



The Five Habits of Financial Health

by Mickey Straub

> Learn five good habits for strengthening your practice's financial health

To achieve financial health, there is more needed than financial planning; there's doing. Sure, planning is part of the process, but you also have to do what is necessary to achieve financial health. That's what The Five Habits of Financial Health are all about, and the better you do it for yourself, the better you can help others.

That brings us to the financial health of your practice. Have you planned for it adequately? To the extent you preach to your clients? What's your plan and do you have repeatable steps? Checkpoints? This article covers what you need to do, the key habits, if you will, to plan and do what's needed. You may even have some revelations along the way, if you haven't already.

Before we get started, let's define the title. The first part is easy; it's a list of five items, or key steps, which happen to be in sequential order of importance. (Though, the position of the last habit could be debated.) Habits are those things, or action items, that we do every day by reflex with little or no forethought. Some are good; some are bad. (If you want to identify your own, just ask your spouse, significant other or friends.) All are hard to break, though the bad ones seem to be harder. As far as financial health goes, that is a little trickier to frame up because it can only be defined by you.

HABIT #1: FOCUS

Focus on what you want to achieve and why. The power of focus can never be underestimated. What is it that you want to achieve? MDRT level? Top or Court of the Table? Or is it to attain a certain income level or leadership club in your company?

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And more importantly, why do you want to achieve it? To buy a new house, car or to pay for your kid's college education? Is it for personal satisfaction, your family's financial security or to make a difference? Be clear and make sure it's about something bigger than just yourself. The what is usually a more measurable and tangible goal; the why is attached to a deeper purpose and is the real reason you get out of bed in the morning. But remember, it's not the money you're after, but the feeling you get once the money arrives.

In his speech at the NALU insurance convention in 1941, Dr. Albert E. N. Gray didn't only address the value of habits, he credited purpose as being the driving factor. He called it "the common denominator of success," and said, "the secret of success of every man who has ever been successful lies in the fact he formed the habit of doing things that failures don't like to do." Dr. Gray also said, "Successful men have a purpose strong enough to make them form the habit of doing things they don't like to do," and, "the strength which holds you to your purpose is not your own strength, but the strength of the purpose itself."

HABIT #2: PLAN

Once you have a clear idea of what you want and why, plan out how to get there. The act of planning, especially when it comes to planning for your financial future, takes some effort and is often overlooked



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(I know I have been guilty of it). Think in terms of activity, not just results, and set incremental goals. How many clients do you want to obtain? How many referrals do you need? And how many appointments do you need on a daily and weekly basis to achieve your goal? Professional golfers, too, know the value of activity and statistics, like the number of fairways hit off the tee, greens in regulation and average number of putts. They also plan out the hole backwards; you may want to do the same.

HABIT #3: EXECUTE

Now that you know what you want, why and how to achieve your goal, you have to perform the activities necessary. Execute on the plan's high-payoff activities. Here are some tips you can take to the bank. Keep records. Do what you must first. Keep your (what and why) goals in the forefront at all times. Set deadlines for each activity goal (time-block); for example, "I will make 10 calls by 10 a.m." Remember, work expands to fill the time available.

Financial health doesn't happen overnight or after one event. Like success itself, it is a process and can only really be achieved by doing the right things over time.

HABIT #4: MAINTAIN

Maintaining the process and progress over time with regular reviews will help you do just that. So make sure that you build into your schedule a set time to regularly analyze the quantity and quality of your activities and results by looking at trends

and success ratios. You need to "measure and monitor what matters most," as industry legend Garry Kinder, CLU® likes to say. Put systems in place to make that happen on a regular basis. Systems build habits, and habits build careers.

HABIT #5: ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

This final habit is actually my favorite and should probably come first. Accept responsibility for all outcomes in your life. All the great leaders in the financial services industry will agree that this is paramount to success, including Nick Murray, who dedicated an entire chapter to it. I loved his first revelation, "If I can own the problem, I can own the solution." And here's my belief: The day you take responsibility for all outcomes in your life is the day you are no longer a victim. Accepting responsibility equals freedom; it puts you in control of the direction of your business.

Before the plane that I recently flew on departed from the terminal, the pilot had a clear focus on what he wanted to achieve and why: Fly to Vegas safely for the benefit of the passengers and the company's long-term future. The pilot had a definite plan, a charted course from beginning to end and a team of people to help him. You should do the same. He also executed on his plan, maintained his high-payoff activities and accepted responsibility for the outcome. The pilot demonstrated all five habits.

I hope you will, too, and I hope as industry icon Joe Jordan likes to say, that you "live a life of significance." ■■■