



# Bottom Line

## PERSONAL

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### Action plan

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## Breakfast Is the New Lunch And other new rules for success

In my 30 years of working with individuals and corporations, I have found that the key to helping people be the best they can be is to focus on bridging the gap between the idea and follow-through. It's important to strategize, but you can't be successful unless you put those strategies into action. Here's how...

**1 Complete one important task every day.** Refuse to quit until it's done. Knowing that you did something that added value will give you a feeling of accomplishment.

**2 Pay attention.** Whether you're checking your monthly phone bill or your company's overhead costs, truly focusing on your task can make an important difference.

**Example:** A division of a Fortune 100 company was conducting a routine review of payments when someone noticed that a vendor had been overpaid \$20. Most of the group thought it wasn't worth the time to chase down the mistake, but one employee checked the files. He found that the vendor had been overpaid \$100,000 during the previous six months.

**3 Replay the tape.** Spend a few minutes in the evening thinking through conversations you had during the day and the actions you took. Consider how you handled challenging situations—what worked and what you would do differently next time. Don't berate yourself if you made a mistake. Just commit to improving.

**4 Do breakfast.** Breakfast is the new lunch. It's much easier for people to start the day with a morning appointment. They're fresh and energized. The meal usually is shorter and cheaper. The morning's news provides topics to discuss. It's a great way to maintain business contacts and stay connected with friends and family.

**5 Respond to calls and E-mails within 24 hours.** Make this a personal standard, and hold yourself accountable. Responding promptly tells people

that you can manage your time and you respect theirs.

**6 Share the good news—and the bad.** Some people are cheerleaders who communicate only when things are going well. Others communicate only when things are going poorly. Both types of communication are vital for true understanding and effective problem-solving.

**7 Solicit input.** If you tell people what to do without getting their input, they may perform—but not as well. Figure out who your key constituents are—your spouse, kids, sales team. Meet with each person to describe what you're trying to accomplish, and then ask for feedback. Try to use the ideas offered.

**8 Spend 10% of your day connecting with people.** Ask them how they're feeling, and listen to what they say. Visit a hospitalized friend. When someone invites you to a wedding or funeral, make an effort to attend. If you can't, express your regret by sending a handwritten note. These actions strengthen valuable relationships and build loyalty.

**9 If it's important, say it twice.** When a doctor in surgery asks a nurse for O-negative blood, the nurse replies, "I have O-negative blood," not, "Okay, here it is." She repeats the request as part of a process that eliminates error—the stakes are too high for miscommunication. When the stakes are high in your world, follow up on a conversation with a note, voice mail or E-mail.

**10 Don't let others derail you.** Write the phrase, *Nothing and nobody can affect me negatively.* Put it where you can see it. Let it remind you of your personal power.

*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed Stuart Levine, chairman and CEO of Stuart Levine & Associates, a consulting and leadership training company in Jericho, New York. He is former CEO of Dale Carnegie & Associates, Inc.

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