Identifying Your Top Tasks

Developing a list of your tops tasks is critical for success. If you do not know what things you are doing, then you are doomed to failure in terms of achieving your top goals.

Begin by creating a list of twenty (20) tasks that you regularly perform. After developing the list of your most common tasks, continually refine the list until you narrow it down to your list of the five (5) most important tasks that you perform. These five tasks should represent the highest profile, highest payoff, and most important tasks needed to be the most effective individual that you can be.

This list should be continually reviewed to ensure that you are doing the most effective things on a regular basis. This tasks that are on the list may change with time. Additionally, this does not mean this list contains the only tasks you will perform, but instead indicates what you should be doing on a regular basis.

Tyranny of the Urgent Model / Eisenhower Matrix

The Tyranny of the Urgent, originally conceived as the Eisenhower Matrix, conceptually categorizes our tasks so that we can apply the proper responsiveness to new tasks. Often people have trouble identifying which task to do next. This concept will help you to do that by identifying the next most important task.

All tasks can be categorized in two ways: urgency and importance. These two concepts can be organized into a matrix of four possible quadrants in which every task can be compared. Identifying which quadrant applies to the task will determine how quickly it should be tackled. Ideally, the majority of time should be spent working in Q2.

1. URGENT and IMPORTANT Emergencies, Deadlines, & Pressure Situations	2. IMPORTANT BUT NOT SO URGENT High Value, but Non-Emergency Situations
3. URGENT BUT NOT SO IMPORTANT Compulsive Activities that Prevent Achievement	4. NOT IMPORTANT NOR URGENT Complete Time Wasters

A-B-C / 1-2-3 Methodology

This is a simple methodology that can be used to prioritize a task list. Begin by categorizing each item on your task list as an A, B, or C item. The A items are the most critical items that must be completed. B items are the next most important. C items are the least important.

After categorizing all items, then number the items in each category in order, starting with 1, then 2, then 3, etc. You will end up with a numbered list of A items, B items, and C items. Then set out to the complete the items in order.

However, in small snippets of time, you can move lower items up to knock them off your list if the available time does not permit completing something more complex.

Ten Before 10

Ten Before 10 is a mind-trick that can be used to get things done quickly and give your day a significant psychological start.

Simply, create a list of as many items as possible and then get it done by 10:00 am. The idea is to move as quickly as possible through a list of items to knock enough that you will feel productive throughout the day.

Organization and categorization of the tasks is less important with this method.

Eat the Frog First

Mark Twain once said, "Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."

This has spawned a time and task management technique that challenges one to do the most difficult task as the first thing you do during the day. After that, each task that you must complete will seem much easier, allowing you to be more productive.

If faced with two unappealing items, "eat" the uglier frog first, meaning do the worst task first.

Weekly Task Matrix

The weekly task matrix can be used to identify gaps in a person's standard weekly schedule. By looking for the gaps, one can rearrange their week to maximize the opportunities that exist.

Sometimes, moving items around can allow a person to better leverage their time. Additionally, productivity gaps can be better planned for and ultimately eliminated.

This is a theoretical exercise, and no week goes according to plan. However, understanding the flow of one's week will allow a person to be more realistic about what can really be completed

Keystone Habits

This concept was developed by Charles Duhigg in the book "The Power of Habit". The idea is that one should always be replacing their poor habits with newer good habits. This continual upgrade of activity will result in an ongoing process improvement and lead to better outcomes.

This book focuses on the idea that those that achieve success do so by focusing on the patterns that shape every aspects of their lives. People are the sum of their habits.

Habit Stacking

The book "Habit Stacking" by S.J. Scott highlights the effective results that can be accomplished by starting with small changes in behavior and then slowing increasing the actions that underlie these small habits.

Essentially, you want to make change by implementing small improvements and then slowly upgrade to increasingly more important habits. By stacking habits, one can more effectively change over time.

Gamification

The idea of gamification is to turn everything into a game. People respond when they are being measured, and they typically respond better when they are engaged in a game.

Gamification uses game playing concepts to get people better engaged into work activities, working out, and learning. It has been used successfully in an increasing number of fields.

The application of gamification principles has been found to be effective for making both personal and professional change. It stimulates the brain to respond to meet the challenges being presented.

Circadian Rhythms

Circadian rhythms are biological cycles that complete in one cycle daily. Ultradian rhythms address the recurring period that exists within a day. There is more than one utltradian cycle within a day. Infradian rhythms are periods longer than a day.

By understanding these cycles, one can better identify the time of day in which they are more effective at getting certain things done. The human brain does not work well for 8 straight hours, so some individuals will respond optimally by rearranging activities into the times of day in which their mind and body will best respond.

Ultradian Rhythms

Ultradian rhythms are recurrent cycles repeated throughout a 24-hour day. Because of these cycles, the brain isn't designed to focus intently for long periods of time. It can optimally focus for 90 to 120 minutes before needing a break.

One study of ultradian rhythms found that a person is at his or her creative peak in earlier parts of the day as waking up. It is best to utilize that time for thought-intensive work and then step away from the work for 15-minute break could lead to better idea generation that can be used during the next work period.

Merging Methodologies

Merging methodologies is an excellent way to super charge a person's productivity. Studies are indicating that time management hacks such as multi-tasking do not work. The mind can only truly do one thing effectively as a time. By merging methodologies, one can become more productive.

As an example, identifying one's ideal time to work on detailed tasks from a **BIOLOGICAL RHYTHM** standpoint can enable a person to develop their **WEEKLY TASK MATRIX** in a way that maximizes the best time of the day to accomplish the most complex tasks. Or, by using the **EISENHOWER MATRIX** in conjunction with the **A-B-C METHODOLOGY**, a person can stack their Q2 items in their A list of items to be more effective. Or, by scheduling a day of the week to leave a morning open in their **WEEKLY TASK MATRIX** for the **TEN BEFORE 10** method, one can have an effective catch up day for some of those less important, but nagging things that need to get done.

Merging methodologies can help a person to alter one's psychology and make them feel more effective. It is important to remember that so much of being effective results from being productive.