Arbus – American photographer

Unskilled

- ☐ Slow to act on an opportunity
- ☐ May be overly methodical, a perfectionist, or risk averse
- ☐ May procrastinate
- ☐ May not set very challenging goals
- ☐ May lack confidence to act
- ☐ May know what to do but hesitates to do it
- ☐ May not be motivated; may be bored with the work or burned out

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to use as a substitute for this competency if you decide not to work on it directly.

SUBSTITUTES: 9,12,16,18,32,34,36,43,50,52,53,57,62

Skilled

- ☐ Enjoys working hard
- ☐ Is action oriented and full of energy for the things he/she sees as challenging
- ☐ Not fearful of acting with a minimum of planning
- ☐ Seizes more opportunities than others

Overused Skill

- ☐ May be a workaholic
- ☐ May push solutions before adequate analysis
- ☐ May be non-strategic
- ☐ May overmanage to get things done too quickly
- ☐ May have personal and family problems due to disinterest and neglect
- ☐ May not attend to important but non-challenging duties and tasks
- ☐ May ignore personal life, burn out

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to work on to compensate for an overuse of this skill.

COMPENSATORS: 11,27,33,39,41,43,47,50,51,52,60,66

Some Causes

- ☐ Burned out
- ☐ Hang on to too much
- ☐ Not motivated; bored
- ☐ Not passionate enough about your work
- ☐ Not self-confident
- ☐ Perfectionist
- ☐ Procrastinate
- ☐ Slow to grab an opportunity
- ☐ Won't take a risk

Leadership Architect® Factors and Clusters

This competency is in the Energy and Drive Factor (IV). This competency is in the Focusing on the Bottom Line Cluster (J) with: 43, 53. You may want to check other competencies in the same Factor/Cluster for related tips.

The Map

One mission-critical competency for today and the future is action orientation. The need for speed and agility in the marketplace means that those individuals and organizations who hesitate will be overtaken by those who don't. Most successful senior managers count action orientation as one of their strengths. The hesitation mainly comes from perfectionism, procrastination or risk avoidance. All cause people to delay taking quick and timely action.

Some Remedies

- ☐ **1. Procrastinator? Get an early start.** Are you a lifelong procrastinator? Do you perform best in crises and impossible deadlines? Do you wait until the last possible moment? If you do, you will miss some deadlines and performance targets. You may be late taking action. Start earlier. Always do 10% of each task immediately after it is assigned so you can better gauge what it is going to take to finish the rest. Break the task down into smaller pieces. Commit to doing a piece a day. Don't even think of the larger goal. Just do something on it each day. One small step for a procrastinator, one giant step forward to being more action oriented. *More help? – See #16 Timely Decision Making and #47 Planning.*
- ☐ **2. Perfectionist? Curb your appetite for certainty.** Need to be 100% sure? Perfectionism is tough to let go of because it's a positive trait for most. Worried about what people will say when you mess up? When every "t" isn't crossed? Recognize your perfectionism for what it might be—collecting information to improve your confidence and avoid criticism, examining opportunities so long you miss them, or waiting for the perfect solution.

Try to decrease your need for all of the data and your need to be right all the time slightly every week, until you reach a more reasonable balance between thinking it through and taking action. Also, you may hold on to too much of the work, fail to delegate, and are becoming a bottleneck preventing action around you. One way to overcome this is to begin to believe in others and let them do some of the work for you. *More help? – See #18 Delegation and #19 Developing Direct Reports and Others.*

- **3. Struck by analysis paralysis? Balance thought with action.** Break out of your examine-it-to-death mode and just do it. Sometimes you hold back acting because you don't have all the information. Some like to be close to 100% sure before they act. Anyone with a brain and 100% of the data can make good decisions. The real test is who can act the soonest with a reasonable amount but not all of the data. Some studies suggest successful general managers are about 65% correct. If you learn to make smaller decisions more quickly, you can change course along the way to the correct decision. You may examine things to death because you are a chronic worrier who focuses on the downsides of action. Write down your worries, and for each one, write down the upside (a pro for each con). Once you consider both sides of the issue, you should be more willing to take action. Virtually any conceivable action has a downside, but it has an upside as well. Act, get feedback on the results, refine, and act again.
- **4. Not sure if you can do it? Build your confidence.** Maybe you're slow to act because you don't think you're up to the task. If you boldly act, others will shoot you down and find you out. Take a course or work with a tutor to bolster your confidence in one skill or area at a time. Focus on the strengths you do have; think of ways you can use these strengths when making nerve-wracking actions. If you are interpersonally skilled, for example, see yourself smoothly dealing with questions and objections to your actions. The only way you will ever know what you can do is to act and find out.
- **5. Don't like risk? Start small.** Sometimes taking action involves pushing the envelope, taking chances and trying bold new initiatives. Doing those things leads to more misfires and mistakes. Research says that successful executives have made more mistakes in their career than those who didn't make it. Treat any mistakes or failures as chances to learn. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Up your risk comfort. Start small so you can recover more quickly. Go for small wins. Don't blast into a major task to prove your boldness. Break it down into smaller tasks. Take the easiest one for you first. Then build up to the tougher ones. Review each one to see what you did well and not well, and set goals so you'll do something differently and better each time. End up accomplishing the big goal and

taking the bold action. Challenge yourself. See how creative you can be in taking action a number of different ways. *More help?* – See #2 *Dealing with Ambiguity*, #14 *Creativity*, and #28 *Innovation Management*.

- **6. Lost your passion? Focus on your interests.** Run out of gas? Heart's not in it anymore? Not 100% committed? Doing the same sort of work a long time and you're bored with it? Seen it all; done the same tasks, made the same decisions, worked with the same people? To make the best of this, make a list of what you like and don't like to do. Concentrate on doing at least a couple of liked activities each day. Work to delegate or task trade the things that are no longer motivating to you. Do your least preferred activities first; focus not on the activity, but your sense of accomplishment. Change your work activity to mirror your interests as much as you can. Volunteer for task forces and projects that would be motivating for you.
- **7. Moving, but in the wrong direction? Set better priorities.** You may not have the correct set of priorities. Some people take action but on the wrong things. Effective managers typically spend about half their time on two or three key priorities. What should you spend half your time on? Can you name five things that you have to do that are less critical? If you can't, you're not differentiating well. People without priorities see their jobs as 97 things that need to be done right now—that will actually slow you down. Pick a few mission-critical things and get them done. Don't get diverted by trivia. *More help?* – See #50 *Priority Setting*.
- **8. Not sure where to get started? Get organized.** Some don't know the best way to get things done. There is a well-established set of best practices for getting work done efficiently and effectively—TQM, ISO or Six Sigma. If you are not disciplined in how you design work for yourself and others, and are late taking action because of it, buy one book on each of these topics. Go to one workshop on efficient and effective work design. *More help?* – See #52 *Process Management* and #63 *Total Work Systems (e.g., TQM/ISO/Six Sigma)*.
- **9. Afraid to get others involved? Polish your sales pitch.** Taking action requires that you get others on board. Work on your influence and selling skills. Lay out the business reason for the action. Think about how you can help everybody win with the action. Get others involved before you have to take action. Involved people are easier to influence. Learn better negotiation skills. Learn to bargain and trade. *More help?* – See #31 *Interpersonal Savvy*, #37 *Negotiating*, and #39 *Organizing*.
- **10. Not committed? Consider a shift.** Maybe you are giving as much to work as you care to give. Maybe you have made a life/work balance decision that leads you to a fair day's work for a fair day's pay mode of operating. No more. No less. That is an admirable decision. Certainly one

you can and should make. Problem is, you may be in a job where that's not enough. Otherwise people would not have given you this rating. You might want to talk to your boss to get transferred to a more comfortable job for you; one that doesn't take as much effort and require as much action initiation on your part. You may even think about moving down to the job level where your balance between quality of life, and effort and hours required of you at work are more balanced.

Some Develop-in-Place Assignments

- ☐ Manage a group through a significant business crisis.
- ☐ Take on a task you dislike or hate to do.
- ☐ Take on a tough and undoable project, one where others who have tried it have failed.
- ☐ Resolve an issue in conflict between two people, units, geographies, functions, etc.
- ☐ Relaunch an existing product or service that's not doing well.

There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.

John F. Kennedy – 35th President of the United States

Suggested Readings

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Index

The index is designed to include key development themes that a manager or learner might want to explore in greater detail. Each entry directs learners and coaches to a chapter and remedy number that is pertinent to the theme. For example, if a learner looks up “Action Oriented,” he/she will see entries that pertain to “getting organized, 1.8; perfectionist, 1.2; and procrastinate, 1.1”. If getting organized is the issue at hand, the learner can go to chapter one and read remedy number eight. Please note: Index entries in italics are not alphabetized.

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FYI® For Your Improvement

5TH EDITION

This easy-to-use reference has become the standard for leadership development at thousands of companies around the globe.

Written by two of the world's most respected thought leaders on competency-based leadership development, this book can help any motivated adult with a development need.

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- **Enhanced remedy titles** – pinpoint developmental needs by posing a quick diagnostic question and action step.
- **Additional causes for stallers and stoppers** – illustrate how overuse or lack of certain skills can create noise.
- **Competency connections** – illustrate how various competency combinations tie to the most common development needs and career goals.
- **Developmental difficulty matrix** – shows how difficult it is for a typical person to develop any of the 67 Competencies.
- **Updated development plan** – organize your plan on an easy-to-use two-page spread.
- **Updated suggested readings** – hundreds of the best, most current books and articles aligned with each chapter.

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