
The Key to Unlocking Your Potential

Module 3: Getting Things Done: Improving Your Capacity for Work and Tasks

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If you're a business owner, then it's likely people will assume you're very hard working and spend long hours at the grindstone. They could be right - when something really needs doing I bet you're unstoppable. You'll lock yourself away for hours on end and don't come up for air until your done, but it may not always be that way. There may be times when you keep circling a certain task (particularly if it's a dull one!) and just don't feel engaged. In this module, we'll look at the pros and cons of these two extremes and help you find the happy medium.

What is Work/Task ability?

In the assessment tool I use, The Judgement Index, work/task capacity is measured through two main indicators. Firstly, 'Trainability'; the speed and accuracy of taking in knowledge and learning a new skill and, secondly, 'Dependability and Reliability'. This measures how likely a person is to do what they are required to do. It's very possible to have one capacity without the other. We all know someone who is as bright as a button but extremely unreliable. This

has to be the most frustrating imbalance because the potential is there but that person's skills are rarely used to their full capacity.

If someone is dependable and you can always trust them to turn up do their best, you can forgive them for being a little slow on the uptake but obviously, a strong mix of both is ideal. One of the biggest mistakes we can all make is assuming everyone is the same as us. We all have our own strengths and weaknesses and having awareness of what our own capabilities are, and those of our teammates is the key to unlocking everyone's potential.

The effects of driving a square peg into a round hole

Some people love tasks - they are in their comfort zone when given a pile of work to do, and feel a huge sense of satisfaction when they tick several things off their To-Do list. People with high trainability won't be daunted if they are given a new system or piece of software to learn. They may even feel comfortable doing repetitive tasks that some people couldn't cope with - things like production-line work or accountancy processing. Regardless of a person's IQ or general numeracy and literacy, some people are more geared up for ploughing through high task-process workloads than others.

Not everyone is heavily process-orientated, but this doesn't necessarily mean they are lazy. Take, for instance, someone with very strong people skills. They place high value around building relationships and interacting with others, so if you stick them in a room on their own with a pile of invoices to feed into a bookkeeping system, they're going to struggle, regardless of how good their attitude is to work. But stick them in front of a group of moaning customers on a business help-line, and they'll happily bash through hour after hour of difficult conversations that would leave many people in a frazzled mess.

Whilst there is no right or wrong per se (it's good to have a variety of different strengths in teams), I rarely find anyone at board-level that doesn't have a strong mix of both work/task capacity and people skills. Perhaps in days gone by when the leadership styles were more dictatorial, then just having a strong work/task ethic was enough. But, these days the whip-cracking style is very much out of fashion, so if you don't have a softer edge yourself, then you need to get assistance from others with good people skills to help get the best out of others.

The drawbacks of having a very strong Work/Task abilities

As with any gift, high capacity around work and tasks can cause problems for you if you lack self-awareness. One of the first issues it can cause is, if your people skills are less developed than your task skills, you might find yourself prioritising the tasks over *everything*,

including your own welfare and the that of the people around you. You might become so focused on the task in hand that you fail to spot warning signs of people becoming disengaged and burning out. Ultimately, this will cause avoidable trouble for you and ironically end up making the task take longer than needed.

The second drawback, if your task skills are much stronger than your strategic skills, then you may become so focused on completing a task that you forget to check if what you are doing is still relevant or useful. I'm sure we've all been there - things like heading down the route of creating a marketing campaign for electric fans in June and not noticing the weather forecast predicts the coldest summer in history.

You might also find yourself very frustrated with people who don't share your abilities to get things done. You can't change other people, so if this affects you then you might have to learn to take a few deep breaths and develop some patience.

So, how do you help yourself and unlock even more of your potential?

As with all this personal development stuff, it's about two things: understanding yourself better and understanding how others tick, too. Whether you have high or low work/task capacity, you'll have your own set of challenges to deal with.

Low Capacity

There are different areas you might struggle with

- Taking in new information quickly and using it to develop your skills (Trainability)
 - If you or someone on your team has this problem, then it may be you need extra time or extra training in certain areas. If training uptake is a common problem in your company, you're either hiring the wrong people or it might be that the training is not as clear or thorough as it could be, or that inadequate feedback was given.
- Dealing with repetitive or mundane tasks
 - Some people love them and some people hate them! I'm not sure if anyone can be made to love repetitive tasks if they aren't wired that way. If it's not your bag, it's best to delegate such tasks to someone who thrives on them.
- Being motivated to plough through volumes of work
 - It might be that overwhelm or anxiety is getting in your way. If your To Do list feels like a mountain you have to climb every day then maybe you need to do some work on prioritising to get things feeling achievable again. Small wins will bring instant happiness but don't be tempted to just do the easy things on your lists and ignore the tough stuff. As Mark Twain said, "If it's your job to eat

a frog, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first."

- Going about things efficiently
 - Are you doing everything as efficiently as possible? What you could automate or delegate? How can you check how efficient you are being? Is anyone doing the same job quicker and, if so, why?

High Capacity

You might find the following things get in your way

- You might prioritise tasks over your own wellbeing
 - If you have a very strong drive to complete tasks, then it's highly likely your self-care will suffer at times. Are you making early starts and working late more often than not? Do you keep putting off booking your holidays because the time never feels right? Do you eat lunch at your desk? Are you too busy to exercise? These are all signs that you're too focused on work, and you know what they say about all work and no play...
- You might prioritise tasks over the needs of other people
 - Are you a slavedriver? You might wear the title like a badge of honour, but if you don't take other people's needs into consideration then they'll lose motivation to look after you. It's a very short-term strategy to burn through teammates and associates. You'd be smarter to become more collaborative in your thinking, and if people skills really aren't your thing then make sure you put a friendly, caring buffer between yourself and other people.
- You might not always consider the big picture
 - Make more time to plan ahead and consider implications to your actions. You might find a SWOT analysis useful, where you consider your businesses Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Talking to teammates in meetings and discussing business ideas in mastermind groups can be really helpful.
- You might get frustrated with people who don't have your capacity for learning new skills and getting things done
 - Patience, young Grasshopper! If you're a super-speedy learner-doer, then that's awesome for you, but don't forget not everyone has your gifts. It doesn't necessarily mean they are lazy or stupid (although that happens, too!), it simply means they work at a different pace. So, if you feel your stress levels rising then approach the problem calmly. Ask them what they feel they do understand fully and seek to understand where the gaps in their knowledge and abilities lay. Then, either up the training efforts or possibly adjust their role to play to their strengths and find a suitable person to complete the parts they continue to struggle with.

Other things that can help with productivity

Improve your time-management and planning skills

Many people go about time management arse-about-face. They'll start by writing lists of things they need to do that day, then try to fit those things in around other stuff in their diary, and then start to wonder why life isn't how they'd always wanted it to be.

It's the difference between being "proactive" and "reactive".

A proactive person has a bigger plan. It doesn't have to be crystal clear, because things can and do change along the way, but they start by knowing the general direction they're heading in. I personally use a time-management tool called "The Self Journal". This is a pre-formatted book you write in every day and it lasts for 12 weeks. At the beginning of every 12 weeks, you choose up to three main goals to work on. The very act of deciding on that small number of main goals to work towards causes you to question if they are the right or the wrong ones for your overall direction.

When you've decided on the goals, you then think about the actions you need to take, when you need to take them and the milestones you'll hit along the way that will confirm your progress.

When you come to filling in your goals for each day, it's easy to check back to see if what you're doing every day is aligned with the course you've set out to achieve, or if you're hopelessly adrift. You may not be perfect every day, but being intentional with your time makes you much more effective and productive than just turning up to the office each day and hoping for the best.

Take care of yourself

It sounds obvious, but this is a very important point that is overlooked by many business owners. If you don't put the right food in your body, stay hydrated, take enough exercise and get enough rest and relaxation, then you won't be firing on all cylinders.

Eating the wrong foods will play havoc with your body and cause fatigue, obesity and illness. Exercise, whilst important, will not cancel out the effects of an unhealthy diet. But, even if you aren't wanting to lose weight, exercise is still an important way to maintain mental health as it reduces stress levels, and anything that's good for your heart will be good for your brain too.

You might also want to consider your drinking habits. Are you staying within recommended guidelines and having a few alcohol-free days each week, or are you getting through a bottle of wine every night because it's the only way you can relax? Drinking at home has become

completely normalised for our generation, and it's causing issues around dependency, even when you aren't drinking to get drunk.

Delegate

It's OK to not do it all! Many business owners I've met describe themselves as control freaks, and many see it as a good thing, but you can end up suffocating your business and running yourself ragged if you don't learn to let go of certain things.

Management of others is a skill that can be learned, but a lot of the problems around delegation can be addressed by learning what's stopping you delegating in the first place. It'll usually be connected to a fear that you won't be able to cope if things go wrong, and you'll never get over that fear unless you practice letting go and dealing with the consequences. That's where having a coach can come in very handy - you often can't see when you're being the problem!

Improve your systems

It's amazing how much technology improves every single day, and it's always worth revisiting your systems every now and then to see what could help you. Try not to be afraid of change, too. In the accountancy practice I own with my partner, Kevin, we have had endless struggles with staff who refuse to embrace new systems. For instance, there's is now software that can be trained to do the brunt of your regular bookkeeping tasks for you by bringing in data directly from your bank online. You'd be amazed at the number of employees who insisted on inputting all the data manually because they didn't trust the systems. Needless to say, they are no longer working with us! We gave them ample opportunity to adjust but when emotions kept overriding logic, we had to part company. Don't be afraid to try new things - you might find they take some getting used to, but can save hours of your precious time when you're up and running.

Work out why you procrastinate

If there are certain things you never seem to get around to doing, then ask yourself why you are procrastinating. Is it because you are imagining you'll find the task overly difficult or dull? Is the outcome of your task unclear? Is there a downside to completing the task? Are you addicted to the adrenaline of always being up against a deadline? Our minds can play tricks on us in all sorts of ways, but if you have something in particular that you keep putting off, try the following.

- Make an appointment for yourself to do the task. Make it as soon as possible - perhaps this afternoon if your reading this in the morning, or first thing tomorrow.

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- Picture yourself completing the task, and really tune in to how you'll feel when it's done.
 - Remind yourself of all the reasons you need to do it.
 - Think of how much worse things will get if you keep putting it off or don't do it at all - peoples you'll upset and the knock-on effects
 - If it's a big task, then chunk it down into smaller pieces and write them down in order of priority.
 - Promise yourself that no matter how you feel, you'll start the task at the appointed time and spend at least 10 minutes working on it. Once you've started you probably won't stop.

Module 3 Worksheet: Your Work/Task Capacity

1: Thinking about what we've discussed above, which of the following things do you struggle with most?

- Taking in new information quickly and using it to develop your skills (Trainability)
 - Could you be overloading your brain with too much information. If so how can you make it more manageable and enjoyable to learn?

- Dealing with repetitive or mundane tasks
 - Firstly, should these tasks be delegated, and if they can't how can you make them more bearable? For example, could you do them at a time of day when you have more energy? Could you put some music on and make your environment more comfortable in other ways? Could you book time in your diary do them more regularly in smaller chunks, so they don't build up through being left?

- Being motivated to plough through volumes of work
 - Are you reminding yourself of all the reasons why you are doing the tasks in the first place? How will you feel when it's all done, and what are the negative consequences of not getting things done.

- Going about things efficiently
 - Could you do things differently and use your time better? What are the top three things that spring to mind, and how can you change the way you do them?

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- Prioritising tasks over your own wellbeing
 - Are you getting enough rest and exercise, and are you taking care of your own wellbeing? Do you keep putting off holidays and work all day without breaks? What could you do differently? Who, apart from you, will benefit from you taking care of yourself better?

- Prioritising tasks over the needs of others
 - Are you a bit of a slavedriver? What could you do to ensure you aren't burning your team out?

- Not considering the big picture enough
 - Do you ever get so caught up in doing tasks that you forget the benefit of doing them? What can you do to ensure you are always doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason?

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- Getting frustrated with people who aren't as capable as you
 - Have you ever given anyone a hard time because they don't whizz through work as quickly as you? What could you do to either get the best out of them or change their role to one that suits them better?

- Poor time management
 - What can you do to organise your days, weeks, months and years better?

- Poor delegation skills
 - Are you good at delegation, if not what can you do about it?

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- Sticking with old systems and not checking for better ones
 - When is the last time you reviewed all the systems you are using, from your bookkeeping to your diary to your CRM systems? Could you put some time aside with another person to sense-check your systems?

- Procrastination
 - What task is the thorn in your side - the one you keep putting off and is starting to haunt you? Follow the steps below and by this time next week, you'll have nailed it!

1: Make an appointment for yourself to do the task. Make it as soon as possible - perhaps this afternoon if your reading this in the morning, or first thing tomorrow. When will you do it?

2: Picture yourself completing the task. How will you feel when it's done?

3. Write down all the reasons you need to do it.

4. Write down how much worse things will get if you keep putting it off or don't do it at all - people you'll upset and the knock-on effects

5: If it's a big task, then chunk it down into smaller pieces and write them down in order of priority.

6: Promise yourself that no matter how you feel, you'll start the task at the appointed time and spend at least 10 minutes working on it. Once you've started you probably won't stop. When you're done, what will you do to reward yourself?

Good luck with everything, and I'll see you in Module 4!

All the Best

Vicki