



## The Traps That Steal Your Initiative

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Author: Daniel Stewart

*“If you only see problems or despair, that is what will be.  
But, if you see **hope and opportunity**, then you can make  
change happen! It comes down to what you choose to see,  
despite all that is around you.”*

*-Virginia Jones*

Often as I work with leaders, they seek to create a feeling of ownership among their employees. They seek to have their people see opportunity and not problems, so they can initiate solutions instead of accepting the status quo.

## WHAT IS OWNERSHIP

Ownership means you have a stake in the game. It means that what you do matters—it matters for yourself, to your team, to your customers, and to your community. It is a positive choice to make your slice of the world better because you have been there. It is stepping up, instead of hiding out. Even if the outcome doesn't equal the effort, you still move forward because you can. It is using your gifts to choose improvement over fear.

## THE THREE TRAPS

But, there are three conditions that lead to an absence of ownership or initiative. These three maladies are like a virus that can uncontrollably spread.

However, there are cures to control the symptoms and eventually unleash positive change. Look at yourself and consider how prevalent these three vicious viruses are on your team and how you can turn them around to promote engagement and betterment.

## ATTITUDE #1

### **Attitude #1: "It isn't worth the effort!"**

In other words, I'm resigned or apathetic to the fact that I cannot fix things no matter what I do. It is the belief that customers will *always* be cranky, leaders will *always* have their own agendas, and bad things will *always* happen. It is no use in trying to improve my team or even my own attitude because it is just a matter of time until something negative will happen. Even in small doses, this condition can suck the life out of a team.

## ATTITUDE #2

## **Attitude #2: "I'd rather remain upset!"**

The fancy term for this is *sedentary agitation*. This means being frustrated about the mediocrity and mistakes that happen around you, but not doing anything about it. *Typically people with this condition care about doing the right thing and want to make a difference, but choose to not translate their energy into action.* Instead, they complain and find solace in being a critic. They choose to devote their energy in being upset instead of trying to make it better.



## **ATTITUDE #3**

## **Attitude #3: "Forget you all!"**

This condition is when someone gets so fed up that they decide to become extremely independent. They are tired of the poor team performance, the inconsistent handoffs, or the delays from HR and are taking things into their hands. While this can sometimes be helpful to shake things up, it can become unhealthy when the person pursues their own needs at the expense of others. *They can forget they still need to partner with others to achieve a better outcome.* However, their exaggerated autonomy begins building silos, which worsens relationships instead of improving the collective performance.

# THE CURE

## **You Have A Choice!**

While these attitudes are very natural and we all have experienced them at various times, it is important to not let those perspectives become overpowering. There is a definite way to minimize and even overcome these potentially destructive attitudes. The remedy is illustrated well by an old Native American story about a grandfather teaching his grandson an important life lesson. The grandfather says to his grandson:

*"There are two wolves fighting in my heart. One of the wolves is fearful, envious, and resentful. The other wolf is generous, compassionate, and hopeful."*

Intrigued by this situation, the grandson asks, *"Which wolf will win the fight?"*

The grandfather responds, *"the one I feed."* (Shambhala Sun, pg. 53, May 2011)

**The key is to remember we have a choice!** We have remarkable power to decide how to act yet we can too easily give away that power or simply forget we have it. No matter the circumstance, the dysfunction, the poor performance, we always have a choice in how we show up as a leader, in how we decide to influence our world, and in how we decide to treat others. As we attempt to solve large problems, like a business transformation, a product line redesign, or even a community rebirth, we can choose to see possibilities instead of problems.

# SEEING HOPE & OPPORTUNITY

We do not need to choose to accept the status quo and be paralyzed by fear or apathy. We can remember our ability to choose something better and how we can elevate the performance of all around us by being our best self. We can then take ownership and show initiative, instead of allowing the situation to control and shape us.

**Just like Virginia Jones said, when we see hope and opportunity instead of fear and despair we will make change happen!**

## FREE RESOURCE

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