



Eat That Frog By Brian Tracy

Introduction



This book helps readers understand the importance of managing our priorities and contains many highly practical and easy to implement suggestions for improving our effectiveness and ultimately to achieve our goals. In particular it focuses on the need to eliminate procrastination when completing key tasks. The title of the book is inspired by Mark Twain who once said that if you start the day by eating a frog you will have the satisfaction of knowing that this was probably the worst thing you had to do that day. The frog is a metaphor for your biggest and most important task. It encourages us to develop a habit of starting and completing important tasks.

Although the author warns us that there is never enough time to do everything on our lists there is always enough time to complete the important tasks. He provides techniques to help us set clear priorities and implement plans to achieve these. Overall the book includes 21 key suggestions – 1 per chapter and this summary briefly explains each one.

1. Set the Table

Before you begin working it is vital that you decide exactly what you want to achieve. Clarity is essential for prioritising tasks and eliminating procrastinating. This chapter emphasises the vital importance of setting and writing down goals to achieve success. It is amazing how many people still do not set life or career goals.

The chapter includes a simple 7 step model for goal setting

1. Decide exactly what you want to achieve and (for work goals) agree them with your manager. The worst thing you can do is to do something well that didn't need to be done at all.
2. Write it down.
3. Set a deadline for completion.
4. Draft the list of activities required to achieve each goal.
5. Organise your plan and categorise your tasks.
6. Take action immediately to move you towards achieving your goals.
7. Resolve to do something everyday to achieve your goals.

Remember goals are considered the furnace of achievement.

2. Plan every day in advance

Your ability to set goals, make plans and take action on them determines the quality of your life. Taking action without planning is the cause of every failure and yet very few do it.

Although many people don't want to take the time to plan, it has been found that 10 minutes planning can save 100 minutes in execution. Planning is also a vital tool in helping us to avoid procrastination.

To start the planning process create a list of all the tasks required to achieve your main goals Start with a master list and then break this into monthly, weekly and daily lists.

In chapter 6 the author explains how to prioritise daily tasks lists to ensure the important tasks are always completed first.

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now"

Alan Lakein

"There is one quality that one must possess to win and that is definiteness of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants and the burning desire to achieve it" – Napoleon Hill





3. Apply 80/20 rule to everything.

The 80/20 rule was established by an economist Vilfredo Pareto back in 1895. He found that 80% of the wealth of countries was held by 20% of the population. He then discovered that this principle extended to most other areas in life and business.

For example

- 20% of the tasks we need to complete produces 80% of the results we are looking to achieve
- 20% of your products can produce 80% of your sales and so on.

The 20% tasks are often our "frogs" – the ones we tend to procrastinate on. Often we focus on the 80% tasks instead. Therefore don't be tempted to start on low value tasks. There is great satisfaction gained from completing high value tasks. Although they are often your more complex or difficult tasks they usually do not take any extra time to complete.

Time Management is really about choosing the important tasks over the unimportant tasks. The key message here is to identify your 20% tasks and resolve to spend time on these few areas that will really make the difference.

4. Consider the consequences of each task on your list.

One of the best ways of prioritising tasks is to consider the consequences of doing or not doing each task on your list.

When considering the consequences you should take both a short and, in particular, a long-term view. In fact the ability to take a long-term perspective is a huge factor in the success of many people. Taking a long-term view can improve short-term decision making.

Our top priorities are the actions or tasks that have significant positive or negative long-term consequences depending on whether they are done or not. This can provide the motivation to complete certain tasks.

Remember the law of forced efficiency - there is never enough time to do everything but there is always enough time to do the important things.

Ask yourself - what can I do that, if done well, can make a real difference. Keep asking yourself what is my most valuable task and discipline yourself to do these tasks. Make this your habit as these tasks must never be at the mercy of the tasks that matter least.

5. Practice Creative Procrastination.

This is the art of deciding to procrastinate on your low value tasks. That is deliberately deciding to postpone or eliminate these tasks.

We can't do everything so start procrastinating on the things in your life that are not important. Normally we procrastinate unconsciously and start dropping the important tasks. To get control of your life you need to discontinue low value activities by saying no to others (or yourself). Often doing something new requires you to stop doing something old.

Review your life career and select at least one activity which you can procrastinate on or eliminate completely. This is an on-going responsibility. Therefore review your life and look at the tasks that you currently complete that would be no real loss if stopped (e.g. excessive television).

Practice zero-based thinking. Ask yourself would you start this activity now if you were not already doing it.

Review your current work activities and select one that you could abandon with little or no consequences.



About the Author

Brian Tracy is a leading self development author and coach in the United States of America. Tracy is a best selling writer with more than 40 books published, more than 300 video and audio programs produced, and a live audience of more than 250,000 each year. Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations. He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology.

He was born in Canada to a family that struggled financially and had very few luxuries in life. He was a high school drop out and started his career as a labourer, working in several physically demanding jobs during his teenage years. Brian used many of the strategies he discusses in his books to turn his life around and achieve phenomenal success in life and business.



6. Practice A, B, C, D & E Method of Prioritising

This is a simple method used to prioritise your list of tasks that need to be completed to ensure the most important ones are done. A description of each code is as follows.

- A tasks must be completed today. These are the tasks that are very important and that have significant consequences if not completed that day.
- B tasks should be done today but are not essential (mild consequences). Never complete a B task before all A tasks have been completed.
- C Tasks are nice to do but there are no consequences whether you do them or not. Meeting someone for coffee or phone a friend may fit into this category.
- D tasks are ones that can and should be delegated to others.
- E tasks can be eliminated altogether with no consequences. Often only done out of habit or because you enjoy them. They may have been important at some stage.

Tasks are then also prioritised within each category. For example the most important A task should be A1, the next most important A2 etc. Always start the day with your A1 task. It is usually your biggest and ugliest frog.

This is a very powerful and yet simplistic method for transforming your efficiency.

7. Focus on Key Result Areas

Every job we do can be broken down into 5-7 key areas. These are the areas we need to focus on to succeed. These can be defined as areas that you are completely responsible for and that are within your control.

In your job these are the areas that will affect your pay and your ability to be promoted. Therefore you should agree your key areas with your manager. A good question to ask is "Why am I on the payroll".

Your weakest key area will set the standards that you will achieve. A weakness in one area can drag you down and result in failure overall. Consider the analogy of one of your major organs ceasing to function.

For example a key area for a manager is delegation. If a manager is unable to delegate this could have a huge impact on the success the manager can potentially achieve. Of course the tasks that we are not so good at are often the ones we procrastinate over which often makes things worse.

Exercise: Write down your 5-7 key result areas and discuss and agree these areas in an open and frank way. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 on these key areas and resolve to improve on your weakest areas.

8. The Law of 3

This law is basically that there are usually 3 key tasks that will give you 90% of the results you want.

Make a list of all of the tasks you need to complete. For example there may be 17 tasks on your list. Decide on your 3 key tasks and do them. For the other tasks you can look to delegate, outsource or look for support (where possible).

This can have a dramatic effect on the results you achieve. The author provides examples of some of his clients who doubled their income within 12 months using this approach.



As with all the key messages in this book the underlying goal for us all is to enjoy life. One of the principle reasons for getting more efficient in work is that we can get extra time for our home lives.

But remember just like the tightrope walker we must continuously work at staying balanced.

9. Prepare thoroughly begin you begin

It really pays to prepare before you begin working each day or before you begin working on a specific task.

To thoroughly prepare you should clear your desk of anything not required to complete this specific task, gather all the materials etc that you will need so that you don't even have to get up for say a file and then start doing it.

Fear can often stop us from getting started but when you do get started then "the death of fear is certain". Get your task completed to 80% of the finished product and then start improving it. Don't be afraid of failures. The main thing is to get started and learn from any errors or failures. Wayne Gretsky the famous hockey player once said – you miss 100% of the shots you don't take.



10. Take it one oil barrel at a time

The famous Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once said “the journey of 1,000 leagues begins with a single step”

When a task just appears to be too big to achieve then it is very useful to break in down (often referred to “Chunking it down”) to get started.

Remember to break down any big tasks into a series of smaller tasks (steps) and start with task 1. When you do that move on to task 2 and so on. Once started the momentum will ensure that you keep going and make real progress against your bigger goal.

The title of the chapter comes from a story about a 500 mile strip of the Sahara desert where 3,000 people have died trying to cross as they lost their bearings. The only landmarks were oil barrels planted by the French in the ground. These were 5 kilometres apart (the size of the circumference of the earth). This enabled the author, and many before him, to cross the desert by taking one barrel at a time – when he reached one barrel he then focused solely on getting to the next barrel and so on until he crossed the entire strip of desert.

Exercise

Take a key goal and write down all the actions that you will need to take in order to achieve this goal. Then get started by completing the first task. If you have difficulty starting then break down your first tasks into smaller tasks if required.

11. Upgrade your key skills

You should continuously strive to improve your key skills. One of the major causes of procrastination is a lack of confidence in your ability to do that task well.

What are the key skills you need to be really excellent at what you do. Is it marketing, sales or even your time management skills? Then look out for seminars, training courses, or books that will help you develop and enhance these skills.

Audio books are a great option for self improvement. For example you can learn so much using time that previously appeared to be wasted while sitting in traffic.

Remember every skill is learnable. The author uses his own personal example of how he realised that his typing skills (the hunt and peck method) was holding him back from his goal of writing books. Therefore he found a touch typing course that he completed and then practised for 30 minutes a day for 3 months. He transformed his typing skills and saves countless hours every week as a result.



Remember the words of Pat Reilly, the highly successful NBA coach who once said “If you are not getting better then you are getting worse”.

12. Leverage your special talents

We should all tap into your strengths and talents to enable us to do a great job. Very important for us to be clear about our special talents and skills. To identify them ask yourself

- What am I really good at.
- What talents come naturally to me that others can find difficult.
- What strength do I have that has been most responsible for my success to date
- What job would I do if I won the lotto and didn't need to worry about my finances

When you are clear about your special strengths and talents, focus on these areas and make sure you tap into them to achieve even greater success

One way of identifying your special talents is to ask yourself what is it that you really enjoy doing. You see we are built to enjoy completing tasks that we are really good at.

Remember one of your greatest responsibilities in life is to find out what you are good at and then to focus on doing these tasks to become even better and achieve greater success



Identifying your key talents and strengths

A book we have found useful on this topic is “Now, Discover Your Strengths” by Marcus Buckingham. This book highlights the importance of establishing your strengths and includes an online questionnaire that produces a report with your strengths highlighted and explained in detail.



13. Identify Your Key Constraints

Everyone has some key constraints. These constraints set the speed at which you are attain your goals.

Could it be your sales and marketing skills or processes, your ability to sort through mails and other interruptions Could it be resources or another person.

It could it be internal e.g. a limiting beliefs you possess. The 80/20 rule applies here. 80% of constraints are usually internal whereas only 20% are related to external factors such as competition.

We need to identify the key constraint. Ask yourself why have I not achieved my goals already. Then decide what action is required to eliminate this constraint. And then, of course, take that action.

When the key constraint has been removed move on and ask yourself again – what is now the key constraint. Then look to eliminate that and continue to move on.

However we need to be careful not to identify the wrong constraint. For example the company who blamed their drop in sales on their sales force and removed a number of them. They then discovered that it was an error in the pricing of their products that caused the drop in sales.

14. Put Pressure on Yourself

Many people look to others to push or motivate them to work harder and achieve success.

However to be truly successful we need to put pressure on ourselves to complete our tasks and achieve our goals. Waiting for others to do this is like waiting for a bus on a street where buses don't travel.

About 2% of people can work entirely on their own. We call these people "Leaders". You can become one.

Set deadlines and task times for the key tasks you have to complete to achieve your goals and then aim to meet and even beat these deadlines.

Self esteem can be defined as your reputation with yourself. Everytime you push yourself to achieve something it will improve your self esteem.

Exercise: Pretend you have just won a free month's holiday starting tomorrow. Decide what tasks you must complete by the end of the day and resolve to do them. Do the same the next day.

15. Maximise Your Personal Powers

This is about increasing our energy levels to improve our overall performance. We feel that this is one of the really important suggestions and therefore this is discussed in detail in our February 2009 Newsletter.

16. Motivate Yourself into Action

This chapter is really about becoming a positive thinker and using this positivity to motivate you to success.

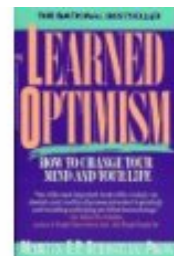
Being positive and optimist will make a big difference to your success levels. And anyone can become an optimist.

Martin Seligman in his book "Learned Optimism" says that there are 3 learned behaviours of optimists.

- They always look for the positive in every situation – and they always find it.
- They look at what can be learned from setbacks. They see setbacks as instructive.
- They look for the solutions to every problem.

Optimists also always look forward rather than back. Positivity is linked to self esteem. Whatever you can do to improve your self esteem will make you more positive. Affirmations are a very useful tool for this.

Remember that what you continuously focus on and think about is what you will get out of your life – so focus on the positive.





17. Get out of the technological time sync

The message here is to make technology your friend and not your enemy.

People are being controlled more and more by their mobile phones, emails, the internet etc. As a result we never switch off and relax.

The author quotes a funny example of a wedding he attended where everyone at his table bowed their heads for a prayer before the meal. However they continued to bow their heads after the meal was finished. He assumed that the prayer had a profound effect on them but then realised that they were all using their blackberries.

Email can consume a huge part of a person's day. Some people can get 300 + emails per day. Remember the 80/20 rule applies here. 80% of our mails have no value. Of the 20% that do, 80% of these require no immediate action.

If you are in a position to you should delegate the task of sorting your mails to an assistant.

When you return from holidays to 100's of mails consider deleting them all. If someone sent you something that was really important they will send it again.

Remember to make technology a help rather than a hindrance. If you let it control your life it will only add to your stress levels.

Exercise:
For 1 day per week completely turn off mobiles and don't check your texts or emails. Also for 1 hour each day in the morning and again in the evening do the same exercise.

"There's more to life than increasing it's speed"
Gandi

18. Slice and dice the task

One of the biggest causes of procrastination is when you feel that the task is too big to get started. When this happens we tend to avoid completing the task and doing smaller (less important) tasks instead.

If a task appears too big then we should break it down into it's different elements and then do the first 1 or 2 sub tasks. Using the Salami metaphor cut the task into manageable slices.

By breaking down your big tasks into a number of small tasks you get to complete or finish more tasks.

The advantage of this is that humans get a great sense of enjoyment by completion. As we complete tasks a physical reaction occurs in our bodies as endorphins are released.

This makes us feel good and makes it even more likely that you will continue with the rest of the smaller tasks required to complete the bigger task.

Another technique to avoid procrastination on a large task is called the Swiss Cheese method. This is where you punch a hole in a large task by say deciding to work on it for a set time (say 30 minutes and then drop it (if required)).



Often after you have got started and spend 30 minutes on the task you will want to continue and make even more progress or even, perhaps, complete the entire task..

19. Create large chunks of time

Most of the really important work you do requires large chunks of unbroken time to complete. Your ability to carve out these blocks of high value, highly productive time is central to your ability to make a significant contribution to your work. And to your life.

You can make great progress on a task or goal if you dedicated a block of time to working on that task

Really successful people manage to carve out blocks of time to focus on the key tasks that they need to complete to achieve their goals. These blocks can be 30 minutes or even 1 or 2 hours.

Ideally the time should be scheduled into your day as you plan your day in advance. Make an appointment with yourself to complete the tasks at a specific time and make sure you keep the appointment.

During this time you should work uninterrupted and continuously on the task. Don't take calls (switch off phone) and don't check your emails.

By applying this method your productivity can increase by 2, 3 or even 5 times.

A Time Planner broken down into various time segments throughout the day can be one of the most powerful personal productivity tools of all.

Exercise:
Select your most important task and schedule a block of time to work on it continuously and without interruption for the time allocated and notice how much more you achieve – then make it a habit in the future.



20. Develop a sense of urgency

One of the most outwardly identifiable quality of a highly successful person is action orientation – they are in a hurry to get their key tasks completed. When you are working on your key tasks you should develop a sense of urgency to motivate yourself to get them completed.

When you do this consistently with a high level of action and energy you can enter what is known as a state of flow. In this state you reach higher levels of clarity, creativity and competency. You can come up with brilliant ideas and tap into your intuition. This will motivate you to get going and keep going.

When you become action orientated you can activate the momentum principle of success. This states that it can take a huge amount of energy to get started and overcome inertia but once you generate the energy to get started it takes far less energy to keep going. In fact you will then go faster and faster with less and less energy.

If you find yourself tempted to stop and procrastinate repeat mantras to yourself to keep up this sense of urgency (e.g. “Do it now” or “Back to work”).

“Do not wait the time will never be just right”
Napolean Hill

21. Single handle every task

Your ability to select your most important task, to begin it and then to concentrate on it single-mindedly until it is complete is the key to high levels of performance and personal productivity.

What this idea means is that when you start on a task you continue on it without allowing any interruptions until it is 100% complete.

If you are interrupted momentarily then repeat the mantra “Back to work, back to work back”

It has been estimated that our tendency to pick up a task and then to keep dropping it and then picking it up again can increase the amount of time required to complete it by 500%.

Each time you go back to the task you need to familiarise yourself with it again. You need to overcome inertia and develop momentum again.

However when you prepare thoroughly for a key task and focus on it single mindedly you develop energy enthusiasm and motivation and get the job done better and far more quickly. .

Exercise: Select an important task and take action now. Challenge yourself to complete it without interruptions and watch the impact.

Other books by the same author

For those interested in other books from Brian Tracy we have included a small sample of his other works. We hope you enjoy them.

- Maximum Achievement: Strategies and Skills That Will Unlock Your Hidden Powers to Succeed.
- Goals! How to Get Everything You Want--Faster Than You Ever Thought Possible.
- Reinvention: How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life
- Master Strategies for Higher Achievement: Set Your Goals and Reach Them - Fast! (Audio CD)

