

Five habits of successful students

SEEKING EXCELLENCE In order to succeed in academics or your chosen profession, developing winning habits is key. **V Pradeep Kumar** tells you how to cultivate the right habits and nip the wrong ones

A habit is an unconscious pattern of behaviour to act in a particular way acquired through frequent repetition. It slowly gains strength and before we realise it can be as binding as a chain of steel. Rising early instinctively, lacing up your shoes for a jog or going for a swim after reaching home from college, are examples of some habits.

Charles Dickens, the famous author once said, “I never could have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time”. Developing a new habit or breaking one, can take two to four weeks, with constant practice.

What are winning habits?

There are early birds getting up in the wee hours of the morning to study and some are night hawks, studying late into the night. Which set of students do you think are more successful?

Research has indicated that this is indeed difficult to conclude. Importantly, both habits point to the winning habit of maintaining a regular pattern in daily activities, or discipline.

■ **Discipline:** Discipline is of paramount importance in academics, as well as your professional and personal life.

Your internal body clock finds it easy to adjust to a regular pattern of sleeping, improving the quality of sleep and productivity during the day. Further, nutritionists think that regular and consistent eating habits positively influence health. Learn to manage your time, handling important and urgent tasks on priority.

Regularity in attending lectures is mandatory, unless there is a family or personal emergency. By missing lectures, you lag behind, creating additional academic pressure. Break the habit of missing lectures casually. Consult your professors for clarifications after missing lectures for genuine reasons, or for additional study materials. Professors like to guide serious students and can be your mentors too.

As a teenager, movies, late night parties, weekend tours etc., are common. Try not to yield to such temptations; instead, plan unwinding activities occasionally.

Become a thorough professional making discipline a way of life.

■ **Persistent goal focus:** Discover your strengths and interests by taking an aptitude test. Use this assessment and consider appropriate career options. Consult a mentor and choose your career.

Pursue career goals with focus. Career



challenges and difficulties can be demotivating, distracting you away from your goals.

When faced with hurdles, persist by asking key questions: why is this strategy not working? Have I erred by not considering an aspect? What are the alternate strategies available? Successful students learn from every difficult situation, and persist until their goals are achieved. By the power of your imagination, visualise the benefits of a dream career, to keep you energised and highly motivated.

■ **Health, fitness & emotions:** With an array of tasks like classes, assignments, case studies, projects etc., academic life becomes demanding and stressful. Balance your academic and personal life, by managing time for sports, yoga or a relaxing hobby. A balanced life with regularity in sleep, diet, exercise, makes you physically fit and healthy.

With self-discipline, condition your mind to focus, irrespective of routine or challenging tasks. Overcome addictions and dependencies with emotional control, developing a positive self-image.

■ **Concentration & study techniques:** You must combat any lack of concentration. For example, you may be forced to wake up late after a late night party, and rush to college, missing breakfast. Lack of sleep and gnawing hunger make it difficult for you to concentrate on lectures. Therefore, you may find the classes boring, and indulge in conversations, texting, or

even bunking.

However, successful students, manage to concentrate on the lecture, with strong listening habits. Become a part of a learning environment by understanding the syllabus and expecting the content of each class. Stay away from friends who wean you from scheduled activities. Engage in self-dialogue, developing the ability to say ‘no’.

Consider these learning techniques:

■ **Be open to continuous learning:** Recognise learning opportunities from different methods (lectures, assignments, case studies, debates etc.), mediums (classroom, print/electronic/internet media, experience sharing etc.), and people (teachers, seniors, elders etc.)

■ **Develop flexibility in thinking:** See the bigger picture; but have an eye for detail. Develop lateral thinking (alternate points of view) and change your mindset, with new facts.

■ **Develop accuracy focus:** Accuracy is required in many professions like Medicine, Engineering, Marketing, Music, Dance, Crafts. Recognise tasks where accuracy is critical.

■ **Active listening and empathetic understanding:** Maintain eye contact with the professor; develop the right body language to indicate the extent of understanding.

■ **Questioning is the key to wisdom:** Questioning helps in understanding the gaps between the known and the unknown. Understand concepts by posing ‘cause and effect’ questions, getting additional information and data.

■ **Seeking excellence:** Stephen Covey, author of the outstanding book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* says, “Our character is basically a composite of our habits. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constant-

ly, daily, express our character.”

Successful students have winning habits. They understand that life is a long process of learning and constantly work at educating themselves. Therefore, in pursuit of excellence, consider every achievement as a stepping-stone to set higher standards.

For academic success, it’s crucial to develop career goals and an action plan. Implement the plan with discipline and persist until the goals are reached. Greek Philosopher Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit”.

Breaking a habit

Old habits die hard; but the point is they

do. Therefore, breaking a bad habit isn’t impossible. An effective way is to ask questions to yourself: What are the compelling reasons for the habit? What are the consequences of the bad habit? What are the benefits of breaking the habit? The answers to these, will provide the remedy too.

Every time you turn to the habit, remind yourself that you are choosing the bad consequences vis-à-vis the benefits. With self-awareness of consequences and determination, challenge yourself that you can break the bad habit. Reward yourself for breaking the habit, successfully.

For success in academics or a profession, identify key strategies and persist with them, until they become habits. Winning habits act as powerful motivators insulating you from failures and difficulties; they energise you to progress towards your goals and enable achieving personal excellence.

Remember

- Sleep, study and eat regularly
- Pay attention to hygiene and grooming
- Don’t miss classes unless there is an emergency
- Concentrate in class
- Ask questions. It is an effective way of learning
- Prioritise tasks and manage time
- Don’t get obsessive with your cell phone and social-media
- Be selective in friendships
- Develop a bias for action; don’t procrastinate
- Seek excellence in everything you do

Developing a habit

- Visualise the benefits; make a decision
 - Inform people around you. This will build healthy self-pressure
 - Repeatedly affirm; implement without exception
 - Persist until it is a habit
 - Reward yourself
- (The author is a management and career consultant.)

