

Eat That Frog!

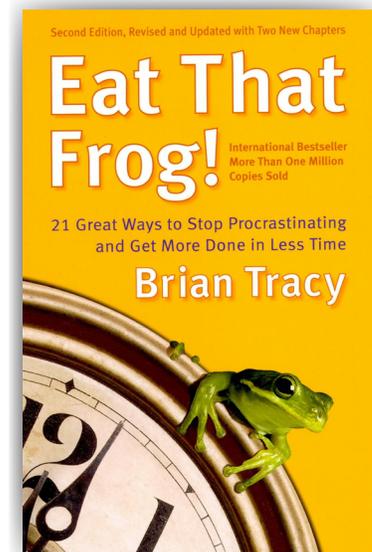
21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time

Brian Tracy

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KEY CONCEPTS

- *Set the table:* Clarity about goals and objectives, and a commitment to them, is crucial to productivity. Systematic time planning will increase productivity and dramatically change people's lives.
- *The Pareto principle:* Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto pointed out that 20 percent of economic activity is "vital," while 80 percent is "trivial." In other words, 20 percent of people's activities will account for 80 percent of their results.
- *Consider the consequences:* The most important tasks have the biggest long-term consequences, and the least important tasks have only short-term consequences.
- *Maximize powers:* One of the best ways to be productive is to maintain optimal energy levels. Working while rested is two to five times more efficient than working while tired. After nine hours of work, productivity declines. Productive people identify the time of day when their energy levels are best and use those times to conquer their most important tasks.
- *Prepare thoroughly:* To overcome procrastination, it is essential for people to prepare comfortable, clean, and attractive workspaces.
- *Identify constraints:* The most efficient way to increase productivity is to identify and conquer the biggest restraint and spend all energy on overcoming it.
- *Technological time sink:* In this era of technology and constant connectivity, it is crucial to develop an independence from technology. Productive people regularly detach themselves in order to remain clearheaded, calm, and focused.

- *Slice and dice:* A good way to prevent procrastination is to slice up big tasks into smaller tasks. Completing one slice motivates people to complete the next slice, and soon their tasks are finished. Humans have a “compulsion to closure,” which means they are more fulfilled when they complete things.

INTRODUCTION

As Brian Tracy explains in **Eat That Frog!**, options abound in life, but so does procrastination. People simply cannot do everything they need or want to do. Instead of attempting to complete everything, productive people select the most important things and prioritize them. Mark Twain said that if people eat frogs first thing in the morning, it will be the worst thing they do all day. Like eating frogs, the most important tasks people have for the day should be completed first. This boosts self-esteem and energy, ignites the desire to complete the next task, and becomes a positive addiction that leads to a productive, fulfilling way of life.

SET THE TABLE

A major cause of procrastination is a lack of clear vision about what people want to achieve. Clarity about goals and objectives, and a commitment to them, is crucial to productivity. Seven steps will help individuals increase their productivity. They must:

1. Decide exactly what they want.
2. Set deadlines.
3. List everything they need to achieve their goals.
4. Make plans.
5. Take action.
6. Do something every single day.

The number one reason why some people get more work done faster is because they are absolutely clear about their goals and objectives, and they don't deviate from them.

Productive people decide on clear goals, write them down to give them tangible forms, set deadlines to produce urgency, write down any activities that will contribute to those goals, devise plans that prioritize their lists and breaks them down into individual tasks, and execute plans daily. Goals are the key to fueling the desire for achievement. Productive people make monthly lists, weekly lists, and daily lists before their months, weeks, and days even begin. Systematic time planning increases productivity and can dramatically change people's lives. Every minute of planning saves ten minutes of work. Checking off completed tasks throughout the day motivates people and raises their self-esteem, granting them the energy to complete more tasks.

One helpful rule to apply is the “Pareto Principle,” or the “80/20” rule. Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto pointed out that 20 percent of economic activity is “vital,” while 80 percent is “trivial.” He claimed that 20 percent of people's activities actually account for 80 percent of their results. This means that for a list of ten items, two will be paramount, counting five to ten times more than the rest of the list. These two items are people's “frogs” and should be prioritized. Most people procrastinate the two most important items, but the most effective and productive people commit to completing them first every day and develop a habit of it.

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of a task determine its value. Whether positive or negative, the greater the consequence, the more important the task. Consequences should be evaluated within a long-term view rather than a short-term view. The most important tasks have the biggest long-term consequences, and the least important tasks have only short-term consequences. Productive, successful people analyze what they are doing now to make sure it

contributes to their long-term goals. They sacrifice short-term gratification for long-term gratification, knowing that the rewards will be higher. People should ask themselves three questions regularly:

1. What are their highest value activities?
2. What can they alone do that, if done well, will make a real difference?
3. What is the most valuable use of their time right now?

Accurately answering these questions will make it easier for people to set proper priorities and overcome procrastination.

PRACTICE CREATIVE PROCRASTINATION

Because it is impossible to get everything done all the time, people will always procrastinate. The key is to procrastinate on the small, low-value tasks. To procrastinate creatively, people must decide what things to discontinue. The most productive people make this a deliberate choice by continually identifying and reviewing their lower value duties and tasks, and by cutting out those that are the most time consuming.

Planning is critical to proper procrastination. Using the *ABCDE* priority technique produces efficient and effective results. After making a list of daily tasks, individuals should go through their lists and label each task with either an A, B, C, D, or E, with A being the most important and E being the least important task. Here is how the letters should correspond to the list:

- A: Tasks people must do.
- B: Tasks people should do.
- C: Tasks that would be nice to do.
- D: Tasks people can delegate
- E: Tasks people can eliminate

Using the *ABCDE* method greatly clarifies and organizes the priorities people have. The key is using discipline and willpower to conquer the A list before anything else.

Successful people are those who are willing to delay gratification and make sacrifices in the short term so that they can enjoy far greater rewards in the long term.

FOCUS ON RESULT AREAS

“Why am I on payroll?” is a question successful people must ask themselves. Typically, people will have no more than seven specific result areas that they are responsible for. They must discuss their key result areas with their supervisors and list them in order to clarify their priorities. *Key result areas* are vital tasks that will not get done if people do not do them themselves. Once people have listed their key result areas, they should go through their lists and grade their performances from one to ten. Instead of avoiding the areas where they perform the worst, they should plan to focus on those areas and improve them. The more experienced people become in their result areas, the less they will procrastinate.

People should also pick three things that contribute the most value to their companies and focus exclusively on them. In order for this to be successful, they must work diligently while in the office so they do not have to bring their work home. Working efficiently while at work allows individuals to spend optimal time at home with the people they love. After all, the main reason to conquer procrastination is to increase happiness, and 85 percent of people’s happiness stems from happy relationships.

PREPARE THOROUGHLY

To overcome procrastination, it is essential for individuals to prepare comfortable, clean, and attractive workspaces. They must also gather all the materials needed for their current projects to have close at hand. Only after everything has been fastidiously prepared will they begin to work efficiently. Then, they can launch right into work and take each task one step at a time.

UPGRADE AND LEVERAGE SKILLS

An important way to prevent procrastination is to upgrade skills in key results areas. A common cause of procrastination is a lack of confidence and a feeling of inadequacy. If people continually build their skills, they will gain confidence and motivation and will be more likely to get important tasks done. There are three steps they can take to upgrade their skills:

1. Read something in their fields every day.
2. Take seminars and classes on their key skills.
3. Listen to educational programs in their cars.

It is also important for people to identify their unique skills and commit to developing them. People's unique abilities will in turn affect their earning abilities. With the right skills, they will always be able to earn money, no matter what their situations are. Successful people also find what they love to do and concentrate solely on those things.

The mark of a superior thinker is his or her ability to accurately predict the consequences of doing or not doing something.

IDENTIFY CONSTRAINTS

Productive people always identify the main obstacles to their goals. The most efficient way to increase productivity is to conquer the biggest restraints. Successful people ask themselves what is holding them back, or what their "limiting factors" are. Is it a lack of resources, a need of assistance, or a weak spot in an organization? Typically, 80 percent of constraints are internal while 20 percent are external. Internal constraints could be character traits, competencies, or habits, or they could be problems within organizations. Successful people look within themselves and ask what limiting factors lie inside them. After identifying their limiting factors, they must focus on eliminating the obstacles standing in their way.

Successful people do not wait to act on their goals. They motivate and pressure themselves rather than wait for someone else to come along and do it. They view themselves as role models and set their own standards. Successful people also push themselves and go the extra mile. By doing this, they increase their self-esteem, which is the core component of a person's personality.

It is important for people to create daily imaginary deadlines for themselves. They must act as if they have one day to get their task done. By pressuring themselves, they will accomplish more than ever before.

MAXIMIZE POWERS

One of the best ways to be productive is to maintain optimal energy levels. Working while rested is two to five times more efficient than working while tired. After nine hours of work, productivity declines. The most productive people identify what time of day their energy levels are best and use those times to conquer their most important tasks. They also go to bed early, take days off from any brain-work, and sleep in on the weekends to maintain optimal energy. It is also important for people to eat lean and healthy foods—like Olympic athletes before an event—and to exercise for at least 200 minutes each week. The better people feel and the more energy they have, the less chance there is that they will procrastinate.

Productive people motivate themselves by becoming optimists. They interpret everything positively, including their own actions. The higher self-esteem they have, the more motivation they will have to work. Instead of letting fear or doubt overwhelm them, they reassure their value to themselves and to others, and they do not complain about their problems. Optimists are identified by four behaviors:

1. They look for the good in every situation.
2. They find the valuable lesson in every difficulty.
3. They look for the solution in every problem.
4. They think and talk continually about their goals.

TECHNOLOGY TIME SINK

In this era of technology and constant connectivity, it is crucial for people to develop an independence from technology. They must regularly detach themselves in order to remain clearheaded, calm, and focused. Technology can increase efficiency in people's lives, but it can also be addictive. One way for individuals to reduce their technological "time sinks" is to apply the 80/20 rule to technology. For example, while 20 percent of emails are important and should be read and responded to right away, the other 80 percent can be deleted without even being opened. This simple strategy can save people hours and hours of time every week. People can start treating technology as their servants rather than their masters by carving out times during the day where all of their electronic devices are shut off, cutting off all means of communication.

To perform at your best, you must become your own personal cheerleader. You must develop a routine of coaching yourself and encouraging yourself to play at the top of your game.

SLICE AND DICE

Monumental tasks can be intimidating. A good way to prevent procrastination is to slice up big tasks into smaller tasks. Completing one slice motivates people to complete the next slice, and soon all of their tasks are finished. Humans have a "compulsion to closure," which means they are more fulfilled when they complete things, and each completed task motivates and energizes them. Another strategy is to work on a project one chunk at a time before moving onto something else. It may take a little while, but chunk by chunk the project will get completed.

Some tasks require large chunks of unbroken time. For certain important tasks, people must carve out specific times—usually 30, 60, or 90 minutes—in advance where they work productively on one important task. They can use planners or calendars to mark off these times days in advance. Productive people use every minute of this time, including transition times like bus rides and flights.

When productive people launch into their tasks, they reach a steady and continuous level of activity called "flow." In this state, people's minds are transformed into an energized, intuitive, clear-minded, and elated state that reaches the highest possible level of performance. To enter a state of flow, people must force onto themselves a sense of urgency which compels them to work at a steady rate and at a fast tempo. It may be difficult to start, but once they get going momentum pushes them forward. The faster they work and the more they get done, the better they feel and the happier they are.

Starting and stopping a task can increase the time to complete it by up to 500 percent. Every time people stop their tasks, they have to build momentum all over again. To work at a single task wholeheartedly and continuously until it is done requires self-discipline. This self-discipline makes people respect themselves and have higher self-esteem. It also makes them become masters of their own destiny.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Estimated Reading Time: 2–3 hours, 128 pages

Eat That Frog! by Brian Tracy would benefit anyone who wishes to be more productive. The book provides multiple strategies to conquer procrastination and make the most efficient use of time. Its slim length is convenient for people with limited time to read.

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