



Mountains Into Molehills

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Mountains Into Molehills aims to build understanding of self and others. It integrates relevant theory with practical step by step guides to coping with stressful situations, and handling difficult situations assertively.

Chapter Three - Time Management

Including – Procrastination, Prioritisation & Delegation

1. *First Steps*
2. *Stress & Time Management – the vicious circle*
3. *Being assertive with those who impact on your workload*
4. *Managing your manager*
5. *Managing meetings*
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11. *Priority Setting & Delegation Matrix*
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To visit Brian's home website page at www.brianamartin.co.uk simply click this link

To return to www.selfhelp.brianamartin.co.uk page simply click this link

Access my other book 'The Anger Management Programme'

www.angermanagementprogramme.co.uk .

FOUR BOOKS IN ONE

Module One: Anger Management & Impulse Control

Module Two: Anger Release & Self Calming

Module Three: Conflict Resolution Skills for Couples

Module Four: Advice for Couples in Conflict

Time Management

1. First Steps

Decide what you want extra time for, how much extra time, and take the decision to take charge of your life, not let others put on you. Until you firmly take the decision you will find it hard to make progress.

- Decide what you will stop doing
- Decide what you will do less of, or do less frequently
- Decide not to do for others what they can do for themselves
- Learn to say 'NO' [Chapter Eight]
- Learn to express your point of view assertively [Chapter Eight]
- Improve your personal efficiency

2. Stress and Time Management - The Vicious Circle

Poor time management skills cause stress, but stress diminishes personal effectiveness and the things you do take longer, which means that you make less effective use of time, which causes stress, which...

Positive stress is a vital ingredient in motivation and high performance.

Negative stress is a thief of time - it lowers our efficiency. When we are negatively stressed:-

- we make mistakes [which leads to a lot more correction work],
- we forget things,
- we think less quickly,
- we become confused more easily.

This Chapter and Chapter Two 'Stress Management' should therefore be read in conjunction with each other. Tackling stress, except by way of improved Time Management, is outside the scope of this chapter. However the material included later in this chapter 'Changing the way you think about work' should also be helpful.

Good time management also requires you to be assertive with those who impact on your time and you will need to read Chapter Seven 'How To Become More Assertive' and practice the assertiveness models included in Chapter Eight 'Difficult Conversations'.

3. Being Assertive with those who impact on your work

There are many situations in which you need to be assertive if you are not to let others screw up your attempts to get on with your work efficiently. You will need to be assertive:-

With colleagues – who interrupt you, take up more of your time than they need, whose mistakes make work for you, whose lack of co-operation sometimes makes life so much more difficult than it need be, who will dump on you given half a chance, and who sometimes don't do what they are supposed to do leaving you to pick up the pieces.

4. Managing your manager

These are the expectations which you may reasonably have of your manager :-

- Clear guidance on priorities when your workload is simply not manageable
- Help in solving problems which you have unsuccessfully tried to solve
- Self discipline in managing his or her interruptions
- Avoidance of multiple and/ or conflicting objectives and 'shifting sand'
- Care in allocating work and projects so that abortive work is minimised
- Personal efficiency so that you don't have to keep picking up the pieces
- The efficient management of meetings which you have to attend
- Ensuring fair play in task allocation around the team
- Planning ahead, so everything isn't 'wanted yesterday'
- Good communication so that you know the things you need to know to do your job efficiently.

Your boss is already scoring high marks? Great! If not you need to train him or her! How? By being assertive, by asking assertively for what you need, by learning how to give upwards feedback in an acceptable way.

There is no substitute for talking over your issues with your boss having prepared appropriately [see Chapter Seven] Your boss is almost certainly more approachable than you think – providing you express your needs in the right way. Chapter Eight has a specific 'Model' of how to have a 'Difficult Conversation' with your boss.

If you boss is unapproachable? Get another job!

5. Managing Meetings

Meetings are unavoidable, but how long they last, who attends them, and how useful they are, are infinitely variable. Making meetings a sound investment of time is a well documented subject outside the scope of this paper. The internet offers plenty of choice of reading material. However a few tips.

- Put the chair which your uninvited visitors plop down on in a position where its not so easy for them to do that.
- Meetings lengthen to fill or exceed the time made available for them [Parkinson's Law]. Set strict limits on the time allocated and be ruthless in deferring any items not covered in the allocated time. From this it follows that items should be discussed in priority order – but don't spend half the meeting arguing about what to discuss first. Let the Chairperson decide.
- Don't hold meetings in your office, or at your work station. If you do this you are trapped until people decide to go away. Try to meet away from your work station so you can leave when **you** are ready.
- Consider the policy of the organisations which hold meetings standing up.

6. Procrastination

We all have jobs we keep putting off. This makes us feel harassed as we constantly use the standard stress boosters of 'I ought to...' 'I should...' 'I must....' We are constantly reminding ourselves of the what we 'ought' to be doing and adding to our list.

The key to overcoming procrastination is to make a start

Plan to do ten minutes only – usually the start is much the worst part, like diving into cold water – its OK once you are in! Usually you will find that your plan to do ten minutes will be the push you need to get seriously stuck in.

Plan little treats as a reward for getting on with the task – a chocolate biscuit or a nice cup of coffee at pre-planned times during the task.

You will find it very helpful to make a prioritised list of all the jobs you are procrastinating about **and tackle just one a day until the list is completely eliminated.** Its amazing how much easier this feels than trying to find a big block of time to kill them all together.

When there is a big job to do which is going to take a long time allocate short blocks of time and do the job progressively.

'How do you cook an elephant?' The answer 'In small pieces'

7. Personal efficiency *There are many ways to improve personal efficiency. Here are some:*

Back up your computer files frequently I know you already know that, but do you do it?

Brought Forward Systems Have a brought forward system which allows you to put stuff out of mind and where you will find it just when you need it. I am dedicated to a simple brought forward suspension filing system. My suspension files say 'NOW' 'Next Monday' 'Next Month'.

I am very disciplined about checking what is in my 'Now' file at the start of each day, checking my 'Next Monday' file every Monday morning, and checking my 'Next Month' on the first Monday in each month. You may prefer a computer based system, but I prefer to write myself notes and keep them with relevant papers in the appropriate brought forward suspension file.

Use a big diary so you have room to write reminders and notes relevant to the day on the page for the day they will be needed

Use a structured system for deciding priorities The Priority Setting & Delegation Matrices included later in this chapter is a useful approach.

Make a daily list of priorities List making is essential to successful prioritisation and is used by most successful people. Put the most important things nearer the top and the least important nearer the bottom. Leave a space at the top for urgent new things which come up during the day. Don't put anything near the top unless it really must be done today or you would be letting someone down badly if you don't do it. *Remember 'should' and 'ought to' don't mean must.*

Do things less often List the things you do routinely and how often you do them. Reduce the frequency. Examples:

- Do you really need that meeting every week? Do you really need standard agenda's which cause you to over cover topics? We tend to let the simplicity of following a weekly pattern, or a monthly pattern, create over frequent meeting schedules which have no other basis in logic. I wonder if our week was nine days instead of seven whether we would meet every nine days [which would save us ten meetings a year] or insist that seven days is the right gap?
- If you check something daily can it be reduced to alternate days?
- If you review all the data weekly can you concentrate on a particular part in rotation?
- If you check comprehensively can you use sampling?

Remember too, that it takes many times longer to try for perfection and the extra effort is often not justified by what you get for it!

8. Use Pareto's Law

Vilfredo Pareto was an Italian economist to whom is attributed the idea that a small minority of cause results in a large majority of consequence. This is usually expressed as the 80:20 rule which, in my experience, is usually, albeit approximately, true. Test it for yourself. What percentage of people bring 80% of the problems; what percentage of problems cause 80% of the work?

Why this insight by Pareto is important to Time Management. Pareto's Law means that 20% of what a person does brings 80% of the benefits to the organisation. Furthermore, if you play around with the arithmetic behind Pareto's Law, you will find that it leads to a mathematical conclusion *that 50% of what we do gets us 98% of the results.*

Now all you have to do is figure out which 50% of your time is getting only 2% of the results – so you can decide to stop doing some of it! Easier said than done, but not impossible!

9. Avoiding Perfectionism

Many find it impossible to try for less than perfection in what they do. If you are the sort of person who must have things perfect this will have a major impact on the time you need to complete a task, and on your stress level. It could take twice as long to get something 99.9% right compared with 99% right.

Perfectionists hate to be rushed and their perfectionism can lead to work overload – which in turn leads to the need to work faster. Working faster than natural is very stressful for perfectionists so a vicious stress building circle is produced.

If you are a surgeon, or on aircraft maintenance, believe me, I'm glad you aim at perfection. Otherwise you should seriously consider attacking your perfectionism. In therapy perfectionists are taught to reduce their perfectionism by deliberately making one mistake every day. Another good approach short of deliberately making a mistake a day is to notice minor mistakes and restrain yourself from correcting them.

Perfectionists are also prone to obsessive compulsive disorder – so if you have routines which control you, if you tend to check and double check, watch out! You need to resist the urge to treble check..

Perfectionists put so much pressure on themselves they often come into therapy where they are helped to think 'Not perfect, but good enough'. You will find it saves you a lot of time if you sometimes think 'Not perfect but good enough' about your work.

If you are a manager remember that although perfectionists can be great subordinates because they deliver a perfect result on time [providing they don't crack up] they can be really awful to work for because they have a tendency to supervise, nit pick, and criticise!

10. Delegating & Prioritising

If you have people working for you don't do what they can do just as well – unless you are helping them out!

A key delegation skill is being able to identify that work which could successfully be done by someone else [a difficult concept if you are a Perfectionist and now thinking 'If you want something done right do it yourself!']. In other words are you making a *unique* contribution in doing this or that piece of work, or are you doing it for some other reason – or is it just because you always do it.?

Use a structured System for deciding what to delegate

The Priority Setting & Delegation Matrix on the next page should be helpful if you want to improve your delegation skills. In delegation decisions don't forget Pareto's law and try to decide what to stop doing altogether because its part of the 50% which only yields point two of a percent.

Delegation Risk Factor

A big issue in deciding what to delegate is the risk to you if it goes pear shape. The Delegation Risk Matrix on page 12 should be used. Generally speaking, the greater the risk to you personally if it goes wrong the less inclined you should be to delegate without frequent checking of plans and progress.

Priority Setting & Delegation Matrix

		<i>DELEGATABILITY FACTOR</i>		
		1. Only I can do it	2. It would be best if I did it	3. Others can do it just as well or better
<i>U R G E N C Y & I M P A C T</i>	If not done:- - Immediate Impact - Big impact	1. Your number one priority to do personally	2	3
	If not done: - Future impact - Big/significant impact	2	4	6
	- Plenty of time -Low impact -Low detectability	3	6	9 Only do this yourself as a last resort – your lowest priority

The lower the number the higher your personal priority

Delegation Risk Matrix

[A] Detectability of failure by you

Low Risk of Failure

High Risk of Failure

The person/people you are delegating to
Are highly committed to the task given

Are not
committed



There is a lot in it for them

There isn't



You will soon see if they have done it

Won't be easily
apparent



You can easily check the quality of
their work

You can't



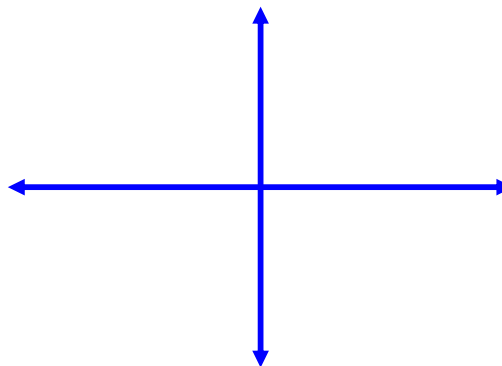
Plus

[B] The risk to you

It will be immediately obvious
To your boss if it goes wrong

*High
Personal
Risk*

There will be a big
consequence
if it goes wrong



Little or no
consequence if
it goes wrong

*Low
personal
risk*

Your boss will never know

11. Other Time Management tactics

Don't prioritise small task – just do them! Clear small tasks as they arise. Don't put them on a list or in a prioritised queue where they will congeal to form a great lump and keep sending you stressful reminders that they are waiting for you to deal with them.

Stop smoking Fag breaks are a big time waster. Hypnosis works if you really want to give up.

Learn Speed Reading

Get other people ideas on how to improve your working methods

Always write things down The shortest pencil is more accurate than the longest memory: and trying to remember everything you need to is very stressful.

Save Time and Stress on journeys Get precise directions to where you are going and record them on a Dictaphone. By listening to the Dictaphone in the car, on the train, as you are walking, whatever, you will be able to find your way to the most intricate of new places without getting lost.

More Tactics

- Always keep your car keys in the same place at home
- Diary important things to do
- Do one of the jobs you keep putting off every day
- Get a little notebook for numbers, dimensions, details you'll need again
- Get up earlier
- Have two alarm clocks with different ring tones – Set one earlier than the other
- Learn good excuses to leave meetings
- Learn polite ways of shortcutting conversations
- Plan to arrive earlier
- Put post it notes in all sorts of places to remind you
- Resist doing things which are more interesting but less urgent