

CHAPTER 8

The Law of Three

“Do what you can with what you have right where you are.”

Theodore Roosevelt

There are three core tasks that you perform that contain most of the value that you contribute to your business or organization. Your ability to accurately identify these three key tasks and then to focus on them most of the time is essential for you to achieve at your best. Let me tell you a true story.

Three months after her first full day coaching session with me in San Diego, Cynthia stood up and told the group a story. She said, “When I came here 90 days ago, you claimed that you would show me how to double my income and double my time off within 12 months. This sounded completely unrealistic, but I was willing to give it a try.”

She went on. “On the first day, you asked me to write down a list of everything that I did over the course of a week or a month. I came up with 17 tasks that I was responsible for. My problem was that I was completely overwhelmed with work. I was working 10 to 12 hours per day, six days per week, and not spending enough time with my husband and my two young children. But I didn’t see any way out.”

“I had been working for eight years for a fast-growing entrepreneurial company in the high-tech area, but there always

seemed to be an overwhelming amount of work to do and never enough time.”

One Thing All Day Long

She continued with her story. “Once I had made up this list, you then told me to ask this question, ‘If you could only do one thing on this list, all day long, which one task would contribute the greatest value to your company?’ Once I had identified that task, which was quite easy, I put a circle around that number.

“You then asked, ‘If you could only do one more thing on your list of key tasks, which would be the *second* activity that contributes the most value to your company?’ ”

“Once I had identified the second most important task, you asked me the same question with regard to the *third* most important task.

“You then said something that shocked me at the time. You said that fully 90% of the value that you contribute to your company is contained in those three tasks, whatever they are. Everything else you do is either a support task or a complimentary task that could probably be delegated, downsized, outsourced or eliminated.”

Take Immediate Action

Cynthia continued with her story. “As I looked at the three tasks, I realized that these were the three things that I did that contributed

the most value to my company. This was on a Friday. On Monday morning, at 10 o'clock, I met with my boss and explained to him what I had discovered. I told him that I needed his help in delegating and outsourcing all my work except for those three key tasks. I felt that if I could work on those three tasks exclusively, all day long, I could more than double my contribution to the company. Then I said to him that, if I doubled my contribution, I would like to be paid twice as much."

She said, "My boss was completely silent. He looked at my list of key tasks, looked back up at me, looked at the list again and then said 'Okay.' It was now 10:21 AM according to the clock on the wall behind him."

"He said, 'You're right, these are the three most important things that you do in this company, and the three things that you do the best. I will help you to delegate and downsize all these other minor tasks to free you up to work full time on these three key tasks. And if you double your contribution, I will pay you twice as much.'

Transform Your Life

Cynthia concluded her story by saying, "He did, then I did, then he did. He helped me delegate and assign my minor tasks so I could concentrate on my top three jobs. As a result, I doubled my output over the next 30 days, and he doubled my income."

She said, “I had been working very hard for more than eight years and I doubled my income in less than one month by focusing all my time and energy on my three key tasks. Not only that, instead of working 10 and 12 hour days, I work from 8:00 to 5:00 and spend time in the evenings and on the weekends with my husband and my children. Focusing on my key tasks has transformed my life.”

Perhaps the most important word in the world of work is “contribution.” Your rewards, both financial and emotional, will always be in direct proportion to your results, to the value of your contribution. If you want to increase your rewards, you must focus on increasing the value of what you do. You must dedicate yourself to contributing more results to your company. And there are always three key tasks that contribute the most.

The Quick List Method

Here is an exercise that we give to our coaching clients very early in the process. We give them a sheet of paper and then ask them, “In 30 seconds, write down your three most important goals in life, right now.”

What we have found is that when you only have 30 seconds to write your three most important goals, your answers will be as accurate as if you had 30 minutes or three hours. Your subconscious mind seems to go into a form of “hyper-drive” and your three most important goals will pop out of your head and onto the paper, often to the surprise of the person doing the exercise.

In 80% or more of cases, the three common goals that most people have are first, a financial and career goal; second, a family or personal relationship goal; and third, a health or a fitness goal.

And this is as it should be. These are the three most important areas of life. If you give yourself a grade on a scale of one to ten, with one being the lowest and ten being the highest, and apply this scale to each of these three areas, you can immediately identify where you are doing well in life and where you need some improvement. Try it yourself and see. Give this test to your spouse or your children. The answers can be quite revealing.

Later in our coaching program, we expand this exercise by asking the following questions:

1. What are your three most important *business or career* goals, right now?
2. What are your three most important **family or relationship** goals, right now?
3. What are your three most important **financial** goals, right now?
4. What are your three most important *health* goals, right now?
5. What are your three most important **personal and professional development** goals, right now?
6. What are your three most important **social and community** goals, right now?
7. What are your three biggest **problems or concerns** in life, right now?

When you force yourself to ask and answer these questions in 30 seconds or less, you will often be amazed at the answers. Whatever your answers, they will usually be an accurate snapshot of your true situation in life at the moment. These answers will tell you what is really important to you.

While you are setting goals and priorities, getting organized, concentrating single-mindedly on one task at a time, and disciplining yourself to complete your most important tasks, you must never forget that your ultimate goal is to live a long, happy and healthy life.

Time Management Is a Means to an End

The main reason that you develop time management skills is so that you can get everything that is really important in your work completed so that you can free up more and more time to do the things in your personal life that give you the greatest happiness and satisfaction.

Fully 85% of your happiness in life will come from happy relationships with other people, especially those closest to you, and the members of your family. The critical determinant of the quality of your relationships is the amount of *time* that you spend face to face with the people you love, and who love you in return.

The purpose of time management skills, of eating that frog, and getting more done in less time, is to enable you to spend more “face

time” with the people you care about, doing the things that give you the greatest amount of joy in life.

Rule: It is *quality* of time at work that counts and *quantity* of time at home that matters.

Work All the Time You Work

To keep your life in balance, you should resolve to work all the time you work. When you go to work, put your head down and work the whole time. Start a little earlier, stay a little later, and work a little harder. Don’t waste time. Every minute that you spend in idle chit chat with coworkers is time taken away from the work that you must accomplish if you want to keep your job.

Even worse, time that you waste at work often has to be taken away from the members of your family. You either have to stay late or take work home and work in the evenings. By not working effectively and efficiently during your workday, you create unnecessary stress and you deprive the members of your family of the very best person you can possibly be.

There is a story of a little girl who goes to her mother and asks, “Mommy, why does daddy bring a briefcase full of work home each night and never spends any time with the family?”

The mother replies sympathetically, “Well honey, you have to understand, daddy can’t get his work done at the office so he has to bring it home and get caught up here.”

The little girl then asks, “If that’s the case, why don’t they put him in a slower class?”

Balance Is Not an Option

One of the most famous sayings of the ancient Greeks was “Moderation in all things.”

You need balance between your work and your personal life. You need to set priorities at work and concentrate on your most valuable tasks. At the same time, you must never lose sight of the fact that the reason for working efficiently is so that you can enjoy a higher quality of life at home with your family.

Sometimes people come up to me and ask, “How do I achieve balance between my work and my home life?”

I ask them in return, “How often does a tight rope walker balance when he is on the high wire?”

After a few seconds of thinking, they almost always say, “All the time.”

I say, "That is the same situation with balance between family and home life. You have to do it all the time. You never reach a point where you have attained it perfectly. You have to work at it."

Your goal should be to perform at your very best at work, to get the very most done and enjoy the very highest level of rewards possible for you in your career. Simultaneously, you must always remember to "smell the flowers along the way." Never lose sight of the real reasons why you work as hard as you do, and why you are so determined to accomplish the very most with the time that you invest. The more time you spend face-to-face with the people you love, the happier you will be.

Eat That Frog!

1. Determine the three most important things that you do in your work. Ask, "If I could only do one thing all day long, which one task contributes the greatest value to my career?" Do this exercise two more times. Once you have identified your "Big Three" concentrate on them single mindedly all day long.

2. Identify your three most important goals in life, in each area. Organize them by priority. Make plans for their accomplishment, and work on your plans every single day. You will be amazed at what you achieve in the months and years ahead.