

**AWAKENING THE POWER WITHIN YOU  
(Enjoy Your Everyday Productive Life)***Self-Enrichment and Inspirational series ...*

“If I really want to improve my life, I can work on the one thing over which I have control – my productivity.” Peter Ng

Eighty-two percent of adult full-time working Singaporeans report that work is a significant source of stress. Additionally, Singaporeans on average work eight hours more per week than Australia counterparts, yet they are no more productive. We are busier than ever, yet we seem to be accomplishing less and less.

We already know about setting priorities, making to-do-lists, and accomplishing goals by breaking them into smaller chunks. However, many of us undervalue setting aside time to plan our work. In coaching and training hundreds of managers and executives, I have found three common drains on our productivity: we are overworked; we multitask; and we procrastinate.

**We are overworked:** Nine to five has been replaced by 24/7, thus, most of us are not only overworked, but reaching the point of exhausted. For most of us, 40-hour workweeks are a thing of the past because of two colliding forces which creates a perfect storm for exhaustion – a global economy and access to technologies that allow us to be available around the clock.

For businesses that operate globally, even scheduling a conference call can be a challenge. No matter how you juggle calendars, someone has to get up in the middle of the night to participate.

Even if your business operates domestically, chances are that you are still overworked because of constant access to technology. One of the common complain I received from my participants is about the time it takes to keep up with the barrage of emails that assault their in-boxes. Moreover, the constant interruptions of emails is also a major cause of distractions and making us lose concentration and focus.

**We multitask:** Many executives tell me they are so busy that multitasking is the only way they can accomplish everything. They participate in conference calls while driving, communicating in IM (Instant Messaging) during meetings, and respond to emails while talking on the phone. Multitasking has become associated with being more productive. The biggest hit to your productivity from multitasking is ‘flip-flop costs’. It takes effort, strong mental energy, and emotional alertness to flip-flop or switch from one focus to another. In fact, we lose up to 40 percent of our productivity from flip-flopping between tasks. Imagine that an email pops up while you are drafting a presentation. You reply to the email and then go back to the presentation. Next, a text comes in and you reply. When you return to the presentation, research shows that it will take you longer to regain your focus and finish your work than it would have had you stayed with that one task. On top of that, researches also most of the mistakes are made during flip-flopping between tasks because of distractions and time-pressure, we tends to be more careless. When we don’t flip-flop between tasks, we often get our best ideas. Flip-flopping can also have a hidden cost – damage to your reputation – such as being termed as a person who... not being able to get things done; constantly late for appointments; lacking focus; fatigue and always exhausted; bad temperament; etc.

No wonder most executives when they reaches home they are mentally exhausted. Some working parents when they reached home they are “absent-presence” – it’s when we are physically present but mentally absent – such as whilst playing with your child, you went into a ‘lost’ state, staring into blank space – not participating in the play neither are you listening to what the child has said.



**We procrastinate:** Being productive is more than simply practicing good time management techniques. Sometimes we procrastinate when our boss gives us a special project, because we want to ensure 'perfection' or making sure that nothing goes wrong. Perfectionism is the enemy of productivity. If you procrastinate, you are probably a perfectionist. If you tend to put off some tasks or projects, there is a high chance the reason is that you want to "do it right". Researchers have found that perfectionism results from one of the three types of thinking: expecting perfect results from yourself; expecting perfect results from others; or thinking that others expect perfect results from you. Being a productive person is about creating a mindset that allows you to efficiently accomplish your work.

We procrastinate when we have disconnected from our innate ability to accomplish what we have decided to do. We are unable to get started until we have no choice. We put off or postpone action because we believe that we are not ready or prepared. With procrastination, we forfeit our ability to overcome life's challenges. Procrastination occurs when courage is weak.

To be productive and successful in our lives, we do not wait for everything to be perfect to move forward. We do not wait for all the problems or obstacles to disappear or until our fear subsides. Successful people take initiative – momentum is our ally. As soon as we take that first step and start moving forward, things become a little easier.

Courage is like a muscle. It cannot grow unless we face a challenge and then push into it. When you put will into action, power can begin to flow and our creative juices are once again realized. We cannot realize our potentials if we do not exercise them. Courage grows by taking risks. When we postpone action, we not only suppress our inner powers, gifts, and talents, but we suffer setbacks.

### **Overcoming Procrastination**

To be honest, all of us are plagued by procrastination in some area of our lives. If something is unpleasant, uninteresting, or complex, we tend to put it off. We procrastinate when we are worried about something. We generally feel helpless to do what we have said we are going to do. No matter what, we can't seem to do it. To break through this block, we need to realize that the answer lies in changing our feelings.

By turning inside and exploring our inner feelings, we will be able to release the negative emotions and feel what we want. When we can fully feel our inner passion, procrastination goes away. By getting out of our head and coming from our passion, we can break through.

Another tool that has helped me is setting my intentions. Just keep visualizing yourself doing what you want to do. Imagine having good feelings of relief and accomplishment. Through this process, you will experience the amazing organizing power of setting your intentions. Suddenly, you have a structure or framework of what you intent to do and it sets you doing what you wanted to be doing.

Another reason some people put off going for what is important to them is that they believe they are not ready. They believe that if they were ready, they would have no fears, worries, anxieties. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.** No matter how ready you are, you will always have fears. Your fears diminish and go away as you begin. If you wait for them to go away, you will never get started.

### **Letting Go of Perfectionism**

When you disconnect from innate ability to accept that life is not and can never be perfect, you get stuck in the desire to be perfect. As a result, you expect too much from yourself or others. When you expect perfection, you are never happy or content. You are too demanding and forfeit any grace in your life.



The need to be perfect is a false need. It begins during childhood when we try to be perfect for our parents. We make mistake of believing that we must be perfect to make our parents happy. When children are unable to succeed in pleasing their parents, the need to please turns into the need to be perfect. As children, we are supposed to make many mistakes to learn our lessons, but often we get the message that if we make mistakes something is wrong with us. When we feel as if we cannot make mistakes, we are well on the way to feeling that we have to be perfect.

If we happen to be gifted or talented in some special way, this can also lead to perfectionism. Since we are talented, we get special attention for being outstanding. We become accustomed to feeling this special praise for being so good. This makes it more difficult for us to risk doing things that we are not so good at.

Although perfectionists may be the most accomplished in their fields, they are rarely good enough for themselves. Rather than love what they have created, perfectionists sometimes do not like their work at all.

The desire for perfection is only unhealthy when we look to ourselves to be perfect in the outer world. When we look inside for perfection, we are trying to discover more of our potential, and that is healthy. Although nothing is ever perfect, we can taste perfection in the process of improving what we have. As we look within and draw in greater power, we feel that our lives, although not perfect, are unfolding perfectly.

### **Letting go of Resentment**

We become resentful when we disconnect from our ability to give support and a deep sense of giving up. In most cases, you feel you have given more and not received what you deserve in return. Classic examples are entrepreneurs and people in sales profession, who initially give more of their time, energy, emotions, and monies – both physical and mental – and not receiving what they think they deserve in return. They are disappointed and at the edge of simply giving up because something happened that is not fair. Closing your heart in this way, you forfeit your power to create what you want and disconnect from your potentials. With resentment, we tend to focus on the negative and miss other opportunities to learn and grow.

Resentment makes us feel as if we have nothing more to give and stops us from creative breakthrough. Yet, if we stop doing what we are supposed to do, we cannot get the result we want, and it became a vicious cycle. The way around this dilemma is to focus on new initiatives or doing something else that can excites us. To break the lock resentment puts on our hearts, we must recognize that we are doing it to ourselves. Yes, it may be that the world is unfair, but to respond by withholding your gifts and talents does not make that any better. It only makes matters worse for ourselves. Realize that when you resent you are now the problem. You not only send out negative energy to others, but that is what you will attract to yourself.

Ultimately, when we feel resentful, it is because we are not aware of our power to create what we want. The pain of deprivation that gives rise to resentment increases with the belief that we cannot get what we need. As we take back our power to create our lives, resentment drops away.

Resentment is a clear sign that you have been giving too much in the wrong direction. Rather than blame others for not giving back to you, take time to appreciate yourself and do a positive distraction by doing something that can move you forward in the direction you want. Life does not seem so unfair as we begin to experience our power to create.



### **Letting go of Self-Pity**

We experience self-pity when we have disconnected from our innate ability to appreciate and give thanks for the blessings and successes in our lives. When we focus on what we are missing, we lose touch with our ability to appreciate what we have and do not recognize the many opportunities available to us. Although it is important to feel empathy and compassion for our setbacks and losses, we do not have to forfeit the inner joy that comes from an attitude of gratitude.

One of the big problems with self-pity is that we not only miss opportunities for more, but we reject them as well. We feel sorry for ourselves, and we expect someone out there to make up for what we are missing and make us happy.

### **Letting go of Confusion**

We become confused when we have disconnected from our innate ability to see clearly, understand, or make sense of what life presents us. Every positive and negative experience has the potential to teach us something useful that we did not know before and to reinforce and strengthen the positive qualities within.

In confusion, we assume that something important is missing – a piece of information or certain data, etc. Instead of being open to finding the answer, we focus on feeling like a victim of circumstances. It is then easy to panic and assume the worst.

By looking for and expecting clear and definite answers right away, we miss the bigger picture that life is an unfolding process of learning to be all that we can be. We forfeit our inner confidence that we are doing the right thing when we require clear and definite answers to our immediate situation. Life will always present us with challenges and changes that will push us to our limit to understand.

When we become confused, it is often because we are not able to accept what is right before us and trust that things will get better even if we do not know how. The wisdom of age tells us that everything always works out, often in ways that are far better than we could ever imagine.

To be free of confusion, take some time to reflect on the many times when you thought things were really urgent or something terrible was going to happen and it did not. So much positive energy is wasted feeling confused rather than trusting that things will work out.

### **Doubt Your Doubts**

To access your creative power to solve problems and create what you want, you have to start from uncertainty. To draw in more knowledge and insight, you need first to feel a certain degree of not knowing or uncertainty. There is a big difference between doubt, which is not believing, and simply not knowing. From the stand point of not knowing, you can still believe that something is possible. By experiencing uncertainty without doubt, you open yourself to your most creative self. The challenge with uncertainty is to keep asking for answers.

Whenever I feel anxiety, I can release it by reminding myself that I have started to doubt instead of accepting that I just do not know. I have learned to recognize that uncertainty always precedes getting a new answer, or a clearer insight. Most anxiety is believing our fear instead of remembering that we really do not know, and we need to open our minds to all possibilities by asking ourselves where and how can we start tapping into our past experiences, our gifts and talents, seeking other people's opinions and suggestions, getting guidance from our boss, and to feel trust again.



### **Life Lessons**

All setbacks and unexpected obstacles will always present life's lessons to be learned. Although you may be doing everything right, you cannot avoid the challenges. Once you have begun to grow from life's challenges, you understand how they have helped you to mold you into what you have become.

You cannot stop the world from upsetting you at times, but you can learn how to use every upset or setback to bring you back to the wisdom and potential of your true self. You can learn to use every negative experience to strengthen and empower you. Every challenging experience can assist you in discovering your inner gifts and powers. Life will never be free of challenges but our ability to meet these challenges will continue to grow. This important recognition frees you to shift your focus from what is wrong to what you can learn. All success hinges on our ability to self-correct and not to continue repeating behaviors or attitudes that do not work or self-sabotaging.

To achieve success in life, we must feel worthy. Without self-love and a sense of worthiness, we can never let our potentials out and becoming much more productive.

### **Plan Your Work or Tasks**

Lots of executives I met highlighted to me that the best way to get things done is simply just do it. Although "just do it" works in some situations, research from Institute of Business Psychology shows that it should be replaced with "just plan it" – creating a brief plan before diving into your work actually improves productivity. Psychologist Peter Gollwitzer of Columbia University wanted to learn what moves people to action, founded that we are twice as likely to accomplish our work if we decide up front when and where we will do it. Similar to writing my articles or developing a new program, I will always decide when and where to do it – usually, I would want to write after breakfast and in a Starbucks outlet, starting out with a general outline of what I want to write, let the creative juices flow, then build the body of the article filling it up with meaty substance, and to end my writing by 11.30am. Some of you may asked why don't I finished what I've started? For those who are familiar with a psychological concept, it is known as Zeigarnik Effect – Bluma Zeigarnik discovered that not finishing a task in one sitting can be a good thing. Leave a project only partly finished on your desk so that when you approach it the following morning, there is something to work on immediately and also to improve upon. Leave yourself loose ends: outline before full paragraphs or draft presentations before finished product.

What is necessary for the Zeigarnik effect to work is to start something. For example, say you want to write a book but are not sure how. The Zeigarnik effect does not work if you merely think, "I should write the book." Nothing happens. You need to start an action in order to leave some loose ends. Write out some bullet points or a structure for the way you will approach the writing of the book; or do an Internet research to gather more ideas of your characters. Then stop – don't push yourself to hard. Come back to it later and you will be more productive.

Often we are in roles in which we need something from one of our employees, peers, or business partners to get our own work done. Using the 'when-and-where' research, a useful corollary is that it is easier to get people to do a task when you gave set a triggering event in their heads or, better yet, when you have agreed with them on a particular when and where. For example, making a request such as, "Steve, could you bring me that report to the conference room after the 10a.m. meeting?" is more likely to get you that report than a general request such as "Steve, could you bring me that report tomorrow?"



### **Get Started or Becoming Stunned**

How can you trick yourself into starting a project on which you have been dragging your feet?

Mary seemed like she was not able to consistently complete all her projects on time. But make no mistake, she was no slacker, rather, she is pushing herself very hard and working conscientiously on each and every project given to her. It is that Mary rarely got to the more strategic projects her boss was looking for her to lead, and that was hurting her career. Instead, she spent her day dealing with crisis upon crisis. She came to a low point of her energy and emotions.

"I feel like things are out of control," she said. "The more I want to move ahead, the hinder I get. I've got to make headway on this project, but I never have a chunk of time to work on it."

"What would you do if you had just ten minutes to work on it?" I asked. "I need way more time than ten minutes," she countered, visibly annoyed that I would asked such a lame idea.

"Of course, we need more time, but what would you do if you had just ten minutes?" I persisted. "Probably jot down the people I need to get input from and set up a couple of meetings." "Good. That's a start, I said. "What else could you do to move the project along? Or put it in another way, what's the smallest step you could take that would have the biggest, most positive impact on this project?"

"I guess I could pull up the template that's out on our company's intranet and start crafting out the structure and framework of what's required of the project," Mary offered.

Mary had tricked herself into taking tiny incremental steps on an important project.

Ask these simple yet powerful questions to help yourself, your employees, and coworkers get a jump start on just about anything:

- What would you do if you had only ten minutes?
- What could you do to move this project?
- What's the smallest step you could take that would have the biggest, most positive impact?

Plan it and trick yourself into getting started are about creating new behaviors to boost your productivity.

### **Set Habits, Not Just Goals**

What do graduating from a part-time degree, courting, and writing a book have in common? They are all goals. What do exercising, easily distracted, and shaking legs have in common? They are all habits.

When it comes to being successful and productive, creating positive habits and routines can beat just setting goals.

What is a habit? Simply stated, a habit is something you do so often it becomes easy. Once a habit is well-developed, it becomes your normal behavior. By systemically improving one behavior at a time you can dramatically improve your overall lifestyle.

**Work Less: Accomplish More**

You may be known for delivering results, and known to be someone who arrives in the morning to the time you leave in the late evening spending your day putting out fires. Admirable? Yes. But at what costs? Burnout and lost touch with your family and friends. You can become known as a doer rather than a leader. If all you do is put out fires, your manager will never get to see that you think strategically, that you can come up with ideas and plans to prevent fires from occurring in the first place.

In our 24/7 world, where boundaries between work and the rest of life become blurred, people are finding it harder and harder to unplug, and their work (and their lives) is suffering as a result. Cases of insomnia, alcoholism, games and caffeine addictions are increasing, and all can be linked to an increasingly stressful lifestyle.

Author of *Sleeping with Your Smartphone* and Harvard Business School Professor Leslie Perlow conducted a four-year study and found that scheduling time off rather than working more hours actually boosted individual and organizational productivity.

Walt Disney's World has figured out how to boost productivity by teaching employees how to avoid burnout. WDW has trained cast members at all levels in ways to recharge their energy by cultivating specific habits such as disconnecting from email during certain period of the day to focus on important project or task, taking a daily mid-afternoon walk, and going to the company gym during work hours. Eighty-two percent of the cast members who participated in this exercise believe it has made them more productive and focused, and better able to manage the demands of their jobs. Although you cannot attribute company's performance solely to this training, WDW's executives believe it has contributed to their continued strong performance despite all challenging situations and varying economic conditions. The whole objective of this simple training is to give your brain a rest and allow your subconscious mind to process information and make new connections.

Consider how you can get yourself and your co-workers to stop overworking. Remember, it is hard to think in new and innovative ways when you are exhausted and stuck in old patterns. Being productive is a mindset that can be learned.

Your Success is My Greatest Reward!

Your Favorite Author & Speaker – Peter Ng