

Title:

Beware The Busy Manager

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559

Summary:

Only about 10 percent of managers work purposefully to complete important tasks, according to a 10-year study of managerial behavior across a variety of industries. The other 90 percent self-sabotage by busily engaging in non-purposeful activities, procrastinating, detaching from their work and needlessly spinning their wheels.

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Article Body:

Only about 10 percent of managers work purposefully to complete important tasks, according to a 10-year study of managerial behavior across a variety of industries. The other 90 percent self-sabotage by busily engaging in non-purposeful activities, procrastinating, detaching from their work and needlessly spinning their wheels.

In a revealing study over a 10-year period, 1993-2003, authors Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal tracked behaviors of managers in a wide variety of industries (A Bias for Action: How Effective Managers Harness Their Willpower, Achieve Results, and Stop Wasting Time, Harvard Business School Press, 2004).

They found that over 90 percent of managers fail to act purposefully in their everyday work. Bruch's and Ghoshal's study identifies four profiles of managerial behavior, as charted in a grid measuring focus and energy. Managers were charted as being high or low in focus, and they were charted as being high or low in energy.

High focus, high energy managers were described as Purposeful.

High focus, low energy managers were seen as Detached.

Low focus, high energy managers were described as Frenzied.

Low focus, low energy managers were seen as Procrastinators.

**The Frenzied:** Forty percent of managers are distracted by the overwhelming tasks that face them each day. They are highly energetic, but unfocused. But "the need for speed" prompts them to be unreflective. They could achieve more if they consciously concentrate their efforts on what really matters.

**The Procrastinators:** Thirty percent of managers procrastinate on doing their organizations' most important work. They lack both energy and focus, spending their time handling minor details in lieu of what could make a real difference to their organizations.

**The Detached:** Twenty percent of managers are disengaged or detached from their work. They can be focused, but have no energy. They seem aloof, tense and apathetic.

**The Purposeful:** Only ten percent get the job done. They are highly focused, energetic, and come across as reflective and calm amid chaos.

The costs of unproductive busyness take a toll on both managers and their companies. Continual unreflective activity has a direct effect on an organization's profits and managerial morale, as it's ineffective and ultimately unsatisfying.

For example, frenzied managers often act in extremely shortsighted ways. Under extreme time constraints and the need to do more with fewer resources, they become adept at finding short-term solutions. As a consequence, they seldom take time to reflect, and neglect long-term issues. Frenzied managers demonstrate a well-intentioned, but desperate, need to do something-anything-which makes them potentially destructive.

Chronic procrastinators are generally recovering frenzied managers. Once they have learned that frantic, desperate actions are unsatisfying, many lapse into procrastination, losing energy and focus. It becomes all too easy for them to put off action altogether.

What distinguishes managers who take purposeful action from those who do not?

Willpower, discipline and clarity of purpose fuel the force behind energy and focus, enabling managers to execute action and to ignore distractions. Even when uninspired by the work and tempted by other opportunities, purposeful managers maintain energy and focus through will power, determination and clarity of purpose.

Next time you evaluate your managers' performance, place them on the low/high

Focus/Energy grid. Find out who fits the descriptions of Detached, Frenzied, Procrastinator, or Purposeful manager. Then see whether it is focus or energy that can be improved. Busyness for the sake of being busy without regard for results can lead to false assumptions.