

PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE

By Gary L. Richardson, noted trial lawyer and author of *Black Robe Fever*, *Fear Is Never Our Friend*, and *Thank God They Ate the Apple*.

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Too often we hear someone say, "Well, that is the nature God gave me." Or, have you ever heard, "Well, that is just the way I am, end of story"? It isn't and shouldn't be the end of the story. Accepting that rationale is about as wise as concluding that going to school to learn math, English, history and other subjects has no value. Just consider someone's position who says, "Well, I'm going with what God gave me and that is it." No, No, No! Life is about growing, developing and learning. That is true in all areas. And the excuse that I probably hate the most for not doing so is, "Well, my dad was this way and that's just the way I am." Well, did you decide to "remain" like Dad in other areas of your life? Not that doing so would be bad, because you probably have or had a pretty good Dad, but the fact is that this rationale for certain behavior becomes an excuse for those that don't recognize that they can grow, develop and live a more fulfilled life.

Many, maybe even most, of you haven't ever thought about whether you are a proactive or a reactive person by nature. Unless you have, then you obviously haven't given thought to what "nature" you have. So let's start out by describing the two.

PROactive type natures look ahead and perceive potential things to come and prepare to deal with them before they ever occur. Now the downside to this nature is that so many proactive people simply look for the negative. This can be a real "killer" to live with for those of us that aren't into creating negative thoughts, because the truth is, once we decide what lies ahead, we subconsciously set out to create what we have decided.

Those who concentrate on the negative are people that are more keen on being right than living a happy life. Their favorite saying is, "See, I told you so." This isn't to say that being proactive doesn't at times allow one to see ahead and realize that if such and such happened a negative could develop, and when this is the case then a proactive type nature starts doing the necessary things to "avoid" the negative. This is a good way to use a proactive nature. In other words, when a proactive nature perceives negative ahead they shouldn't just accept it so they can be "right" and say, "See, I told you so." They should set out to prevent the negative from occurring. This is the best of both worlds.

On the other hand, if you are by nature a REactive personality, you are much like the person I describe in my article titled "Waiting." What often happens here is things occur that a person with a reactive nature never sees coming. Around people with these natures we often hear such things as "Can you believe that happened?" "Who would have ever thought it?" (Duh!) and "It never entered my mind that this could or would happen." These are definitely "reactive" personalities – only seeing things as they happen and rarely ever expecting them to happen. For people like this, the first thing to recognize is that this is their nature and that is why they keep getting surprised. Can they develop? Absolutely!! Just because they have a reactive nature doesn't mean they have to remain there. But, we have all heard about reactive type people who also are "passive-aggressive," (not a good tag to be labeled as it is awfully close to being looked at as "mean spirited" and as a retaliating type person. Passive-aggressive behavior often comes from people being "embarrassed" that they didn't have a clue that something that happened could have happened.

I think it is easy enough to see that most leaders, maybe all, have proactive type natures. That isn't to mean there isn't someone with a reactive type nature in a leadership role, but it is to mean that they aren't doing much leading. Why? They are the type that often gets surprised by events and what happens – the type that waits for things to happen and then deals with them.

Leaders, on the other hand, who are proactive by nature or by development, are those personalities that seem to have "vision." They just have the nature or growth to anticipate things and deal with them before they happen.

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