



Establishing Success Habits for Leaders and Organizations

Urgent message: High achievers across industries and professions all share a common trait: the ability to leverage the power of habit to ingrain positive behaviors that lead to success. Hence, urgent care operators that can cultivate great habits in themselves and their teams effectively lay the foundation for a thriving operation.

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The urgent care model is one that is dynamic, fast-paced, and multifaceted, such that it requires highly competent professionals at the helm for the business to thrive. As such, managing the many and varied aspects of the day-to-day operation, interacting with patients and vendors, and managing clinical and administrative teams takes focused, organized, and well-prepared leaders.

And though high achievers of this sort might vary in their educational backgrounds and training, they typically share a common trait: an embrace of the immense power of habit, and an understanding of how effective habit is in shaping desired behaviors. Indeed, if you study successful people from all walks of life, you'll find that invariably they've learned to cultivate and reinforce habits that lead to success. Thus, urgent care leaders would do well to partake in a close examination of how success coaches, business leaders, and other high achievers wield the power of habit, then cultivate great habits throughout their organizations.

The Power of Habit

The American Journal of Psychology defines a habit as "a fixed way of thinking, willing, or feeling acquired through previous repetition of a mental experience." Basically, behavior patterns that are repeated consistently become imprinted upon the neural pathways of the brain, such that the link between the context and the action becomes increasingly stronger with each repetition. Eventually, the behavior becomes nearly auto-



matic through a process called *habit formation*. For context on how the concept of habit is viewed historically, consider a few famous quotes about the power of habit:

- "We are we what we do repeatedly. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit." – Aristotle
- "Repetition of the same thought or physical action develops into a habit which, repeated frequently enough, becomes an automatic reflex." – Norman Vincent Peale

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- *“Good habits are the key to all success. Bad habits are the unlocked door to failure.” – Og Mandino*

In our own lives and careers, we’ve all experienced how poor habits can keep us and others stuck and unfulfilled. Likewise, we’ve witnessed how those who adopt and reinforce excellent habits ascend to incredible heights in business, athletics, entertainment, and academia. In fact, motivational speakers and coaches the world over attest to the remarkable power of habit, with renowned success coach and entrepreneur Brian Tracy chiming in that “habits determine fully 95% of a person’s behavior.”

How to Develop New Habits

To succeed in adopting new, empowering habits, you first must understand the process of habit formation.

Creating new habits is, in a sense, embarking on a psychic journey of sorts. You’re leaving behind familiar, well-worn mental terrain in favor of a novel landscape that’s unfamiliar, yet far more conducive to your personal and professional goals. You’re effectively stepping outside of your comfort zone and committing to different, foreign behaviors, which can feel unsettling at first.

This indicates that during the beginning stages of habit adoption/elimination, a healthy dose of self-discipline will be necessary. Why? Because the psychic tug of the old, disempowering habit is still firmly in place, and exerting its influence on your behaviors. So, at this stage, you’re going to have to exercise genuine willpower to override the old behaviors, in the moment, and execute the new ones. This is the true price of developing new habits. And flexing your mental muscle and practicing discipline will indeed be mentally taxing at first. You can take solace, though, in the knowledge that with each new repetition of the desired behavior, the older, less optimal habit grows weaker while the new habit grows stronger.

Finally, after around 3 weeks (on average) of consistently practicing the new behavior, it becomes an ingrained habit that happens automatically, with little to no willpower exerted. When viewed from that context, the power of habit becomes incredibly tantalizing. And as long you continue to practice the new habit dili-

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gently, you will have effectively developed a new “brick” to place in the foundation of your long-term success. Hence, the effort is well worth it.

The Benefits of Great Habits in the Urgent Care Workplace

So, what are some of the direct benefits of adopting new, empowering habits in the workplace? Several are as follows:

- **Habits give your days and activities structure.** By developing habits toward productivity and goal completion, your time and activities at work will necessarily become more structured. Habits help you develop a consistent routine, and facilitate getting the most out of your days. When you’ve installed great habits, there isn’t much time left

over to meander and coast like many of us find ourselves doing. Rather, your most precious commodity, time, is consistently put to great use.

- **Habits help you grow and develop as a professional.** Habits allow you to take on new tasks, projects, and undertakings that can help you develop as a professional. By installing the habit of forgoing TV in the evenings, for example, to study a curriculum toward CME, you grow more rapidly as a marketable professional. Likewise, installing the habit to walk for 30 minutes during your lunch break is proven to relieve stress, increase energy levels, and improve the quality of sleep—which of course improves your workplace performance.
- **Habits sharpen your focus.** Virtually any professional or personal goal, big or small, can be achieved more rapidly when you’re focused. And habits facilitate focus. For instance, if you’ve decided to make it a habit to get, say, 33% more work done each day, you’ll necessarily excise the bad habits of idle water cooler chat, constantly checking and replying to low-priority emails, checking your smartphone, and excessive trips to the vending machine. Yes, it will take willpower those first few weeks, but afterward, focusing on getting more done will be an ingrained habit, and second nature.

- **Habits bring fulfillment.** This is one of the greatest rewards of developing positive, constructive, empowering habits. Truth be told, many people are going through their lives experiencing low-grade anxiety and dread due to feeling that time is passing them by, their dreams and desires are going unfulfilled, and they're simply not being productive at work and at home. In short, they experience a vague feeling that they're coasting, and wasting their potential. By putting in the work to install, develop, and cultivate constructive habits, you effectively trade the willpower needed to build the habits for a powerful sense of well-being and fulfillment. You take comfort in the knowledge that, for instance, those 2 hours you used to waste surfing online each day have been rightfully reclaimed, and can now be invested in your most important goals. As a result, you feel like you're finally on the right path.

Urgent Care Organizational Habits

In light of what's been revealed thus far regarding the power of habits, what are some of positive habits that urgent care leaders can cultivate in their clinical and administrative teams toward building a culture of excellence? Below are some examples:

- **Commencing a daily huddle** – Having a daily huddle with providers and the care team creates a positive vibe of togetherness, aids in mapping out and planning the center's daily objectives, and ensures each team member understands their role. When things get hectic or busy, the temptation may be to skip the huddle and dive right into work. Habits are sustained by discipline and commitment, however, so leaders should resist the urge to bypass the huddles when busy, and ensure they become an ingrained part of the culture.
- **Consistently using proper greetings and salutations at work** – Familiarity, stress, and a fast-paced work environment can lead to care team members forgoing their usual greetings and salutations to patients, staff, and providers. Thus, proper and professional salutations must become a core

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part of the culture that's continually reinforced as a matter of habit. Being consistent with this habit lends the entire operation a level of professionalism and courtesy that is sure to be appreciated by every stakeholder—including patients.

- **Acknowledgement and recognition of the successes of care team members** – Making it a habit to single out and publicly recognize achievements and exemplary behavior of care team members goes a long way toward instilling a sense of pride, belonging, and appreciation, not to mention elevating overall employee engagement throughout the organization.

- **Being punctual** – By making it a habit to simply be on time for meetings, work shifts, and other appointments, team members clearly demonstrate that they respect everyone's time, believe in being prepared and ready, and value professionalism.

- **Consistently viewing things from the patient's perspective** – This is perhaps the most important habit of all to ingrain, reinforce, and make an integral part of the urgent care culture. Things to take note of from the patient's point of view:

- Are waiting areas, front desk areas, corridors, and exam rooms clean and orderly?
- Are care team members' uniforms and attire clean and professional?
- Are patients consistently addressed by their name?
- Are care team members interacting with each other in a professional manner, especially in the presence of patients?
- Are the expectations of each phase of the visit clearly explained to patients, and are delays/excessive wait times acknowledged, and apologized for?

While there are many additional organizational habits that can be adopted, the aforementioned are indeed essential, and a great starting point for building a culture of urgent care excellence.

Key Habits for Urgent Care Operators

Urgent care operators are the leaders of their operations, whether it's a single center, a chain, or individual units belonging to a larger hospital system group. Hence, managing a dynamic and diverse group of providers, office staff members, and clinical teams can be an all-encompassing job that's taxing to their mental and emotional reserves. Adopting the following set of empowering behaviors ingrained through the power of habit can help leaders stay positive, organized, engaged, and effective:

- **Deep breathing.** When work gets hectic, tasks pile up, and tense situations arise, practicing the habit of deep breathing is soothing, calming, and centering. In fact, according to WebMD.com, deep breathing is scientifically proven to reduce stress and increase willpower. So, take at least 2 minutes a couple times a day to engage in slow, deep breathing exercises.
- **Be patient with habit formation.** As behavioral scientists claim it takes around 21 days to fully form a new habit, be patient with yourself and your teams. Given the power of old, well-established habits, there's bound to be a relapse or two along the way. Rather than give in to discouragement, understand that a temporary relapse is simply a minor setback.
- **Remain in the moment during trying or stressful situations.** As a leader, you must always stay calm under in pressure. So, in addition to deep breathing exercises, get into the habit of always asking yourself, "What is the single action I can take right now to improve the situation, or move toward a resolution?" Then habitually take that action.
- **Don't attempt too many habit changes at once.** Trying to get yourself or your team to take on too many habit changes at once is a recipe for failure. Instead, get into the habit of looking for ways to improve the culture by implementing no more than one or two changes at a time. Slow and steady wins the race here.
- **Create vision boards.** Many higher achievers and successful leaders maintain vision boards in their homes or offices so they have a constant visual reminder of the goals they're pursuing. Make it a habit to create a visual representation of whatever goal you set and view it often.
- **Solicit feedback from your team whenever feasible.** Urgent care operators should get into the habit of asking their teams about challenges they face in their daily roles, how upper management can help, and suggestions for operational improvements. Communicating to your staff this way increases engagement, since the team sees that their voices are heard, and management values their input.
- **Surround yourself with inspirational quotes.** On your screensaver, desktop wallpaper, pictures hanging from the wall, or even on your phone. Better yet, see if you can find a program or app that delivers a fresh inspirational quote every-day automatically. Quotes from high achievers and historical figures are incredibly motivating and can put what seems like insurmountable obstacles into their proper context.
- **Network and stay abreast of industry happenings.** Don't allow yourself to develop tunnel vision while obsessing over the minutiae of your own operation. Instead, make it a habit to maintain a fresh perspective on the industry by subscribing to newsletters, signing up for webinars, touring other urgent care operations, and attending conferences. The energy, insights, fellowship, and ideas you gain there can recharge your batteries, allow you to benchmark your own operation, and build the impetus to implement necessary changes.

Conclusion

As the saying goes, successful people are simply those with successful habits. However, empowering habits have another useful purpose: They become the sturdy emotional bulwark you can lean on when self-discipline wanes. Because no matter how strong your willpower, you're bound to experience stress, duress, and fatigue at some point. And it's at that point we get to see the power of our deeply ingrained habits, because they will surely rise to the fore under tough circumstances.

In sum, habits, although incredibly powerful, do not form easily. There is a price to paid, and that price is relentless repetition of the new, desired behavior. This requires willpower, being present, and above all, patience. Doing so will allow urgent care leaders to literally transform their operations through the power of habit, paving the way for them to realize a level of career success they may not have thought possible. ■