

Discipline #6 – Anticipate, Create, Evaluate [ACE]

Injunction [What to do]:

Recognizing that in our relationships with others there are patterns of conflicts that arise with them; and recognizing that the most distressing conflicts are those that arise over and over again in the context of our relationships with those with whom we have the most significant relationships; select a single pattern of conflict in a particular significant relationship.

- Anticipate when the next time will be that this conflict will arise. Identify how you will recognize it. This may be because of some response in you or it may be because of some specific behavior on the part of the other or it may simply be because a certain time has come.
- Create a new way of addressing the conflict. You can remember what you did last time and what effect the choices you made then had on you and on the relationship. How do you want things to be different next time? This step has two parts to it:
 - Plan for what you intend to do.
 - Implement the plan.
- Evaluate how well the plan worked. In what ways did it move you toward what you need and in what ways did it fall short? How well were you able to do what you planned to do and how were you acting differently than you expected to act?

Then, trusting that the pattern will reappear, begin the process again by anticipating the next occurrence.

Why do it [Rationale]:

The experience of having the same conflict come up over and over again can be a great source of frustration, helplessness, and anxiety. This is mostly because the focus of our attention is on what the other is doing and thus is on something that we can't change. When we shift the focus onto what we are doing and onto the qualities that we are trying to create in the relationship, we discover that we are actually very powerful.

We often have the goal of making the conflict go away. This is an unreasonable expectation. We can't really change the pattern. But we can change the present event. We do that by changing how we act...what we choose.

Doing things differently turns out to be much harder than it seems at first. We may have a clear idea of what we want to do but then find that we can't get ourselves to do it.

While this can be its own source of frustration, it can also be a way to find how we are blocked from acting more assertively on our own behalf.

What it will get you [Promises]:

As you practice this discipline, you will find that you have been doing it all along in some form or another, just not with as clear an intention. When you smash your thigh into the desk drawer when you get up, you vow to make sure that you close it all of the way next time. You anticipate that there will be another time that you open that drawer and that sometime after that you will get up from your chair and that you will whack yourself if you haven't closed the drawer. If you make the plan but don't implement it, you will get another bruise on your thigh and will have a chance to figure out why you can't remember to close the drawer.

But as you do the discipline with greater intention and with more and more complex conflicts you will find that;

The hesitation that you have about addressing conflicts will diminish as you recognize that the conflicts are going to arise whether you anticipate them or not and that, when you do, you are better prepared to deal with them.

You will begin to feel more and more powerful and less frustrated and helpless. You will notice that each time the pattern emerges you respond with greater and greater clarity and calm and the outcome will be more and more satisfying for you.

Suggestions :

It is important to avoid some common pitfalls.

Some people try this discipline and then report "that it didn't work." If you think that the outcome is going to be that you will change the other or to make it so that the conflict doesn't ever happen again, then, true, this won't work. The gauge of whether it works is whether you were able to be different in the way that you decided to be different. Even then, if you are not able to change what you do, simply noticing how hard this is can be a first step toward profound transformation.

Some people come up with a plan and then find that they can't get themselves to implement it and give up. They think that because they couldn't do what they decided to do, this won't work. In fact, these are the very things we most want to identify. When we find the places where we want to respond differently and are stuck, we have found a core block in our own behavior. [See discipline #5 for more on this.]