

From Ideas to Actions

Instructions

Healthy Action Habits

Being busy has somehow become a badge of honor. However, a recent article by Dr Travis Bradberry described very succinctly how being busy makes you *less* productive as this inevitably leads to multi-tasking and interruptions, which are both deadly to productivity.

The article explains this further: David Meyer from the University of Michigan published a study recently that showed that switching what you're doing mid-task increases the time it takes you to finish both tasks by 25%.

Beyond interruptions, "busyness" reduces productivity because there's a bottleneck in the brain that prevents us from concentrating on two things at once. When you try to do two things at once, your brain lacks the capacity to perform both tasks successfully. In a breakthrough study, René Marois and his colleagues at Vanderbilt University used MRIs to successfully pinpoint a physical source for this bottleneck.

Regardless of what we might think, we are most productive when we manage our schedules enough to ensure that we can focus effectively on the task at hand.

So why do we keep ourselves so busy?

There are two underlying fears that drive our busy behaviours:

- Fear of inactivity borne from the common belief that busyness is a sign of success and hard work
- Fear of failure leading us to avoid the big tasks that are important and filling the time with unimportant trivial tasks because this busyness makes us feel productive

So what can you do:

Step 1: Reflect on your busyness habits:

- How do you manage your interruptions? eg email alerts, telephone calls, questions from others
- How many tasks are you focusing on at any one time?
- What beliefs do you hold about being busy?
- Could the fear of failure be causing you to avoid the important and fill your time with trivial unimportant tasks?

Step 2: Review tasks using the urgent important matrix to enable you to review where you spend your time and develop more healthy habits. This will allow you to remove the unimportant tasks from your schedule and free up more time for the important.

Step 3: Establish how you would like to work more effectively. Consider:

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- Blocking diary time to focus on specific projects
- Changing how you are alerted about emails
- Scheduling “non-interrupt” time
- Putting your mobile phone on silent

Step 4: Take action and create new healthy habits

Tips for dealing with emails, letters and correspondence received:

- Allocate a slot of time to read correspondence and to decide on action
- Aim to look at something once only (reading something in full and deferring the decision for action means reading it more than once)
- Make an instant decision on how you are going to deal with it and do one of the following:
 - Bin it
 - Do it
 - File it
 - Delegate it
 - Diarise it and put paperwork in pending folder with date attached

Tips for dealing with tasks that are boring, unpleasant or overwhelming:

I recommend reading the book “Eat That Frog!” by Brian Tracy. It includes tips on how to get more of the important things done today such as:

- Review your list of tasks, activities and projects regularly and decide which one would have the biggest impact on you and make that the one to focus on
- Invite constructive input from others about what you should be doing
- Identify your three most important goals and work on them every single day
- Define those unpleasant tasks that will enhance your day if you completed them as ‘live frogs that need to be eaten’ and plan to eat at least one frog a day at the outset providing the satisfaction of knowing that that is probably the worst thing you will do all day! Adhere to the rules of frogs:

Rule 1: If you have two frogs eat the ugliest one first

Rule 2: If you have to eat a frog at all, it doesn’t pay to sit and look at it for very long