

### 3 techniques to transform your personal effectiveness (or ‘ways to avoid the runaway train’)

Let's be clear from the start - good time management is not about being able to work faster, harder or more efficiently. In fact, just the opposite. The best time managers find that they operate in calmer environments, they have more free time and they often do not finish their to-do lists! Here are three powerful techniques used by the best time managers.

- 1) **FOCUS ON RESULTS:** Instead of being obsessed with getting your ‘to-do’ list finished - become focused instead on getting better results. The Pareto Principle suggests that about 20% of what we do will deliver 80% of the results we need. This of course means that the other 80% of our activities are *relatively* worthless. Ever lost the will to live in a meeting? When that happens, you are probably involved in an activity that is not delivering value against your job purpose. The trick to good time management is to recognise which activities will deliver real value - and which do not. Effective time managers can tell the difference – and ruthlessly avoid work that does not deliver. They work hard, but avoid all *unnecessary* work.
- 2) **TAKE A BREAK:** One implication of the Pareto Principle is that you should never take work home or work beyond the normal close of your regular office hours. You should never work in the evening or at weekends. ‘Impossible!’ you cry. ‘If I didn’t put in all of these extra hours, I’d never be able to cope’. And of course it does seem that way. However, the Pareto Principle is quite clear on this. You will do your best work in the 20% or so of your time when you are fresh, alert, and focused. For the rest of the day, you will get a diminishing scale of returns as you become more tired. Trying to finish work over the weekend simply means that you will be less effective on Monday morning, because you have not spent the time relaxing, recharging and refreshing yourself. Taking work home in the evening simply means that you will be tired tomorrow. And that means you’ll be less effective, make more mistakes and work more slowly. So you’ll end up taking work home again. And so on and so forth. To break this cycle, simply stop. By using your spare time to recover from the challenges of a busy life; by recharging your batteries properly, you will find that you get more from your day. This simple reality, combined with the other techniques in this book designed to make you more effective will mean that burning the midnight oil becomes a thing of the past. Use *your* time to work on *your* goals and personal projects and your employer will see a marked improvement in the thing they pay you to produce - quality.
- 3) **TAKE ACTION:** If you are twenty years old tomorrow, you may look forward, all things being equal, to another sixty years of life. So there’s loads of time to achieve everything you want, right? Hang on. Sixty years sounds like an age. But ask any thirty year old how quick the ten years pass between twenty and thirty and they are likely to answer - ‘in a twinkling’. Ask a forty year old and they will tell you that time accelerates as you get older (Einstein missed that one). And anyway, it’s not actually sixty years you’ve got left. You can take off 33% of that for

sleeping; about another 10% each for watching the telly and eating and 5% for grooming, sitting on the loo and bathing. I'm not even going to begin to calculate how much time you will waste waiting for colleagues to turn up late for meetings, trains to arrive and your children to tidy up after themselves. Actually I do know the answer to the last one - it's forever. The future is travelling towards you at 3,600 second per hour. There's less time left than you think! So stop thinking about it! Do it!

Here are just a few ways to avoid procrastination.

**BANJO Technique:** This acronym stands for Bang A Nasty Job Off. The idea is that when you arrive at work with an unpleasant task hanging over your head, you have a simple choice. Let it lie and get on with other stuff - in which case it will gnaw at the back of your mind. Or do it first. In which case you get it done, out of the way and you get to feel the relief that this brings. If you use the BANJO method, even the most unpleasant days just get better and better as they go on.

**Cold Plunge:** A whole range of work challenges, from difficult conversations with colleagues to the production of the annual report are sometimes best tackled just by diving in. Putting it off while still worrying about it can simply serve to blow the whole thing out of proportion. Anticipation of the unpleasantness can be far worse than the real thing. So dive right in - more times than not you'll find it's not as bad as you think.

**Avoid deactivation words and phrases:** These are words and phrases which allow you to put off taking action, and include 'tomorrow', 'later', 'next week', 'when I'm ready', 'some other time'. More often than not they really mean 'never'. If it really needs doing, do it now!

**Take action:** We can plan, think, ponder, reflect and learn until the cows come home - but unless it is followed up with action, nothing will change. This ability to take daily action, and to persevere is recognised as an important attribute in the search for success by even the most brilliant minds. Thomas Edison undertook more than 50,000 experiments to perfect the storage cell battery. He is reputed to have argued that none of the failed experiments were really failures, because each one brought him a step closer to finding the correct solution!

**Get the habit:** Taking action is a habit. It is a frame of mind. The more actions you take, the more likely you are to take successful action. Get into the habit now. Think about something you plan to do but haven't done yet. Put down this article, and take that action, now!

In summary – focus on results not activities; look after yourself and keep your batteries charged; and get stuck in! Remember the words of Will Rogers: *'Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.'*