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How to Develop a Can-do Personality (2 min read)

Some people handle tough jobs without breaking a sweat. Others seem to give up before they even get going.

What's the difference between a can-do and a won't-try person?

"It's usually a matter of bravery," says Paul Hauck, Ph.D., a psychologist in Rock Island, Ill. "Can-do people aren't any smarter than anyone else. They have learned not to let fear carry them away from success."

The most common roadblock is fear of failure, which is closely tied to two other big fears: losing respect and approval and losing self-esteem.

Fear of failure takes away one of your most valuable learning tools -- mistakes. "The only way you ever become good at something is by learning where the pitfalls are and how to avoid them," says Dr. Hauck. "If you never try, you'll still be stumbling around long after you should have moved on to other things."

To break the cycle, "choose to become fearless," he advises.

Recognize fear

Becoming fearless isn't easy. But you can start by recognizing how fear is holding you back from what you want to do by asking these questions:

- Could I accomplish a lot more than I'm doing?
- Have I ever passed up an opportunity because I thought I couldn't handle it?
- Do I look for the safest way to do things instead of taking risks?
- Do I often wish I had another chance to do things better?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, fear could be keeping you from reaching your goals and living a happier life.

Take control

Ironically, the best way to take control of fear is to let go of it. Here are some strategies for loosening fear's grip on you and your performance:

- Focus on the task, not yourself. It's easy to become so emotionally invested in something that you start to judge yourself by its success or failure. That's distracting and could keep you from trying at all.
- Forget what other people think. Instead of worrying about what might win approval, consider what it will take to make the task or project a success. Then, when you do a great job, everyone will recognize it, including you.
- Sharpen your skills. Nothing builds confidence and eliminates fear like capability. Get ahead by learning the skills you expect to need for future projects. When a task is assigned, take stock of what you know already, what you still need to know and where you can go for backup.

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- Do it. "It's far easier to face a difficult task than to avoid it," says Dr. Hauck. Keep your expectations realistic; don't try to achieve perfection on your first try.
- Enjoy the ride. Maybe you won't succeed in everything you do, but that shouldn't keep you from trying.

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