

# 8 ways to stay proactive



It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor there is one thing we all have in common. It's what we call 'poverty mindset'. Poverty mindsets keep us all from fulfilling our amazing potential. How is that? Our life is a real story, the issue is simply who has got the pen? If we don't have the pen to write our own life story then someone else does.

Another word for "having your own pen" is "proactive". Proactivity is the core muscle for living a life. Your life. Not someone else's. In Stephen Covey's words: 'Your life doesn't just 'happen'. Whether you know it or not, it is carefully designed by you. The choices, after all, are yours.'

If we are living an unconscious life then the many little choices that shape each day will go past undetected, but proactivity is living the conscious life where we know what the story is that we want to write and we make sure we write it.

If proactivity is the core muscle of living, then how do we exercise it? How do we get it fit? How do we keep it fit? Here are 8 ways we can do that

1. Have a story to write for your life, your work, your family, your friendships or your community. Being proactive means to find out what that story is. Never worry that your first answer to that question is 'I don't know'. All learning starts with "I don't know", so start the work of mining your own dreams, hopes, aspirations, values to work out what story you do want to write. Where do you want that enterprise to be in one year from now? - What will the story be that you want told about it? Where do you want your character to be in twenty years time? – What is the story you want told about you? Our story is within us, in needs detecting, like a detective doing the hard work to follow the clues and find out the story. And it needs to be a story that means something to us, something that we feel compelled about, convinced about, have some passion and energy about – otherwise it won't get written. Test out your story by asking yourself 'on a scale of 1 – 10 how passionate do I feel about this story?'. If it's less than 8 or 9 then ask yourself, why? What's missing? What would take that score up to a 10?

2. Build daily actions around that story you want to write. If you stood in the future and imagined the story was being written and asked yourself 'what actions did I take to write that story?' and then write down every single action you had taken, you will have a list of things you can do each day. Just pick a few a day – write that letter, make that phone call, read that chapter of a book, visit that friend, take that hour for quiet planning – by taking one or more actions every single day you will be developing your proactive muscle. If every day you take an action that moves you one step towards your story being written then you don't need to worry that your choices each day are leading you nowhere – because you know that each action is leading you somewhere that you want to be. Always have your eyes on the horizon of your desired story while have your feet firmly planted on the solid actions of every day. This is how stories get written.

3. Keep momentum on your daily actions. Like any runner, you get tired muscles after the initial burst. That's the time its important to say to yourself that 'building any muscle requires some stretch and discomfort. The pain or discomfort is a good sign, so keep on with these daily actions". The longer you keep a momentum of proactivity the more it becomes a way of life. One of the enemies of momentum is procrastination. Putting difficult things off until another day. A day without proactivity is a day without developing that muscle and it gets unfit again, so the key is firstly do at least one thing rather than no thing, when you feel like procrastinating. Secondly when dealing with procrastination eat the Greens first. Do that one thing you don't want to do and it will reward you with energy and momentum that you are making this story happen. The third way to deal with procrastination is the mantra of proactivity, which is "Act, don't wait; act, don't react". Sometimes we want to wait until we feel right or feel good or motivated or energised or anything other than what we feel right now. Don't wait; Act. Always do something now. Keep on exercising the proactive muscle every day.

4. Learn to live on your front foot not your back foot. If I'm on my front foot I'm ready, my energy is set for action not inaction, I am anticipating, I am focused. If I'm on my back foot then I will always be disadvantaged. When an opportunity or a crisis occurs it will take all my energy to just shift my momentum into a forward movement. Being on the back foot sometimes feels like the easier place to live but actually it demands more energy.

5. Find the gap between stimulus and response. When something happens to us – a stimulus – there is always a choice about how we respond. The best response we can choose is the response that takes us one step closer to writing our story. When people are locked into a reactive way of living they don't see the gap between stimulus and response, they just react and we know it's a reaction because they say things like 'you made me do that' or 'you made me feel that'. No one can make us do anything we don't chose to let them do if we are proactive, so with everything that happens to us each day, take a micro moment of pause and find that gap to chose what is the best response for your story. Responsibility simply means that we have all got the ability to respond, to find the gap and make the wise choices.

6. Mountains are normal in life. Difficulties, obstacles, up-hill seasons, challenges are just part of the tapestry of life; they are normal. But we need to educate our own minds that they are normal otherwise we always see them as intruders to the normal. We are upset with the difficulties and feel they shouldn't be there and it isn't fair that they are there. When we truly know that these things are normal that our focus is on learning how to deal with the normal in tow particular ways. Firstly, we learn how to be problem solvers. Secondly we learn how to be creative thinkers. The two go together. Our brains have billions of neurons that can create and almost infinite set of possibilities if we learn to use what inside of us. We start with saying 'I don't know' then we ask ourselves 'ok, if I did know what would I do?', or 'what would so and so do in this situation?' or 'who could I phone to get some ideas from?', or 'who is an expert in this area?' or what are the 10 craziest things I could do about this if I wasn't filled with fear?. Our brains are ready for problem solving and creative thinking.

7. Work on what you can influence rather than what you can't. When we get stuck in life we often have a traffic jam of thoughts and emotions that feel like an impossible wall in front of us. This traffic jam is often made up of the things that we can't influence (someone has died; the job has ended) from the things we can influence (I can write a new CV; I can phone an old friend up for a chat). To be proactive means we don't try and put energy into the things we cannot change cannot influence, but rather put energy into what we can influence. If you imagine your feeling of what you can influence is like a circle that sits with a larger circle of things you cannot influence, then we need to keep on growing that inner circle because if we don't it just becomes smaller and smaller and we feel less influential, less powerful, less effective, less of ourselves, less energized and more reactive and more like a victim. The real art is looking at those things we say we cant influence ("there are no jobs going right now") and look a little more closely to see if there are things that I can influence ("let me phone my friends and see if they know of any jobs or anyone I could talk to" and "let me get my CV

prepared in this quiet period” and “I could volunteer at a local company to keep my skills and confidence growing” and “let me ask someone to help me identify all of my transferable skills to see if I could apply for a new kind of job” )

8. Shape your language to support your story. We talk to ourselves and to others all of the time but what we often don't pay attention to is the language we use. There is proactive language and there is reactive language. “I can; I will; I'll take responsibility; its up to me; I can do this; I'll find a way” creates a very different energy and motivation than ‘its always their fault; I cant; its not fair; they always do this to me”. Language shapes action. Languages shapes mindsets. We need to learn to use proactive language to ensure that we are energized and focused and mobilized to be proactive in writing the life story we want to write.

**Bear in mind:** Its worth knowing that every virtue has a shadow side and proactivity is no less guilty. What is the shadow side of proactivity? Anxiety. When we are anxious that things aren't happening, that others aren't doing what we think they should be doing or even (if you are their boss) what they are supposed to be doing, then we project that anxiety onto others. We think we are just embodying pro-activeness but we are actually embodying fear. When we project our fears and anxieties onto others around this issue of being proactive they don't hear it as a call to greater proactivity, they more likely hear it as “you don't trust me”.

