



# PROACTIVITY

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## 1 THE OBJECTIVES – WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

In this session, you will learn:

- About the meaning and importance of the proactivity;
- About the “Circle of influence”;
- What it means to be proactive and initiative at the workplace.

## 2 WHAT IS PROACTIVITY

You are proactive when you take responsibility for your life and actions and you do not look for excuses in certain circumstances or people. Being responsible (response – able) means you are able to respond to any situation. You decide for yourself what you are doing in each situation - what approach and attitude are you going to have. **Your behaviour is a function of your decisions and not your conditions.**

On the other hand, reactive people are affected by their physical environment (for example, if it rains, they are in a bad mood) and by their social environment (for example, if others praise them, they feel well, if they criticize them, they become defensive). While proactive people are driven by internalized values and do not let the environment control them, reactive people are driven by feelings, circumstances, conditions and their environment.

The simplest explanation of proactivity is the aptitude to do things before you need to do them (for example: you service the car regularly before it breaks down). If you respond to situations and people the way you choose, if you do things timely and with your own initiative, you will experience greater peace of mind and satisfaction.

### EXERCISE

Think about the last time you were affected in a negative way by your environment (circumstances or people). Could you react differently? How?

## 2.1 Five key behaviours to demonstrate proactivity

There are simple tips (5 P's) to demonstrate more proactive behaviour:

- **Predict** – Proactive people learn to anticipate challenges and events and are rarely caught by surprise. They learn how things work; they look for patterns and routines as well as daily practices. They do not expect past experiences to be predictors of the future, they use creativity and logic.
- **Prevent** – Proactive people foresee potential obstacles that others find unavoidable and look for ways to overcome them before they become overwhelming problems.
- **Plan** – Proactive people predict long-term consequences and plan what they can do today to ensure success tomorrow.
- **Participate** – Proactive people get involved finding solutions. They do not just react to the actions of other people but are engaged, take initiatives and contribute.
- **Perform** – Proactive people take timely and effective actions and do not procrastinate. They hold themselves accountable for their decisions.

## 2.2 Taking the initiative

To take initiative means you have the power or opportunity to act or take charge before others do. It is in human nature to act and not to be acted upon. Not only have you the ability to choose your response to certain circumstances, but also the ability to create circumstances. Being initiative means you are recognizing your responsibility to make things happen.

There is an enormous difference between individuals who exercise initiative and those who do not. To grow personally and professionally and develop new skills, you need to be initiative – you need to put responsibility on yourself to act and not wait for somebody or something else to move you away from stagnation.

## EXERCISE

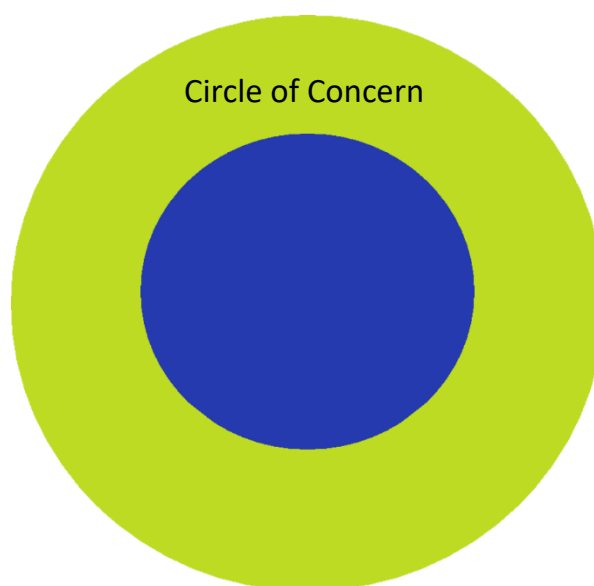
Reflect about your educational path (your last formal or informal education). Have you taken the initiative choosing the school/course based on your preferences and goals or it has been “imposed” on you by parents/other people, proximity to home or other circumstances?

### 3 FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT THINGS: CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

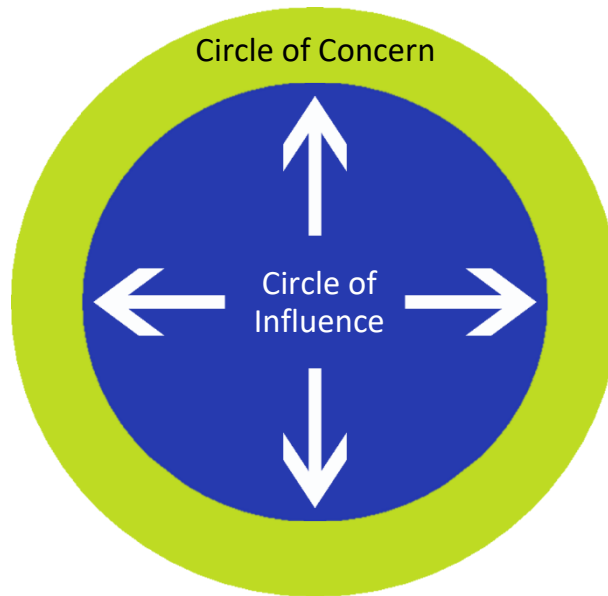
You can become more self-aware about your degree of proactivity by looking at where you focus your time and energy. Everybody has different concerns: your health, your children, challenges at work, conflicts in the world, environment... Let us separate the things on the list of your concerns in two categories:

- **Circle of concern** – All the things in your life (personally and professionally) that affect you, but you cannot do anything about them and have no control over them (other people’s opinions and decisions, weather, traffic, price of gas...).
- **Circle of influence** – All the things in your life (personally and professionally) that you have absolute control over and can do something about (your attitude, behaviour and actions, things you say...).

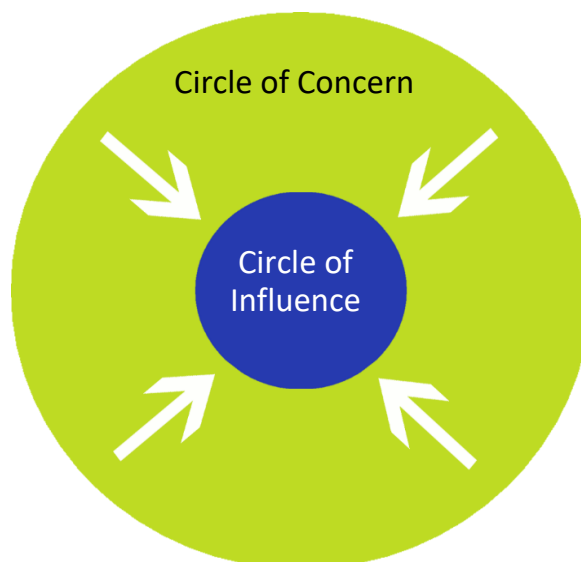
Where do you focus most of your time and energy, in a circle of concern or in the circle of influence?



**PROACTIVE FOCUS** – You focus your energy in the Circle of influence by working on things you can influence. By working on yourself instead of worrying about conditions, you are able to influence the conditions. Positive energy enlarges the Circle of influence:



**REACTIVE FOCUS** – You focus your energy in the Circle of concern, empowering things in the circle to control you. You are not taking initiative to enforce positive change. Negative energy reduces the Circle of influence:



### 3.1 How to expand the Circle of influence

To expand your Circle of influence, you have to commit to taking small consistent actions in your Circle of influence. Your focus and energy have to go to things in your life that you can control and influence, and away from the things in your life you have no control over. To make that shift and lasting behavioural changes, you must:

- **Be open to change** – When you are trying to implement your goals and resolutions, you need to be aware that change is needed in your life and be open to change.
- **Be intentional** – To make lasting behavioural changes, you have to be intentional in the actions you take.
- **Be aware of your self-talk** – You need to use proactive language to enhance your potential and possibilities (for example: “I choose” instead of “I cannot”; “Let look at the alternatives” instead of “There is nothing I can do”).
- **Have clear personal and professional goals** – Not knowing enough about your goals can be a big challenge to face when trying to achieve them. You have to take the time and educate yourself on the process before you begin.
- **Be able to deal with setbacks** – You cannot afford to give up after one or two setbacks when making efforts to improve. There is no such thing as flawless and effortless positive change. You should not dwell on setbacks. You should reward your small victories when progressing.

#### EXERCISE

Think of an experience you might encounter in the near future where, based on that experience, you would behave reactively.

Review the situation and think how you could respond proactively. Picture the experience with a proactive response in your mind.

## 4 PROACTIVITY AT THE WORKPLACE

Proactive employees are highly appreciated at the workplace. Proactive employees have the ability to control the situation by causing things to happen instead of waiting to respond after things happen. Proactive employees are able to be actively engaged instead of just observing passively.

Organizations can be proactive. They can combine the creativity and resourcefulness of proactive individual employees and create a proactive organizational culture. Organization does not have to be at the mercy of the environment and circumstances, but can take initiative to accomplish its set mission and the shared values of the employees involved.

### 4.1 The proactive skillset

Being proactive involves a complete set of skills, cognitive and behavioural. We can identify the six essential components of the proactive skills. The proactivity lies in the ability to combine them all together:

1. **Understanding the big picture** – The ability to use broad business acumen and create a holistic view of the professional environment.
2. **Situational awareness** – The ability to enhance understanding of present circumstances.
3. **Focus on the future** – The ability to create a clear vision with desired results and needed actions.
4. **Strategic foresight** – The ability to predict opportunities, challenges and outcomes.
5. **Intentional action** – The ability to act timely and thoughtfully to achieve set goals.
6. **Self-evaluation** – The ability to assess your behaviour and results and make appropriate adjustments.





## 4.2 How to improve your initiative and proactivity

Being more proactive at the workplace will increase your chances to achieve set goals and to feel more satisfied with your career. Besides being aware of acting in your circle of influence, there are other simple ways to stand out being more proactive at work:

- **Make a career plan** – Having clear career goals can help you gain the confidence to take more initiative at work and to better recognize opportunities for skills development and achievements.
- **Develop team mentality** – Seeing yourself as a team member rather than an individual will show others that your objectives and initiatives are not motivated only by personal achievement.
- **Be prepared for opportunities** – Challenges and opportunities can come your way unexpectedly and you need to be prepared to successfully tackle them.
- **Share ideas for improvements** – If you are well prepared and aware of your job, you will more likely come up with ideas to improve it. You should participate in discussions and share your ideas about the possible improvements.
- **Ask for feedback** – Do not wait for your boss to give you an appraisal or criticism but take initiative by asking a simple question “What can I do to improve?”. Actively seek out the information on how to improve at your job.
- **Network** – Connect with people from different departments. Networking will give you more visibility and opportunities.

- **Be organized** – You can manage time and tasks better to accomplish goals when you are organized. Being organized also makes you more clear-headed and less stressed out. This way you are more open to recognize new opportunities.
- **Follow up** – Having a habit of following up on things (emails, invitations) and people (co-workers, customers) will keep you informed and more alert for future opportunities.
- **Grow in your workplace** – It is important that your job is interesting and fulfilling and offers opportunities to grow. Being proactive, you are able to seize those opportunities better.

### EXERCISE

Think about your career goals and draft your personal career plan. When applying for jobs, think how the job position can contribute to your career goals and what initiatives you can take at the workplace to enhance your plan.

## 4.3 Making commitment

The strongest manifestation of proactivity is making commitments to yourself and to others, as well as your integrity to those commitments.

You show commitment at your workplace by bringing positive energy and initiative, which will manifest with good collaborations and job well done. How you can demonstrate the commitment:

- **Being professional** – You are punctual and prepared, you respect company's property and policies, and you respect dress code, office rules, and co-workers. You show dedication by delivering extra service, help other co-workers, work extra hours when needed.
- **Putting customers first** – You strive for customer satisfaction, always having in mind that your work can affect customers, directly or indirectly.
- **Being a team player** – You are contributing and proposing solutions in team tasks. You cooperate well with co-workers and take up a leadership role in a team if needed.

- **Being highly motivated** – You keep yourself and co-workers motivated to work well. You encourage others to strive for excellence.
- **The balance** – Practicing healthy balance between personal life and work shows commitment to both, your well-being and business.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Being proactive does not mean you are aggressive and pushy, or you do something before somebody else does. Being proactive means you are aware of your responsibility and ability to choose how you are going to act in certain situations. You are able to respond in a positive manner.

When you decide to shift your focus from reactive to proactive behaviour, you choose your actions. However, you need to be aware while you are free to choose your actions; you are not free to choose the consequences of these actions. For example, you can decide to treat the customer well, but you still cannot decide if the customer will buy your product or not.

There are going to be times when your actions, although positive, will lead to consequences you will not want or like - these are mistakes. You need to realize that your past mistakes are all in the Circle of concern; you do not have any power over them anymore. **The proactive approach to mistakes is to acknowledge them immediately, correct and learn from them.** This way they will not have any power over you, instead you will be empowered again. This is how you turn a failure into success.

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