



Instructor Weekly Messages

Self discipline has always been one of those elusive character traits that your parents, coaches, or teachers have tried to instill in you for as long as you can remember. Sometimes you had it and other times you didn't. To help you build self-discipline in the workplace, consider the following ten tips:

1. Just do it. Consciously decide that you really want to be someone who practices self-discipline in your attitude and ethics. Let your desire to achieve self-discipline motivate you to make good choices. Say to yourself, "I am going to play by the rules." Make a personal commitment to develop and bullet-proof your personal ethical code of conduct. You must really want it. As long as you require outside intervention to stay ethical, you won't develop self-discipline.

2. Learn the rules. Clarify what you will and will not do. Educate yourself so you won't make ignorant mistakes. Rules, policies, regulations, and standard operating procedures can be overwhelming. But you must resolve that you will never make an ethical decision without knowing what the rules are. Become comfortable asking your supervisor, legal counsel, or ethics office for help. They will appreciate that you took the time to ask before jumping into an ethically uncertain situation.

3. Be accountable. Accept responsibility for your behavior. Don't blame others for your unfortunate actions and decisions. How many times have you seen a cover-up only worsen an ethical crisis? The extent of your personal damage control should be, "I'm sorry. I take full responsibility for my actions and I will make it right." That is what most people want to hear. Taking responsibility shows honesty of character, which is a rare and valuable commodity in the workplace.

4. Practice. Self-discipline is something you can teach yourself. No matter how carefully you plan to live an honest, disciplined life, you won't get out of the starting gate without actually doing something. Self-discipline is not a spectator sport. It requires numerous cycles of practice, failure, and success. Look at the personal obstacles you have overcome in the past and realize that doing the right thing requires you to step-out and stand-up.

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5. Eliminate harmful habits. If you tend to stretch the truth, cut it out! If you use company equipment, supplies, or facilities for personal use, stop it! If you interpret company policies to meet your needs, don't do it anymore. The list of ethically bad workplace habits goes on and on. We all have some angle, a scam, or semi-ethical behavior that pushes the envelope. Whatever they may be, put an end to the harmful habits immediately.

6. Set and complete goals. There is nothing more satisfying and rewarding than achieving a hard-earned goal. Ethical goals can be, "When I feel tempted to stretch the truth, I will be factual." "When this person puts me in an ethically uncomfortable position, I will stand-up for the truth." The act itself of completing a goal empowers you and gives you courage to do it again and again.

7. Do what you say you will do. Finish what you start. Stay on task. There may be no greater measure of your character than the evidence that you are (or are not) a man or woman of your word. Dependability is an invaluable asset in the workplace. It shows ethical honesty.

8. Ignore peer pressure. It's easy to be ethical without the negative influence of others. You can't escape ethical conflicts with your peers at work. Every job (no matter how isolated) involves working with others. Even the most homogeneous environment will have some level of moral and ethical diversity. Peer pressure can be the most difficult challenge to your personal ethical values. You must learn to stick to your principles and take the knocks that come with it.

9. Do activities that enhance your self-discipline like exercising, sports, or practicing a musical instrument. The fact is, attaining self-discipline in one area of life will translate to other areas of life as well. Achieving self-discipline in one area reprograms your mind to know what it feels like to say "No" to the easy way out.

10. Don't give up. Moral and ethical values are not skin deep. You simply can't walk away from them when times get tough. Many things in life are negotiable, but your principles are not.

The personal rewards of building strong ethical character are well worth the journey. The benefits go far beyond your business at work and will transcend to all areas of life.

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