



IMAGE ONE
[Windsields and
Rearview Mirrors]

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Windshields and Rearview Mirrors

EVERYONE FOCUSES ON SOMETHING—THE PAST OR THE FUTURE. WHERE DOES YOUR ENERGY COME FROM? WHEN OUR DREAMS ARE BIGGER THAN OUR MEMORIES, WE GAIN ENERGY FROM THE HOPE THAT LIES AHEAD. OFTEN, WE MUST LET GO OF THE COMFORT FROM OUR PAST TO MAKE PROGRESS.

When I was learning to drive, my dad noticed something strange about my newfound driving habits. After he taught me to check the rearview mirror before changing lanes—so I could see the cars around me—I got enamored with the whole process. I know it sounds strange, but as I drove, I kept looking in the rearview mirror. Over and over again. How cool was it to see what was right behind me (especially if it was a police car) without having to turn around! A simple peek could do it all. Well, I soon learned it was dangerous: I almost had a wreck. My dad had to shout, “Stop looking at all the cars behind you and focus on the road ahead of you!”

Note to self. That was good advice. I soon realized that rearview mirrors were good to glance at, but not to gaze at. Most of the time, it’s best to look straight ahead.

I know two students who graduated from college last year, Shane and Evan. They both made good grades in school and were very active in clubs and intramural sports. I soon saw one big difference between them, however. Shane moved right into a job and began building his career. He was excited to meet the people on his new team and learn the ropes of his company. Evan didn’t move forward quite as well. It wasn’t that he couldn’t find a job—he got one right away. It was that he never quite let go of his past. He continued going back to campus; he stayed focused on the events at his alma mater and was preoccupied with his classmates on Facebook. None of that is bad—but he never embraced his new role as an employee. His teammates at work could tell he wasn’t really engaged. No matter what they did, Evan just wanted to stay in school, mentally.

I think Evan had the same problem I did with the rearview mirror. He should have been glancing at what was behind him—but gazing at what was ahead of him. Instead, he spent most of his time looking backward, which prevented him from moving forward. In fact, you might say he almost had a wreck—his supervisor had to confront

him and ask if he planned to stay long. He told Evan he wouldn't make it unless he buckled down and got serious about his work. Ouch.

This Habitude is not simply about letting go of the past. It is important to sustain friendships we've made along the way. We should be grateful for fun memories and good times. Our past will always help shape our future. But sometimes, the past can hold us back. If our memories are more important than our dreams—we are in trouble. If we prefer to look in the rearview mirror instead of the windshield, we'll get stuck—and maybe wreck. Holding on to the comfort of our past can keep us from grabbing the adventure that lies in our future.

Here's a question for you: Where does your energy come from—the past or the future?

Seriously. How would you answer that question? Some people become fearful about the future because of a single factor: They love the familiar and the comfortable. They only get energy from grasping what's behind them. Sadly, this confines them and even enslaves them, preventing them from seeing or seizing opportunities, new friendships, or new freedoms they might otherwise enjoy.

Years ago, a television report revealed how poachers caught monkeys in certain African countries. It was quite simple. They hollowed out a coconut, then made a hole in the surface just big enough for a monkey's hand. Next, they filled the coconut with jelly beans. Then they attached one end of a chain to the coconut, and the other end to a stake driven into the ground. The coconut was literally a ball and chain. It was a trap. As the monkeys sniffed the jelly beans and curiously visited the coconut, they were so enraptured by the candy that they didn't notice the chain or stake. Finally, one of them would reach into the coconut and grab a handful of the candy. At this point, one of the poachers came forward to throw a net around the monkey. Surprisingly, the primate could have run away free—but it never did. Why? It couldn't let go of the jelly beans. Freedom was available—but not achievable, because it imprisoned itself, holding on to the candy. Sound familiar?

A university once conducted a study on “peace of mind.” Researchers sought the greatest factors that contributed to people's emotional and mental stability. The top five they discovered were:

1. Refusing to live in the past.
2. The absence of suspicion, resentment and regret.
3. Not wasting time and energy fighting conditions you cannot change.
4. Forcing yourself to get involved in the current world around you.
5. Refusing to indulge in self-pity.

Do you notice a pattern in their findings? All five of the factors above have to do with handling the rearview mirror and the windshield well. Letting go of what's already happened and embracing what's in front of you. On your journey, can you peer out in

front of you and become excited about the horizon? Can you gain more energy from the future than the past? Based on our qualitative research at Growing Leaders, the most common reasons students get “stuck in the past” are:

- They are victims of time. They can't seem to break free of old patterns.
- They are victims of relationships. They stay involved with people who hold them back.
- They are victims of comfort/nostalgia. They fear that their best days are in the past.

TRY THIS REMEDY

In response, we recommend the following simple new habits and attitudes:

1. **REPLACE COMFORT WITH CURIOSITY.**
Choose to leave the comfortable to pursue the compelling.
Hunt for new horizons to conquer.
2. **REJECT BEING A VICTIM OF YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.**
Don't let anyone control your emotions or your response to life.
It is your life, after all.
3. **RENEW YOUR COMMITMENT TO EMBRACE OPPORTUNITIES.**
Hang out with different people. Search for new challenges that will stretch you.
4. **RELINQUISH THE PAST AND CREATE NEW MEMORIES.**
Perhaps it's time to let go of the old trophies and ribbons and go earn some new ones.

Almost every culture celebrates each new year. In ancient Rome, the god Janus was a key symbol. (Our month of January is named after him.) Interestingly, he had two heads—one to look forward and the other to look backward. You might say the Romans recognized the value of the rearview mirror and the windshield. Later, an Italian custom was born. At the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve, people began tossing possessions into the streets—anything that held a negative memory or connotation. They simply got rid of it and started anew. In doing this, they declared “Out with the old; let's start fresh.” Not a bad custom as a new year begins.

After speaking at a graduation ceremony, I watched the university president hand diplomas to the seniors as they walked across the stage. What he said to each of them was simple but far more profound than he realized. He knew he had to keep the ceremony progressing, so he encouraged them to move quickly across the stage. As he gave them their degree, he said, “Congratulations. Keep moving.” And so say I. Whatever you've done in your past—well done. Now keep moving.

TALK IT OVER

Fictional character Marleen Loesje said, “The longer you wait for the future, the shorter it will be.”

1. In your opinion, what’s the greatest reason students get stuck in their past?
2. Is there any memory or person that holds you back from embracing the future?
3. Talk about where your energy comes from—the past or the future. Why?
4. Can you name a time you saw a student break free from the rearview mirror and look ahead?

ASSESS YOURSELF

Assess yourself, using the criteria below, on a scale of 1–10 (1 being weak and 10 being strong).

- a. I am keenly aware of where I get my energy
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- b. I work through my struggle to overcome my fear of failure
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- c. I maintain a healthy sense of adventure and anticipation
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- d. I can celebrate the past, but I can let go of it to pursue the future
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TRY IT OUT

Get in a quiet place with a pad of paper or a computer, and make a list of some of your favorite memories—experiences, achievements, friendships, etc. Make this a column on the left side of your document. Then take a moment to celebrate those memories. Seriously—relish the good times you’ve experienced in your past. Now make another list, on the right. This one should contain all the potential memories and accomplishments that could lie in front of you if you really put your mind to it. Let your imagination expand a bit. Consider the new environment you are now in, and dream of what could happen if you applied your time, your mind and your energy. Once you finish, compare the two lists. Both are something to enjoy—but ask yourself: Would you want to trade the right column for the left one? Consider what would happen if you did. What would your life look like if you only grasped what was behind you?

HABITUDES

Take the Next Steps to Equipping Your Students for Life

How Can You Use *Habitudes*?

- Freshmen classes
- High School Advisory Programs
- Residence Life Training
- College First Year Programs
- Student Government Training
- Student Leader Training
- Youth Groups and Small Group
- Mentor Training
- Leadership training for athletic teams
- Corporate professional training
- New team member orientation

What Can *Habitudes* Do for Your Students or Young Adults?

Habitudes help your students and young adults:

- Break out of the herd mentality to influence others in positive ways.
- Create environments that are conducive to higher grades.
- Raise empathy and minimize bullying.
- Capitalize on personal strengths to be career-ready upon graduation.
- Develop critical thinking skills that produce better life choices, such as choosing healthy friends, improving study habits, and setting meaningful goals.

Habitudes also help athletic teams:

- Transform a group of individual athletes into a unified force.
- Create teams of student-athletes who build trust with each other and their coaches.
- Create language to talk about real life issues in a safe and authentic way.
- Build teams where every athlete thinks and acts like a leader.
- Build athletes who make wise decisions that keep them in competition and out of trouble.

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