How to Build a Reliable Work Ethic
(Courtesy of www.lifehack.org)

Have you ever noticed how some people seem to just get things done? They don’t need “productivity hacks” or GTD and procrastination is a foreign word to them. These people have a reliable work ethic.

A work ethic is a set of values based on the ideals of hard work and discipline. Building a reliable work ethic means training yourself to follow these values. Training yourself so that work becomes automatic instead of a struggle.

CONSTRUCTING HABITS
A work ethic is based on habits. Persistence, focus, “do it now,” and “do it right” are the key habits in building a dependable work ethic. Here are some steps for building those habits:

FORMING THE PERSISTENCE HABIT
The first part of a reliable work ethic is persistence. If you quickly burn out after only a short period of work or you can’t stay focused on a task for long, you lack persistence. Building persistence is like building endurance for a race, slowly training yourself to work harder for longer periods of time.

Persistence should always be balanced with periods of rest. Working twelve hours straight won't usually be the most effective strategy even if your work ethic is strong. But training yourself to work longer can help you if you need to and it makes working shorter periods of time easier.

Here are some tips:
- **MEASURE YOURSELF**
  Figure out how long you can work effectively. Measure how long it takes before you slow down or give up. Measurement can be a source for improvement.
- **RUN A BURNOUT DAY**
  Try working longer for one day, following it with a lighter day afterwards. By stretching your focus for longer periods once in a while you can boost your persistence for normal days.
- **DO AN EXTRA 20%**
  When you feel like quitting, go an extra 20%. If you’ve been working intensely for three hours but are feeling the desire to stop, try another forty minutes before taking a break.
FORMING THE FOCUS HABIT
Even more critical than persistence is focus. A car going 70 mph for one hour will go further than a car going 10 mph for six. Focusing all your energies for even a short period of time can be tiring, but combined with persistence it is a powerful ability to have.

Here are some tips for forming the focus habit:

- **TIMEBOX**
  Give yourself 60-90 minutes to work on a particular task. During that time you can’t rest or engage in any distractions.

- **ACCELERATE**
  It can take anywhere from 10-30 minutes to build up a concentrated focus. Give yourself time to accelerate into a focused state.

- **CUT DISTRACTIONS**
  Practice the habit of turning off all outside noise. Phones, e-mail, RSS, Twitter and visitors should be shut out while trying to focus.

FORMING THE “DO IT NOW” HABIT
Don’t let yourself procrastinate. Having a strong work ethic means having the phrase “do it now” as a constant hum in the background. Time for leisure is fine, but if you are trying to work make sure the only thing you are doing is work. Don’t let yourself procrastinate when you still have an unfinished to-do list.

DO IT NOW FOR 30 DAYS
Kill the procrastination bug for good. For the next thirty days define periods of your day you want to devote to work or personal projects. During those periods of time, remind yourself of the “do it now” phrase and get working whenever you feel the urge to procrastinate.

FORMING THE “DO IT RIGHT” HABIT
The final aspect of getting things done is doing them properly. Sloppy work, hastily finishing things or spending too little time working out details leads to poor quality. If you aren’t going to do something properly, it’s probably not a good idea to do it at all.

Perfectionism isn’t necessary for many tasks, but most things require a minimum standard of quality. Writing code without useful variable names or documentation, Graphics with merged layers, Articles filled with spelling and grammatical errors. The “do it right” habit means actively slowing yourself down slightly to fix problems before they occur.
Here are some tips:

- **SEPARATE CREATION AND CRITICISM**
  Ideas require mess. Solving a programming problem or writing an article often requires that you first let go of your need for perfection. But once you’ve finished the idea, you should separate a specific time for clean-up afterwards.

- **MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE**
  For tasks that don’t have an Undo feature, take extra care in doing them properly the first time.

- **SET TWO DEADLINES**
  Avoid analysis paralysis by setting two deadlines. One to complete the task, and another to review and polish the work. With two deadlines you won’t stumble into the trap of perfectionism, but you won’t hastily finish something that isn’t ready.

- **SIT ON IT**
  If you’ve hit a milestone in a task or project, take a few minutes to work on something else. When you come back you can use a fresh perspective to tweak problems.

**USING THE HABITS**
What’s the point of building a work ethic in the first place? I can’t comment on your job, but if you don’t feel a natural desire to get more done and work harder, you are probably in the wrong line of work. Doing the absolute minimum and laziness might seem like an ideal solution if you’re working at a job you hate. But if you are involved in a job or personal project you love, having a work ethic means you get to create, accomplish and provide even more.