



LEADERSHIP insights

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Practicing Patience

I am that person who repeatedly hits the elevator button when the door doesn't open immediately. I re-click web links if they take more than a second to open. As I was standing in a checkout line recently thinking of ideas for this newsletter, I found myself steaming up at the person ahead of me slowly counting exact change (though I'm happy to report I caught myself and had a good laugh at my own expense).

We tell people it's a personality trait, and it feels like hardwired identity. Saying "I *have* no patience" makes it sound like it's something I could go get but choose not to-and that is really quite accurate. **Impatience is a choice and a behavior; therefore, we can choose differently if we want to.**

Why should a leader think about becoming more patient?

- ✓ **For your health.** The cost of impatience is mostly to those who are impatient. The upshot of three reports in the last 10 years on the impact of impatience from the *Journal of Biosocial Science*, the *Journal of American Medical Association*, and *Science Daily* was summed up by an NPR story as "Impatience makes us tense, fat and broke."
- ✓ **For your employees.** We want the best performance from people. We can get compliance ("I'll do it") when we pass on our pressure, but can we get engagement ("I'll do it with commitment, excellence and passion")? Do you motivate with a nudge? "I believe you can do this, you can dig a little deeper; I'm in your corner." Or does it feel more like impatient pressure to the employee? "I've got my doubts about you; you might not be fast enough or good enough."



Want to work at lengthening your fuse?

Be an actor. Put yourself in situations that you know will make you impatient and ACT like a patient person. There is science behind "fake it till you make it" as a change strategy. ([Learn more here](#) about how this works). Find the longest line at the grocery store and wait in it. While waiting, focus on breathing calmly, making a mental list of people who helped you that day, whose lives you have impacted that day, something good about each of your employees.

Tell a new story. Our actions when impatient (sighing, fidgeting, getting red in the face, feeling irritated, holding our breath) are not as automatic as we might think. Just like conflict situations, impatient behaviors originate in the stories we tell in our heads. "Don't these people know what they are doing? This computer is a piece of &^+.\$#@! Nothing ever works out for me!" What might be an alternate back story that could change your perspective?

Ask what matters most right now. Is it really most important to get the work done fast/your way, or is there more value in gaining your employee's trust that you are for them? Sometimes quickest does matter most, but if that is always your demeanor, employees will feel only pressure and not support.

Does your behavior serve you? Once you decide what matters most, look at your actions to determine if your behaviors match that. At any given moment ask yourself if what you are thinking or doing is serving you and/or your employees to achieve what matters most.

Patience does not mean passivity. Being more patient doesn't mean lowering your standards, giving someone 1,000 chances, or forgoing deadlines. It's more about the "how" than the "what" of the work we do and ask others to do. Sometimes feeling impatient with someone indicates we have not been as clear or direct as we need to be. Maybe in an effort to appear patient, we communicated with less urgency, but inadvertently left them in the dark as to the real needs.

Start by being patient with yourself. Or not. Impatience is not *all* negative, but if you are feeling ill effects from it-or your employees are-it may be time to ask if the personal costs of your impatient drive are outweighing the benefits and make a course correction.

NEXT BOOK STUDY:
Wednesday, November
6th, 2013, 12:00 noon
– 12:45 p.m. The book:
[Lean In - Women, Work
and the Will to Lead](#) by
Sheryl Sandberg. You don't
have to be a woman to
participate! Click on the
book title above to get right
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