Priority Management

3 steps to getting the right things done today

INTRODUCTION:
Do you know why you get distracted? And, do you know what to do about it? There are two specific factors to be aware of to get important things done each day. As you review each, consider the flow of your day so far today:

1) **Internal Distractions**: Do you practice focusing? According to research at MIT and Harvard, attention training makes you a better and more resilient leader.

2) **External Distractions**: A senior executive I coached recently implemented a *Productivity Tracking Study* [PTS] at work. Over the course of one 5-day work week, she tracked 27 interruptions - from just ONE employee on her 7-person team.

If you want to gain control over (1) your time, (2) your effort and (3) your productivity, take the following three steps below. Left…Right…Left…

**Step 1: Be Present. Answer these 4 questions.**

a) What time is it…Exactly? (And, how long since your last break?)
b) Have you taken in any deep breaths of air in the past few minutes?
c) Are you comfortable in your chair (or standing at your desk) right now?
d) Considering what you’ve done today, are you behind or ahead of schedule?

Questions like these serve one important purpose: They bring you to the present moment, and this may put you closer to the alpha brain wave state; that is, total focused concentration. That fact is that it’s difficult to stay focused on what you need to be doing in an environment that is designed to distract. (Are you reading this sitting at a cubicle or with an “open door” to your office?)

When you understand how attention works at a neuro-scientific level, you are at a great advantage (at work, and in life). You can work smarter, associate significant aspects of workflow and projects, and be more productive during the day. The next two steps will show you exactly what to do, to get the right things done today.
Step 2: Be Specific.

a. Write down a specific priority you are managing this week/month.

b. Identify AT LEAST 4 different aspects of that priority (tasks, sub projects, resources) which must be considered this work week.

c. List a MINIMUM OF 4 questions that need to be answered about that priority before it is completed (short, mid, or long-term included).

Focused = productive; that’s the bottom line. Each prompt above activates a specific thought process, directing you to focus toward one specific priority you’re managing.

To make best use of the limited windows of Focus-Time (often blocks of just 15 minutes each) you have, create appropriate activity sets that are specific and significant. Learn about the “Ziegarnik Effect.” It is the psychological phenomenon that states, “You think about what is NOT finished more than you reflect what is done.” This is why a to do list for the day is critical. Instead of constantly wondering what needs to be done, you use that inventory of tasks to get things done.

Also, realize that the limbic system [brain and nervous system charge of instinct and overall mood] is constantly scanning for information that you might need to be aware of. (Some researchers theorize that this is why it’s so important to check email constantly.)

Step 3: Be Open. *There may be a better way.*

Right now, decide specifically who you will meet with over the next 5-10 days to answer every question and study every aspect you’ve identified.

Our entire nervous system is designed to “seek normal…to find acceptable.” In GET MOMENTUM we call it “Homeostasis.” Leaders of organizations big and small are challenged to get the right things done every day. Over years of experience, you create routines that manifest themselves in a “workflow productivity practice.” By practice I mean the repeated performance of an activity or skill.

To get ahead - that is, to work on your most important priorities - have someone you work with do a “workflow audit” for you. Ask them to sit next to you for an hour or so and watch you work. Then ask, “What could I do differently to save an hour every day?”

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