



NAC Executive Insights

Just Do It — and Other Steps to Success

Key Points

- Taking action is imperative for you to succeed.
- You must believe in yourself and your ideas because if you don't, who else will?
- Communication is key—writing, speaking, AND listening.
- You need to value each person and their ideas.
- Have high but not unreasonable expectations of others.
- Love and serve others.
- Always say thank you.

Introduction

Over the years of my life and career, I have learned from experience what I now call the seven steps to leadership and personal success. May these help you along your path as well. You must learn to take action. If you don't believe in yourself and your ideas, who will? You need to effectively communicate—which involves writing, speaking, and most importantly, listening. Each person and their ideas have value. Have high expectations of others because otherwise they will perform down to your low expectations. Love and serve others. Remember to always say thank you.

Step One — Just Do It

The most important skill is the ability to take action. I believe with all my heart that every change in the world started with one person—and you can be that one person. Everything and anything is your job. You don't have to wait to be empowered. You don't have to ask for permission. We each are able to grab the ball and run with it. Just do it—and do it now!

Candy Lightner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) in 1980 after her 13-year-old daughter Cari was hit from behind and killed by a drunk driver. This is one person with a passion, a sense of purpose, a stick-to-itiveness that didn't take no for an answer. Look at the organization she has spawned.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

Step Two — Believe in Yourself and Your Ideas

If you don't believe in yourself and your ideas, why would anybody else? But when you do, people know where you stand, how you will behave, and how you will act.

Three of us were leaving the New York Hilton in early July after the Society of Women Engineers National Convention. It was hot and humid. A tremendous downpour soaked the streets. As our cab navigated its way to LaGuardia Airport, the engine heat gauge on the car's dashboard began to rise. My colleague, Gina, was in the front seat. She said to the cab driver, "Turn the heat on." He looked at her like she had lost her mind. It was summer. It was hot. The rainstorm had just increased the humidity. But I knew Gina and I believed her. Although I am small, I have been told that I am not intimidating until I open my mouth. I said authoritatively (although I had no idea why), "Turn the heat on." He did and we made it to the airport without the cab's engine overheating. We even passed by cabs that had overheated!

Step Three — Communicate

People can't read your mind, you must communicate. And in order to communicate effectively, you must remember the three components—writing, speaking, and most importantly, listening. And you must communicate with integrity—telling the truth, which builds trust that provides the basis of all relationships. The seeds of trust are the same as the seeds of friendship. Listen, remember the little things, keep promises, clarify expectations, be loyal, admit when you are wrong, and admit when you don't know.

Step Four — Value Each Person and Their Ideas

Each person has value and their ideas have merit as well. Treat everyone as an equal, treat them as you wish to be treated, value them personally, and listen to their ideas. Remember that a team with diversity of thought and experiences will have better results and make better decisions.

Step Five — Have High Expectations

My experience demonstrates that people perform up to high expectations and down to low expectations. People want to be challenged, to push a little harder, and have the feeling of success associated with meeting high, but not unreasonable, expectations.

My friend Chris, whom I met in college, was born with spina bifida. At birth, on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is bad, he was an 8. His parents were told he would not live. Then they were told that he would not walk—but outfitted with special crutches, he did walk. He graduated college with a B.S. in electrical engineering. Later he was the state, regional, and national Big Brother of the year. He retired recently from his career in the defense industry. Why did he succeed? High expectations. High expectations from his parents, from his siblings, and from his doctors. And yes, I'm sure those high expectations led Chris to have high expectations for himself. No, it wasn't easy. He says high school was awful. But college and life have been good. High expectations can be life changing.

Step Six — Love and Serve Others

This step ties directly to step four. When you genuinely care for people and demonstrate this through your actions, helping them with problems and listening to them, the love and service they will return can be amazing. You will be more effective if you value everyone around you and appreciate each of their efforts.

Charles Plumb, a military pilot in Vietnam, was shot down and spent six years in a Viet Cong prison. After his release, Plumb was at a restaurant when a stranger came up to him and said, "Plumb. I'm so glad to see you're alive. I packed your parachute, sir." Plumb thought about this a lot and realized that without the effort of this stranger, a member of his support team, he would not be alive. He became a motivational speaker with the theme "Who packed your parachute?" Think about this metaphor and remember to appreciate those who support you—those who pack your parachute.

Step Seven — Say Thank You

What do people—and employees—want? More than money, they want appreciation. A thank you. A pat on the back. A gold star. Recognition for a job well done. An atta-girl or an atta-boy.

Remember to say thank you. A handwritten thank you note is important and is often a differentiator. The time spent saying thank you is always repaid, many times over.

“Thank you” is the best prayer that anyone can say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.

— Alice Walker

Conclusion

You can be successful in your life and career. These steps: just do it, believe in yourself and your ideas, communicate, value each person and their ideas, have high expectations, love and serve others, and remember to say thank you, will help propel you.

About the Author

Jill Tietjen was elected to the National Academy of Construction in 2022. An author, international speaker, and electrical engineer, she is a recognized advocate for women in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields and has spent more than 45 years in the electric utility industry.

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