

CHAPTER 3

Apply the 80/20 Rule to Everything

"We always have time enough, if we will but use it aright."

Wolfgang Von Goethe

The 80/20 Rule is one of the most helpful of all concepts of time and life management. It is also called the Pareto Principle after its founder, the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, who first wrote about it in 1895. Pareto noticed that people in his society seemed to divide naturally into what he called the "vital few," the top 20% in terms of money and influence, and the "trivial many," the bottom 80%.

He later discovered that virtually all economic activity was subject to this Pareto Principle as well.

For example, this rule says that 20% of your activities will account for 80% of your results. 20% of your customers will account for 80% of your sales. 20% of your products or services will account for 80% of your profits. 20% of your tasks will account for 80% of the value of what you do, and so on.

This means that if you have a list of ten items to do, *two* of those items will turn out to be worth as much or more than the other eight items put together.

Number of Tasks versus Importance of Tasks

Here is an interesting discovery. Each of these tasks may take the same amount of time to accomplish. But one or two of those tasks will contribute five or ten times the value as any of the others.

Often, one item on a list of ten things that you have to do can be worth more than all the other *nine* items put together. This task is invariably the frog that you should eat first.

Can you guess on which items the average person is most likely to procrastinate? The sad fact is that most people procrastinate on the top ten or twenty percent of items that are the most valuable and important, the "vital few." They busy themselves instead with the least important 80%, the "trivial many" that contribute very little to results.

Focus on Activities versus Accomplishments

You often see people who appear to be busy all day long but they seem to accomplish very little. This is almost always because they are busy doing things that are of *low value* while they procrastinate on the one or two activities that, if they completed them quickly and well, could make a real difference to their companies and to their careers.

The most valuable tasks you can do each day are often the hardest and most complex. But the payoff and rewards for completing these tasks efficiently can be tremendous. For this reason, you must

adamantly refuse to work on tasks in the bottom 80% while you still have tasks in the top 20% left to be done.

Before you begin work, always ask yourself, "Is this task in the top 20% of my activities or in the bottom 80%?"

Rule: "Resist the temptation to clear up small things first."

Remember, whatever you *choose* to do, over and over, eventually becomes a habit that is hard to break. If you choose to start your day on low value tasks, you soon develop the habit of always starting and working on low value tasks. This is not the kind of habit you want to develop, or keep.

The hardest part of any important task is getting started on it in the first place. Once you actually begin work on a valuable task, you seem to be naturally motivated to continue. There is a part of your mind that loves to be busy working on significant tasks that can really make a difference. Your job is to feed this part of your mind continually.

Motivate Yourself

Just *thinking* about starting and finishing an important task motivates you and helps you to overcome procrastination. The fact is that the amount of time required to complete an important job is often the same as the time required to do an unimportant job. The difference is that you get a tremendous feeling of pride and satisfaction from the

completion of something valuable and significant. However, when you complete a low value task, using the same amount of time and energy, you get little or no satisfaction at all.

Time management is really **life** management, **personal** management. It is really taking control over the **sequence of events**. Time management is control over what you do next. And you are always free to choose the task that you will do next. Your ability to choose between the important and the unimportant is the key determinant of your success in life and work.

Effective, productive people discipline themselves to start on the most important task that is before them. They force themselves to *eat that frog*, whatever it is. As a result, they accomplish vastly more than the average person and are much happier as a result. This should be your way of working as well.

Eat That Frog!

1. Make a list of all the key goals, activities, projects and responsibilities in your life today. Which of them are, or could be, in the top 10% or 20% of tasks that represent, or could represent, 80% or 90% of your results?

2. Resolve today that you are going to spend more and more of your time working in those few areas that can really make a difference in your life and career, and less and less time on lower value activities.