

# Boost your Productivity

How to get better results in business and more freedom in your life

NICHOLAS BATE



## Boost your Productivity

### **7 ways to increase your productivity at work and your personal time, space and energy at home, including specialist emphasis on:**

- **Re-establishing work-life balance.** For some of us there is the realisation that work simply takes up too much of our Life. Others have a feeling that even if work doesn't overly dominate our time it certainly does our thinking. Where has our time (for ourselves, our loved ones, our interests) gone? We will tackle the challenge of 'work presence' (physical, mental or both!) through a range of strategies.
- **Managing the e-mail monster-finally.** Let's be honest, e-mail has become a monster for many of us. It's always there, always demanding. Here we conquer it finally. We put it back in the cave and get it to work for us, as of course was the intention.

- **Matching productivity systems to your personal style.** Our approach will be sufficiently simple and flexible to recognise the individual variations we each have in our approach to this topic. Some of us are 'specifics' orientated, some more 'options'. Some like 'big picture', some like 'detail'. The system works to and for your style, whilst maintaining the essentials we need.

### **Boost your Productivity**

How to get better results and more freedom  
By Nicholas Bate

## Introduction

'Boost your Productivity' is a practical 'hands-on' system of thinking and acting for increasing your personal productivity, from how you manage your e-mail to how you create the work-life balance you are looking for. It is useful and relevant in all businesses; small, corporate, solo and team, as well as being vital in the increasingly hectic personal and home environment. By 'boosting productivity' we mean boosting your output at work so that you can respond to tough, difficult competitive situations or so that you can handle more challenges at home; when teenagers diversify their interests and need more of your time and support for instance. Importantly 'Boost your Productivity' shows you how to do this without detriment to the overall balance of your Life. Essentially it is about getting **more** out of the **same** time or the **same** out of **less** time. It is NOT about working longer hours. We assume you're doing enough of that already; if your hours are too long we'll look at reducing them.

You will find that in this mini-book there are seven overall concepts, accompanied by an initial 'positioning' concept; 'concept 0'. Each of these is initially explained at the 'big picture' level before detailed ideas for implementation and 'Top Tips' are covered. Finally we'll encourage you to detail your own specific actions and how you intend to take the most valuable ideas for you forward.

The seven main concepts in 'Boost your Productivity' have been taught to literally thousands of individuals and in the majority of our client organisations over the last decade. They are tried, tested and trusted. Most importantly, they work.

# Mindset & Mechanics

## Concept 0

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This is the simplest and briefest concept: an introduction to all the others. It is intended to give you an overall structure for the materials.

To improve your productivity you will need to consider two aspects of your behaviour: the 'mechanics' and the 'mind-set'. What do I mean by these?

By mechanics we mean **what** you intend to do. The processes you use to manage an interrupt, for example. We will recommend practices which will give you the results that you are looking for.

By mind-set we mean **how** you approach what you need to do. How you decide what is more important to tackle on a particular day, for example. It's a more subtle point, often over-looked and as a result can give you truly break-through results.

## Implementation

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We'll be looking at both of these concepts in detail now. When you have the productivity challenge, simply ask mind-set or mechanics or both? Which do I need to work on? You'll need both to be outstanding in this area of Boosting your Productivity.

### TOP TIP

**Really focus on your mind-set.**



# Adjust Your Mindset

## Concept 1

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There are many factors which will have an impact on your personal productivity. Let's start with the one which will have the greatest. It's the one which is potentially most radical and the one which perhaps in the past you have given least attention to. It may not have been addressed by any previous training or coaching which you might have received. It's not an obvious 'tool' as it's with you all the time; it's your mind-set, your mental model of the world and your interaction with that world. Your mental model or perception of time and personal productivity will dramatically affect your behaviour and consequently the results you get.

Let's take an example. Imagine you have been in your job for over a year, perhaps, and you are overwhelmed with work; your current mental model which you use to think about and view work is one of irritation, resentment and fatigue.

Consequently you are demotivated and de-energised. But let's say you're suddenly promoted to a job you've always really wanted. Then suddenly perhaps you see the really heavy workload associated with the job as good news. It means that you are important; maybe even a hero. You feel energised and motivated. The workload is the same, maybe even greater, but your mind-set has changed, and thus your behaviour. And thus your results. Instantly! We sometimes forget that our mental model can be adjusted and is not fixed; reflect on the immense power of that! (Do note that we're not commenting on the workload itself: that may or may not be correct and appropriate. We'll consider that later. The message here is concerned with the possibility of changing perceptions as a 'fast-track' to changing results.)

Now this mind-set change was accidental i.e. we didn't deliberately choose it. But how about if we did? How about if when you're playing with your son, instead of feeling frustrated because you need to get on with something else 'more important', you become aware of your frustration and you remind yourself that his development is all-important to you, that you'll never have this time again... see how it works! You changed your perception and consequently your behaviour has changed. And you know that it'll give you better results.

### Implementation

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So, firstly begin to realise that your mind-set defines how you think about time and productivity issues and thus your behaviour and thus your results. And, secondly, begin to realise that your mental model or mind-set can be changed (and very quickly if you wish). Here we want to look at how you can change your mind-set and which are great mind-sets to use? After all, you and I know there are some individuals who are very, very good at their personal productivity. How do

they do it? In particular, which mental models do they hold and how do they choose those? We will refer to a particular mind-set or mental model as a belief. For instance you might believe that, "work is terrible" or have the belief "I can handle my work-load". We refer to it as a 'particular one' because we've 'locked' onto one perception, one viewpoint of many. And as we saw from our example above, there's no reason why we can't have another viewpoint, if we are willing to 'unlock' the original. Here's the important message: your beliefs drive your behaviour, which will of course drive your results. Let's take an example. If you believe that "successful people **always** clear all their work by the end of the day", how will you feel at 6pm when there's still work to be done? Exactly-stressed and feeling that either you should stay late or you should take some work home (with all of the problems that will entail) otherwise by definition you must be a failure. But what if you had a belief that "successful people realise that they cannot do everything so they simply become excellent at hitting the main priorities"? Then you could

perceive every day to have been at least a good one, even if you haven't worked long hours, so long as you have hit some of the priorities. That might be an excellent belief to hold. What are others? Well, let's now explore what I call 'the Vital Beliefs'.

### The Vital Beliefs

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Firstly, remind yourself of the true meaning of vital; it's 'essential to Life': these are fundamental beliefs in the area of Life Productivity. Secondly as you read these, don't worry if they seem a little abstract initially. Simply grasp the overall concept. The practical points and implementation follow in the next section.

#### Vital Belief 0

Before we start there is an underlying fundamental belief that **I can choose my mental model**. Break out of the belief that you are conditioned. Decide to practise choosing an empowered mental model; one which helps your productivity. For instance, instead of 'I am always

behind with my e-mail' try 'I've set up some systems and I'm getting on top of my mail'.

#### Vital Belief 1

**I can manage my time.** Of this, have no doubt. This mini book is dedicated to this concept. Drop any limiting beliefs about being out of control now!

#### Vital Belief 2

**I do this by choosing the correct kinds of task;** not by clock watching, nor working longer hours, nor microscheduling, nor by destroying my work/life balance, nor by choosing the 'first up' task or responding to who's shouting loudest. But by realising that not all tasks are the same: some are highly productive, some not at all so.

#### Vital Belief 3

**I deliberately do less to achieve more.** I realise that more does not necessarily equal better, that efficiency is not effectiveness, that regular late departures from the office are unlikely to be helping anyone long-term.

#### Vital Belief 4

I accept that as an enthusiastic, creative human being **I am unlikely to be able to do everything I might wish to in all areas of my life**. I thus simply focus on the highest 'pay-off'. I delegate the others to 'systems'. I let go of the belief that 'I must do everything'.

#### Vital Belief 5

Above all, I shift my measure of productivity from what **I do**, to a better one of what **I achieve/create** to an even better one of who **I am**. When we 'live and breathe' we achieve.

Thus we can talk about creating systems to help us manage our e-mail. But when that process is happening, when we are behaving productively, that's when we get results.

We can talk about the importance of spending time with our children, but when we ARE doing that then we get results.

#### Vital Beliefs into Action

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Let us now take the vital beliefs; understand their background and importantly, how to implement them.

On my workshops I typically ask delegates at this stage what terms they use to define tasks/projects which they have to do? The three terms 'important', 'urgent' and 'boring' or 'repetitive' come up the most frequently with important or urgent being THE terms.

Let's start by examining the first two: important and urgent. The terms boring/repetitive we will tackle in a moment.

Here are my definitions:

**Important = I** = a task ensuring a goal is achieved

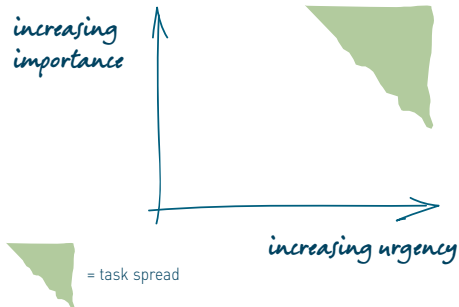
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**Urgent = U** = a task which needs to be done NOW

I then ask for some feedback via a simple exercise:



1. Consider you are working on something at work or home or that you are addressing an issue at work or home. Use the following axes to illustrate the spread of importance and urgency of the tasks and projects that you are reflecting on.



This graphical output illustrates the general consensus within the workshop; that they are working on tasks/projects which are both important and urgent. Example quoted might be:

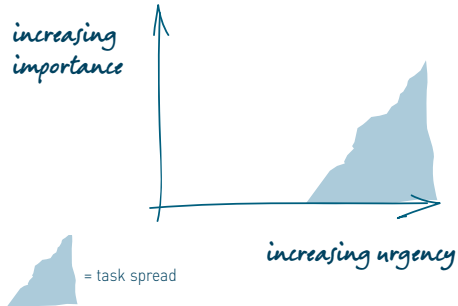
- Finishing a project for a 5pm (today) deadline
- Shopping for food tonight
- Collecting a daughter from nursery (today)
- Responding to e-mail
- Paying a utility bill

These are all meeting goals (e.g. of business, nutrition and parental responsibility for the first three examples respectively) and the need to be done NOW or very soon.

Many of us develop a behaviour pattern of reacting to those tasks with highest immediacy. This can make our environment highly stressful, very time dependent with little time for reflection. But most importantly it can allow us-as we shall see-to lose our focus on true productivity.

We need to respond to such tasks; but maybe there are some better ways.

2. However, as is often the case, perception is not reality. When we encourage individuals to keep personal time log to find out where their time actually goes the reality is:



Because of the constant immediacy of tasks as illustrated in situation 1, individuals lose sight of what is important. They're now working on things which are still urgent but not necessarily important.

Examples:

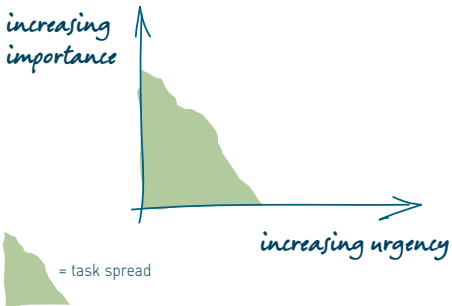
- Answering the phone during a family meal
- Watching the news, again
- Responding to an interrupt when working on an important strategy document.

Notice that the immediacy of the above makes them attractive/addictive, but are they helping the bigger picture?

The 'bigger picture', what is presumably important in each case is:

- Quality family time
- Doing something else which gives a better return on the time. You know what the news is!
- Doing a quality deliverable on the paper you're writing.

3. Or sometimes, the time logs show an even more worrying situation. Individuals find that they are working in an environment of tasks/projects which are neither truly important nor actually that urgent.

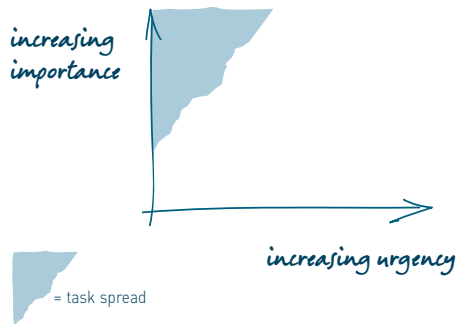


These tasks have a strong addictiveness at times:

- Gossiping at the coffee machine
- Watching junk TV
- 'Fiddling' with e-mail

There is an air of busyness, but little is achieved and true satisfaction levels are low.

4. So what profile do we notice of those individuals who seem to be very effective at getting the important things at work and home done, with minimum stress and who seem to be enjoying their job? It's a different kind of profile. It looks more like this:



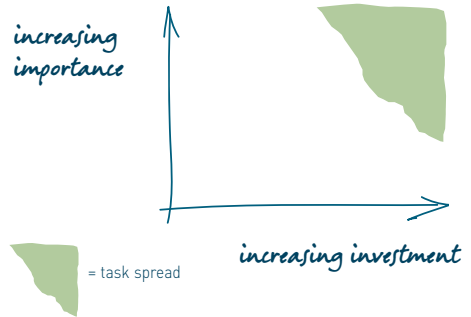
Initially it looks a little odd. Working on things which are important yet non-urgent? Think about it for a moment, though. What are the important and yet non-urgent things in your life?

## Boost your Productivity

Examples:

- Long-term strategy planning
- Looking after your health
- Financial planning
- Your relationships

And the more we consider this piece of time, the more we realise it's the vital one. And because tasks are non-urgent it takes the pressure off. And here's the problem. Because they're non-urgent we tend to forget them or ignore them. But if we tackled them the process could be leisurely yet investing and would avoid many of them becoming urgent and important. And the reason it looks a little odd or sounds a little odd is because our time management has become locked into two words: important and urgent. But let's change the axes on the graph;



Now it makes even more sense. Those who are effective in this area are working on tasks which are high in importance and high in investing (i.e. thinking for the long-term.)

Examples of important (i.e. meeting goals) and investing (i.e. working for the long term):

- Scheduling a company 'awayday' to consider market issues 18 months hence
- Arranging induction training for a new employee
- Running a customer feed-back scheme in which the data is used in new product development

- Walking briskly in the park every lunchtime
- Reading to your children every night
- Deliberately planning quality time with your partner

Realise that none of the above HAVE to be done. We choose to do them for the longer-term benefits.

This piece of time is a breakthrough as no longer are we measuring our time by what we do, but what we achieve. We are letting go of an activities measure to an accountability measure.

### **What to look for**

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Here is our strategy. Have a mind-set in which we look for tasks and project which have the following qualities:

- Firstly, they are important i.e. they enable us to meet our goals
- Secondly they are investing i.e. they are giving us the greater/greatest return on our investment of time for the long term.

Tasks which meet these two criteria we will call compass tasks as they point us in the right direction, they work for our future. Tasks which are important and urgent are clock tasks. They are generally for the here and now. They are often short-term and quick fix. We attempt to minimise these and of course one strategy for doing that is to work on compass tasks.

You can achieve more by doing fewer compass tasks because of the extra consideration and quality that goes into them. With clock tasks it's about 'cramming' more into the day. As you do cram more into the day your immediate productivity does rise because of longer hours, but then falls with loss of focus and natural fatigue. Your true (holistic) productivity falls.

### **A Third Quality**

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When we are being truly productive, there is a third quality to tasks: that quality is 'interesting'. The task or project is interesting. It is satisfying. This can either be a natural by-product e.g. this would be a fascinating market sector to go into.

Or interest can be created e.g. how can I make my exercise routine interesting? This third quality 'up-grades' a compass task to a LifeBalance task i.e. one which is absolutely in line with the balance of our life. Because of that it is highly productive and very satisfying.

### **'eye on i'**

This is our simple reminder; keep your 'eye on i'. We're seeking tasks and projects which are;

**Important • Investing • Interesting**

### **TOP TIP**

**Think 'eye on i'**

### **Actions**

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What actions will you take? Decide now.



# Deciding (Prioritising)

## Concept 2

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Our key understanding is 'eye on i' tasks.

We focus on tasks which are:

- Important; they execute our goals.
- Investing; they develop our goals long-term.
- Interesting; they engage us to the full.

A key question therefore is of course, how do we decide? What are our criteria? Clearly we need to establish these; without doing so then by definition we cannot be productive. We must have agreed with ourselves what is **important** what is **investing** and what is **interesting**.

It is particularly important that we do this while the pressure is off. Otherwise when the pressure is on, we might be tempted to go quick fix, urgent or respond to whoever is shouting loudest rather than create interest in our work.

We decide what is important by clarifying our goals and objectives in all areas of our life.

We decide what is investing by looking for the best return on our time long-term.

We decide what is interesting by ensuring it's within the framework of our personal life goals-our LifeBalance and/or by finding interest in it.

## Implementation

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**In work.** Always ensure you are getting thorough, regular 1:1 briefings as to your personal objectives. Check that they are measurable and have time-scales. You must know and have agreed that, say, client X is more important this quarter than client Y, or that XYZ report always has priority over the PQR report.

**More broadly: our Life.** It's vital that we get proactive in our thinking. This is where you will find the Strategic Edge LifeBalance helpful and I'd encourage you to refer to our mini-book entitled "LifeBalance."

'LifeBalance' encourages you to take a broader view of your Life. Life isn't just 'survive' work to enjoy the rest. Life is about an exciting range of possibilities. To give you an introduction to this concept, simply take these three areas of your life:

### Work • Health • Family

And ask what exactly do I want in these areas of my life? Spend five minutes (no less) writing on each. Now reflect on your notes and create some actions.

Through this process you'll ensure that work doesn't always rule your life.

### TOP TIPS

**1. Meet up with your manager. Decide your top five objectives. Work with him/her to ensure those objectives are measurable and time based.**

**2. If you run your own business, put aside some time to think about your business objectives.**

**3. Put aside some time this weekend to reflect on what you want to do in various areas of your Life. LifeBalance will help with this.**

**4. Now study the concepts of the Vital Few and Trivial Many (next section).**

### Actions

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What are your personal actions?



# The Vital Few and The Trivial Many

## Concept 3

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It is clear that not all tasks generate the same value in terms of results nor pay-off. They may take the same time to decide or write down or be briefed upon but they certainly don't give the same value. Compare these ways of spending five minutes:

- Planning the next day
- Reading the newspaper
- Sending a supportive text message to your best friend
- Thanking a customer via e-mail when you didn't really need to, but you thought it'd be a great gesture
- Complaining to a colleague about 'life'

Each of these five minutes gives very different pay-off. Planning the next day now might save hours tomorrow. Complaining about life will undoubtedly reduce your interest in the task.

Compare these ways of spending one hour:

- Lazing with your lover on a Sunday morning
- Helping a toddler build a brick tower
- Outline a strategic plan
- Designing a fun birthday surprise for a friend
- Attending a poorly organised client meeting

Helping a toddler might seem a more time wasting activity compared to serious stuff like clearing e-mail that you could be doing. But think about the long-term impact on your relationship with your son or daughter.

We don't know enough about the context able to value these quantitatively. But there's no doubt that for every one of them the pay-off will be different.

And deciding which pay-off you want is difficult. For example, who can necessarily find it easy to decide between attending a key business meeting and a child's first school nativity play? That's why the concepts in the previous section were of course so critical. We must have agreed with ourselves some higher level criteria as to

what is important **before** the pressures of other's demands and stress are put upon us. These are MAT goals for business: Measurable, Attributable, Timely or LifeBalance directions (for life/home). Otherwise we'll be attracted to what is trivial and easy or pressurising. If your MAT goals put client Y above client X then you'll find it easier to say no to client X. If your LifeBalance has set time with your son teaching him football then you're more likely to make that time happen. Responding to some routine e-mail is clearly not the same pay-off as resolving a long-standing productivity issue with another team. Fixing the guttering is not the same as finally developing an answer for the ironing problem. Not all tasks generate the same pay-off. Some are real trivia. Others are 'blockbusters' in their impact. 'Boosting your productivity' is about focusing on your personal 'blockbusters'. Which are your big time investments in which you personally wish to be involved? And which do you want to out-source?

Pareto, an Italian economist, was the first to really describe this effect. He encapsulated it in what we now know as the 20/80 ratio. 20% of the tasks upon which we focus give 80% of the benefit. The 20%, or vital few, are the ones to ensure (1) we know what they are and (2) we give them appropriate attention. Pareto can help with both deciding which task and then also how much of that particular task. For instance:

- 1.** If you were planning for a client meeting, the vital few would be what to ask them: "what do you want out of this meeting?"
- 2.** If you were wanting to get fit, the vital few would be to start walking more every day.
- 3.** If you wanted to become financially independent the vital few would be to save something every month.

## Implementation

There is a well-known story which many people find helpful in this area. Take a large glass jar. The jar represents your schedule/diary. Place a few big rocks into it. The big rocks represent the vital few. Now take some pebbles, add these. Now some sand. Now some water. Notice: it's crucial to get the big rocks in first. Know your 'big rocks' (vital few) and get those in the diary (schedule) first. Pack the pebbles and sand (the trivial many) around the rocks.

Wouldn't life be great if you only had to focus on the vital few? If you could just collect your Big Rocks and focus upon them. But unfortunately, there's also the sand and stuff: the trivial many. How do we cope? In a word: SYSTEMS. And we'll be looking at those in the next section.

Now just before we leave the concept of the 'vital few', let's raise a question I am often asked:

"I've got your point re balance. But surely in the Big Picture, chasing my client is always no 1; it simply has to be?" And the answer is no,

because we have zones. Within your work zone, then yes responding to this particular client will always be crucial. However, we create other zones in our Life.

A zone is a time/space area. Decide to have at least four zones:

- At Work
- With Partner
- With Family
- 'For me'

Examples:

Let's understand this through a couple of scenarios. Consider these situations. How you react will depend upon the zone you are in:

**1.** You're at home trying to get some paperwork done. Your daughter keeps pestering you with Lego. You feel guilty about not playing with her, but equally the paperwork needs to be done. What's the answer? Of course, there's not an easy one. But decide which zone you are in. If you are in the work zone, explain to the child when you will be available. Finish the paperwork and

switch to family zone and keep your commitment to the child. And stick to it! If you're in family zone, remember that. Realise that you've been drawn into the paperwork: stop it and play.

**2.** You'd like to watch the football. Your lover would like you to chat and go for a walk. There's no easy answer to this until you talk and balance your respective needs and time zones. Everybody needs their 'For me' time zones. Maybe this should be one of them and you both do your own thing. But have a 'together' time zone later.

### TOP TIPS

- 1. Think 20/80**
- 2. Think: what zone am I in?**

### Actions

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What specific actions will I take?

## Managing 'eye on i': The Master List

### Concept 4

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Given our refreshed understanding on time, wouldn't it be great if we had a simple tool which allowed us to be more focused on compass tasks (and in particular, LifeBalance tasks) rather than simply on clock tasks with their tempting urgency addictiveness? That's the 'Master List'. It enables you to have the overview, control and flexibility that you want. It ensures that you focus on 'eye on i' tasks. Do note that a 'Master List' is very distinct from a 'To Do' list. The 'to do' list too often encourages urgency, loss of balance and consequently sense of failure; you know that end-of-day feeling: huge lists but little apparently achieved. The ML will banish that. The MASTER LIST enables you to do the stuff you have to do but also the stuff you want to do. It enables you to keep your 'eye on i'.

## Implementation

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Firstly, understand the characteristics of the Master List. Then we'll consider the best format for creating your personal one. And then of course, how you use it.

Firstly, the quick one line definition of a MASTER LIST is a list of **1-word reminders of everything you need or want to do**. Everything. Yes, everything. Don't panic but yes it might contain 250 or even more items. The MASTER LIST allows us to give more attention to those things which we want or have to do. Our philosophy is if they're not on the list they won't happen. So, get them all on the list. Literally everything. 'Write strategic Plan', 'Get Mum a Birthday card'. Chase the plumber etc. It might look like this

- *start plan - 16th*
- *Mum card*
- *Think promo how?*
- *Up-date e folders*
- *Plan coll mtg*
- *Book cinema tickets*
- *Food - Sat night?*

- Secondly, your MASTER LIST contains issues, tasks and wishes both from **work and home**. Many people if they have some kind of list, use it only for work. So they give work stuff attention. And if only work is given attention, then not surprisingly home/personal does not get the attention they want so they lose balance. Beware of separate lists. It sounds perhaps logical and convenient but unfortunately when the pressure is on the one which gets attention is... yes you guessed it... the work list. A mixed list ensures that the Strategic plan, Mum's birthday all get the attention they deserve. **One list**.
- **Short-term and long-term**. People sometimes ask about the time-scale for their Master List; how far into the future should they go? Don't worry. You'll have some tomorrow things and some things that may not happen for a decade. The important thing is that they are on there so that you regularly give them attention.

## Boost your Productivity

- **Important only.** If it's not meeting a goal—personal or corporate, ask why am I considering this? There is no non-important stuff on this list. Remember that doesn't mean everything on the list has to be 'serious'. Your list is about what you want to do/think about/consider. It's about Fun. It's about Life. A question which we will be addressing later—what about if your important does not equate to someone else's important because of differing goals? (Business or personal). See the Q&A section for a discussion of this. The IMPORTANT criteria.
- Get a decent balance between that which is **urgent** and that which **investing (non-urgent)**. Slowly but surely address more of the non-urgent.

You'll then notice that the urgent falls away. If you start planning longer-term the relationship with your client then the panics fall away. If you work proactively in developing a relationship with your young son then you'll

undoubtedly have fewer reactive shouting matches when he's a teenager. The INVESTING criteria.

- Ensure you have your **dreams and wishes documented too**. For example if you wish to play the guitar or do more voluntary work or learn the game of GO, write it down. Once it's down, you'll be giving it more attention. And once that is happening you'll be making progress. The INTERESTING criteria.
- The final important consideration of your MASTER LIST is that it must be portable. If it's not you may well have difficulties in two areas. You'll firstly not capture thoughts as they arise and secondly you'll not be able to decide your priorities.

Now what about the format? Here are four successful formats for the MASTER LIST: there are others but they are essentially variants on these:

**PDA:** this is of course in many ways an ideal format. Clearly updates can be done very easily, tasks can be quickly found and sorted and edited. The main possible downside is that the interface is not perfect for everyone.

**Hard-back notebook.** An oldie but goldie. It is easy to use, robust and not easily damaged. It's tremendously flexible. The down-side is that it occasionally needs a re-write.

**Out-look task list hard copy.** Simply keep your tasks in Outlook and once a day up-date the list and print it out. Capture points on the printed copy which you keep with you during the day.

**Mind-map.** If you're a fan of mind-mapping this can be an excellent application of the technique.

For many of you, that will be sufficient to get you up-and-running on your MASTER LIST but if you would like a more detailed check-list, you will find it below.

## TOP TIPS

**1. Decide your master list format. If any doubt, use a hard-back notebook.**

**2. Do your first pass at collating your master list. Here's how:**

**Step 1.** You need 60 minutes, a hard-back notebook and a pen.

**Step 2.** Open the hard-back notebook and start writing:

- 1.** Short-term things to be done at home  
e.g. pay phone bill
- 2.** Short-term things to be done at work  
e.g. complete month-end report.
- 3.** Long-term things to be done at work  
e.g. ask re career plans
- 4.** Long-term things to be done at home  
e.g. discuss children's education.
- 5.** Wishes and dreams e.g. retire at 37 and run a farm

**Step 3.** Now find any old lists and add them.

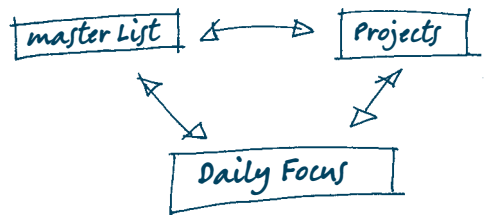
**Step 4.** That's a basic ML. Note that you haven't categorised/prioritised/grouped in any ways.

**Step 5.** Now keep this with you and use it for the rest of the day.

## The System

### Concept 5

We now have in place an appropriate mind-set, supported by our key tool-the MASTER LIST; these in themselves will take us a long way, but not quite all the way. We now introduce our 'system'. A system is something which is designed to make life easier. Once started a system will run itself. The system here is a simple one. Here it is visually:





Let's start with our primary deliverable: Daily Focus. We create this at the end of each day for the next day; it's a simple list. As suggested by its name it guides us to where we spend our time on any one day. We deliberately do it at the end of the day so that psychologically we feel 'ready' for the next day so that we can enjoy our evening. For most people it will be a mixture of shared activities (e.g. meetings, project reviews swimming group) and sole activities (e.g. responding to e-mail, doing a report). The shared activities will generally be pre-booked and come from our schedule (although certainly a goal of those concepts in this mini-book will be to reduce the number and length of such events-see later). So it might look like:

*7.30 gym*  
*9.15 team meeting*  
*11.15 supplier meeting*  
*2pm own time*

Sole activities can now be chosen. These will flow between the pre-booked items e.g.

<i>7.30 gym</i>	<i>2pm strategy report work</i>
<i>9.15 team mtg</i>	<i>costs spread sheet</i>
• <i>strategy report</i>	<i>e-mail</i>
• <i>e-mail</i>	<i>5.45 go</i>
<i>11.15 supplier mtg</i>	<hr/>
• <i>break/lunch</i>	

Two questions now immediately arise. Firstly, how do I know what I might do? And secondly how do I decide which to do? Our MASTER LIST answers the former; our MASTER LIST is our 'bag' of potential stuff to do. We should never be at a loss to what we might do! At this point there are no weightings/categories for the various tasks. The latter we will answer by referring to MAT for business and LifeBalance for personal see soon.

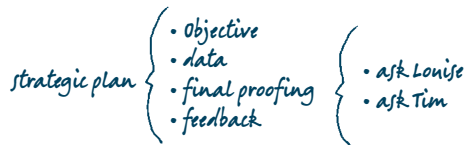
We take a 3 by 5 card, and write down your committed joint activities and our chosen sole activities.

## Boost your Productivity

And we focus on this card. All day. And it's as simple as that. And yes if you wish to create a more hi-tech version then of course you can. But if in any doubt, start here. Now two important points when we review our Master List:

Firstly, one challenge is that whenever we look at our MASTER LIST there will invariably be significant tasks on it such as 'Get Fit', 'write Strategic Plan' etc. Such tasks are often skipped because there is a feeling of yes but not NOW because firstly they're too big to do in the current time available and secondly we don't know how to start. And this behaviour becomes reinforced, we get used to looking at large tasks and not doing anything. It is therefore vital that big/tough/demanding task are immediately broken down. And again and again. At which point they become manageable. Let's take two examples: get Fit and write Strategic Plan.

Do this either immediately or create a project file. Note that not everyone will need this latter element.



Secondly, if we only reviewed on a daily basis we would to a certain extent be kidding ourselves. At the end of each week, review the following week. And at the end of the month, review following month. At this point it may be worth pre-scheduling chunks of time as we recognise tasks which need time.

Finally, what format for your system?

MASTER LIST: As previously discussed:  
PDA/Outlook print-out/Hard-back  
notebook/mind-map

Daily Focus: single 3 by 5 card onto which transcribe meetings and tasks. Absolute focus. OR page in schedule. Add tasks.

Project: Outlook/MS project/ break down tasks

## TOP TIPS

**1. Remember that the MASTER LIST is always with you and is reviewed at the end of every day, every week and every month. Decide now when your next review time will be.**

**2. Your daily focus will be a mixture of pre-booked items and those for your MASTER LIST.**

**3. Your project planner is simply a way to ensure complex tasks are definitely broken down.**

## Actions

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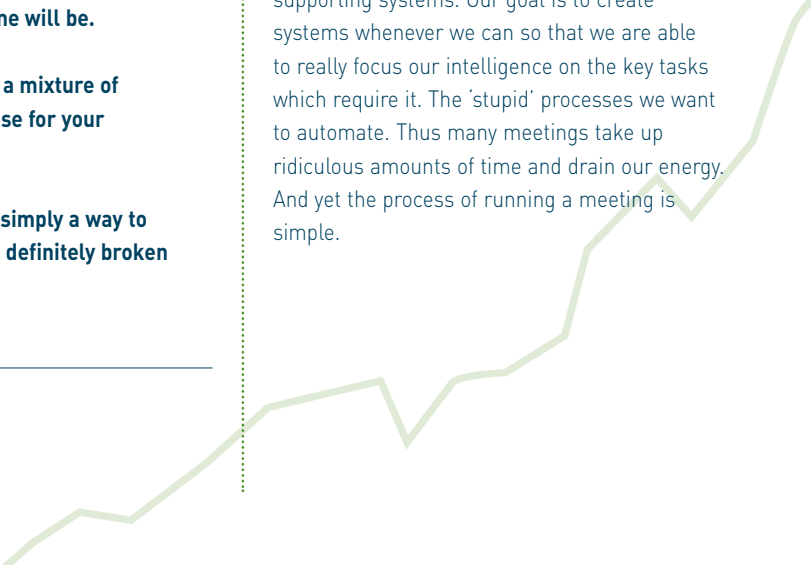
What are your actions?

# Great Systems

## Concept 6

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A system is a process to automate, to make our Life easier through allowing us to focus on what is really important rather than being distracted by 'trivial' matters. We have already discussed our primary system. However there are many supporting systems. Our goal is to create systems whenever we can so that we are able to really focus our intelligence on the key tasks which require it. The 'stupid' processes we want to automate. Thus many meetings take up ridiculous amounts of time and drain our energy. And yet the process of running a meeting is simple.



## Implementation

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Let's look at some generic 'great systems' and then see how you can design your own.

- **Meetings**

**Comment:** In time log analyses, meetings regularly appear as one of the top time-stealers.

**System:** Agree to

1. Always have an objective; how will we know that we've been successful in this meeting?
2. Always have an agenda; on this detail timings, allocations of responsibilities. Circulate this prior to the meeting.
3. Always have a chairperson to manage agenda and actions.
4. Never leave without actions fully agreed; ensure the chairperson specifically asks each person around the table: "what are your agreed actions?" Agree minutes there and then.
5. Be creative on timings; for example, make more meetings just 45 minutes in length rather than 60 minutes. Be bold and try 'fast-track' 30 minute meetings.

6. Be creative on location to break patterns e.g. simply a different routine.

7. Be creative on physiology; remain standing e.g. we can't sit down until the action has been agreed.

- **Reports**

**Comment:** Writing regular reports can for some be a painful process. The report often takes an unnecessarily long time and is not of tremendous quality.

**System:** Agree to

1. Agree deliverable with your (perhaps internal) client.
2. Agree template with your (perhaps internal) client.
3. Write weekly or daily for monthly or weekly reports respectively i.e. accumulate the report.
4. Ask for feedback; this will act as a motivator and may well reduce the burden.

- **Objectives**

**Comment:** Business objectives are often poorly written with poor mutual understanding, and consequently poor results and or disagreements at review times.

**System:**

1. Insist on them. Never proceed with a task or project unless you have received an objective and it is clear.
2. Use them yourself i.e. when making requests of others, ensure you set CLEAR objectives.
3. Make them MAT. MAT represents:  
**M** = measurable  
**A** = attributable  
**T** = timely

- **Interrupts**

**Comment:** Interrupts can be debilitating to high productivity. They stop the brain being able to access its deeper levels and its higher productivity. Please not: there are of course proper times for discussion and brainstorming.

**System:**

1. Hide. Seriously. Work elsewhere if you can. Obviously, there are times when you are locked into technology. But if you can take your laptop for a while or if you can mind-map.
2. Agree personal win-win contract. Explain what the interrupts are doing to you and what you need instead.
3. Be assertive. Balance the rights on both sides. For more help see our guide of assertiveness.

- **E-mail**

**Comment:** E-mail can be debilitating to high productivity and can become a potential personal nightmare.

**System:**

Mindset perspective

1. Actively reduce e-mail (see below).
2. Do not react to it.
3. Do not become addicted to it.
4. Batch process i.e check it just twice a day; no more.

### Corporate perspective

1. Ensure that you have a FAQ (frequently asked questions) site.
2. Ensure that you have appropriate auto-response software in place if you are on holiday, for instance.
3. Use different addresses e.g. sales@/questions@/support@ to help routing of mail.
4. Use filters: ask for local help in use.

### Personal/perspective

1. Wherever possible make personal agreements with individuals to batch stuff rather than immediate send.
2. Block messages. Automatically delete messages from certain e-mail addresses.
3. File messages.
4. Auto forward if appropriate.
5. Decide to empty in-box (delete or archive or MASTER LIST).
6. Regular edit 'sent messages'
7. KEY: organise e-mail into incoming folders. Ask for local help in use.

- **Travel**

**Comment:** Many find that the novelty of extensive travel can wear off and it can become tiring and a great time stealer.

**System:**

1. Get a Packing check list; pack against this.
2. Consider duplicating essentials e.g. wash stuff: one for travel, one for home.
3. Invest in a bag to help with packing: make sure it has the compartments (and wheels!) which you want.
4. Schedule a note to pack a few days before it becomes vital.

- **Zones & Roles**

**Comments:** We effectively travel between time zones. There are ones for work and ones for home. Adjust to the right pace and style. Coming straight from 'work' time zone to 'home' time zone can be like continuing to drive at 70mph on a country lane.

1. Think which zone you are in.
2. Think which role you have.
3. Adjust accordingly.

- **Decision Making:** See separate guide.
- **Creativity:** See separate guide.
- **Generic**

**Comment:** At home and work you'll occasionally notice something is 'bugging you'. Capture this thought and decide whether it is 'one off' or symptomatic of a failed system. If one-off perhaps accept it and try and avoid in the future. If repeated, think "how could I do something about this?"

E.g. 1: ironing. Could you out-source this?

E.g. 2: arriving home stressed. Could you pull over just before you get home and meditate for minutes to improve your mood?

E.g. 3: poor input from another team. Why not meet up and thrash it out?

## Personal Energy

### Concept 7

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It's at this point that some people begin to worry a little: 'these ideas look great but do I have the "will power", the "drive" to make this happen?' Well, let's be clear what we mean by a term such as "will power". Firstly it's not something which only special people have; we are in fact all born with it. When we admire someone for his or her 'drive' or 'energy' we're simply looking at someone who knows how to remain resourceful. Unfortunately, many of us lose this ability. Sometimes temporarily, sometimes forever. But the good news is that we can re-discover it. We can all develop it. Will power: WILL + POWER. You need will i.e. a decision. You need power i.e. energy. Let's see how.

### Implementation

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Lets take the WILL part. You must make your decision. Decide today to start work on this material. Specifically write down what you will

gain when you get these ideas working for you: better quality of Life, easier workload? More time with the children? What exactly will you get? And very importantly, be honest with yourself: what about if you don't get it working for you? What'll be the consequences? More stress? More challenges? Further unfulfilled dreams? Your decision is made of two components: clarity and action. Get absolute clarity now, to help you take action.

Now the ENERGY component. Follow these stages:

1. Start your MASTER LIST. This will get you feeling in control. And simply feeling in control will give you more energy. Disorder saps energy and as you see things achieved that will cause more energy. Success generates energy.
2. Ensure you have great personal energy. In brief you will need:

## **M** represents meditation.

Take time out. Whatever that might be for you. We all need time and space to reflect.

## **E** represents exercise.

In particular, take regular CV. As you take this your energy levels will soar.

## **D** represents diet or eating for energy.

Focus more on complex carbohydrates, fruit, and vegetables. Phase out simple sugar, caffeine, and highly processed food.

## **S** represents sleep.

We all need good quality, regular sleep. Avoid sleep debt.

### TOP TIPS

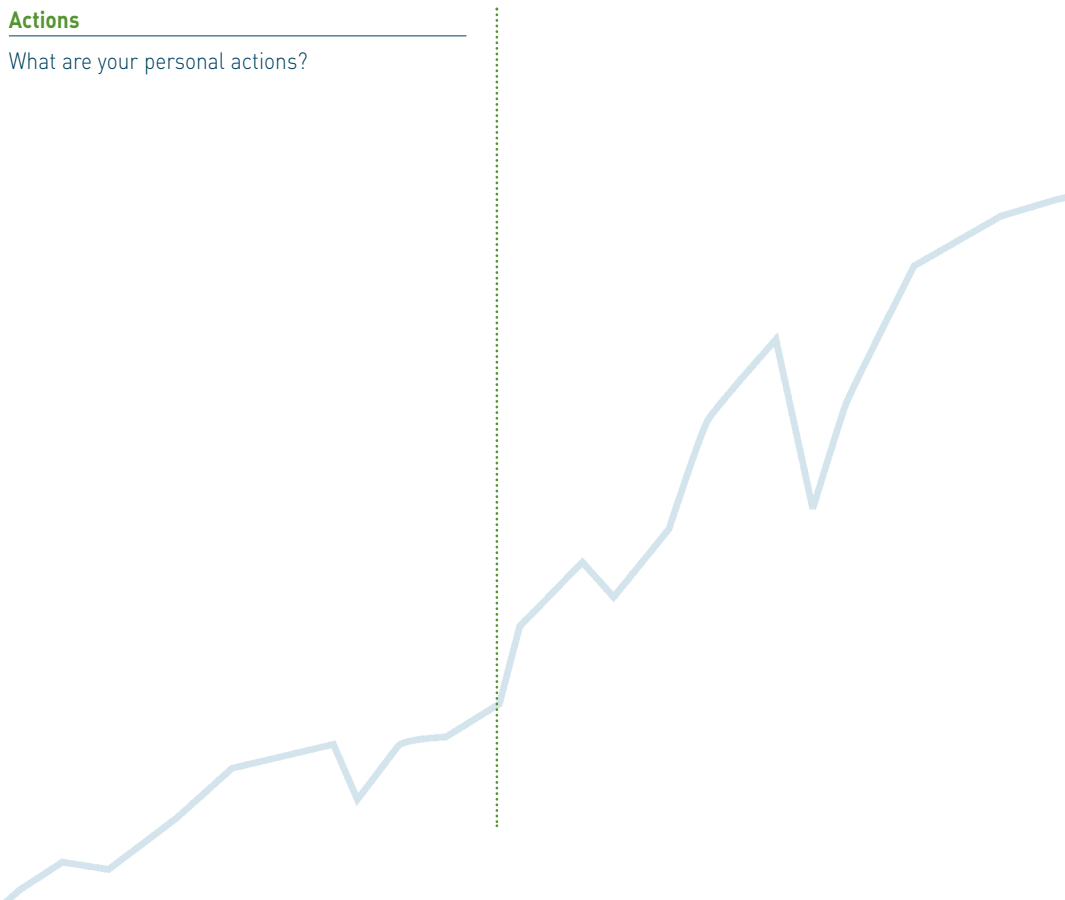
1. Decide to do a little bit of restoration work in each of exercise, diet, sleep.
2. Decide to get hold of the Mind/Body advanced guide.



**Actions**

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What are your personal actions?



# Boost your Productivity

## Concept Summary

**Let's summarise the ideas which we have been through. We'll follow that with a Q&A which will ask the most frequently asked questions before giving an implementation checklist. Boosting your Productivity is about:**

**1.** Step back and reflect. What does productivity mean to you? 'Doing more?' Or 'having more?' Or 'being more?' Or 'all of these' Or 'something different' You can only increase it when you know what 'it' is? Decide to decide what it is you want, at work and play, at home in business. Do that now. Simply write. What is IMPORTANT in your Life. Write and write.

At work ensure you have clear MAT objectives. At home, establish your personal LifeBalance. I encourage you to get the separate Strategic Edge mini-book entitled simply LifeBalance on that topic to help your development in that area.

- 2.** Work on your mind-set 'locks' or beliefs. Your beliefs drive your behaviours. If you believe you'll never be able to get on top of your e-mail, then perhaps you won't. But if you realise a different set of beliefs... Re-read and internalise the 'Vital Beliefs'.
- 3.** Use a simple, but powerful tool: the MASTER LIST. Remember that this is a lot more than a 'to do' list. It enables you to do and be and have. Home and work. Haves and wants. It gives you the 'bigger picture' focus as well as the detail.
- 4.** It's a complicated world out there. You need a few other systems. Establish those. Remember to tackle big tasks. Whenever you see a big task, break it down And again, And again.
- 5.** Is e-mail a hassle? You need a better system. Are meetings driving you spare? You need a better system. Are interrupts causing you to lose your best thoughts? You need a better system.

**6.** Decide how you'll decide. Decide from your MAT goals and your personal LifeBalance. What are your measures of success? Once you know you can decide which/what to do.

**7.** Be committed to your physical and mental health. If that platform isn't there it'll be difficult to make this stuff happen.

### Question and Answer

I have tried to anticipate the key questions. However here are a few which I believe fall outside any particular section and which I often receive on my seminars.

**1.** A lot of this approach seems very controlling and measured? Is there a danger in losing the fun and spontaneity in Life?

There could be. And it is true that some people take approaches like this far too far and begin to micro-schedule their Life-"Ok it's 7:20pm so it must be 15mins play-time with the children"-or measure everything by one kind of (often financial) "success goal". Our approach is not

that. This is not about controlling; it's about managing. And it's about managing enough to give us the freedom we want. Boost your Productivity is about two concepts: Freedom and Results.

**2.** But what if it's simply not my style?

There is sufficient flexibility in the system for it to adapt to any individual style.

**3.** A lot of this is very dependent upon you knowing your goals, which I of course accept. But what happens when your goals clash with someone else's?

You'll need to thrash out a win-win agreement. For much more detail see Win-Win thinking mini-book.

**4.** I really do understand your point focusing on direction and not getting caught up in simple urgency, but I still feel I need a bit of time to set up systems and processes so that I can start reaping the benefits. How do I get that time?

Ok here are some ideas:

### At work

1. Gossip less. Yes you do. We all do.
2. Make all 60min meetings just 45 minutes. And apply the guidelines for running excellent meetings.
3. Start earlier in the day and reduce commute time. Leave earlier or take a long lunch and do your exercise routine there.
4. Take all your holiday and use the beginning and the end to reflect and act.
5. Take breaks during the day. At each break: stretch and drink water.

### At home

1. Watch fewer TV programmes. Try a bold experiment: watch no TV for a month.
2. Shop fewer times per week for food. Plan your menus once a week. Use internet shopping.
3. Get up earlier.
4. Cut down on junk reading. Do you really need a daily paper? Is the Sunday heavy simply a habit?
5. Agree personal time with partner/children.
6. Hide in your favourite café. Think/write.

7. Stop lie-ins apart from romantic ones.
8. Have several nights off alcohol per week.

### Implementation Summary

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Here is a definitive summary of how to implement the mindset and mechanics of Boost your Productivity.

As you have been reading this mini-book, you may well have already been getting these ideas established. Congratulations. Or you may have been waiting for the story to come together before you started working on these ideas. Either way, there is no more. Now is the time for action.

Remember the overall strategy as follows: "CIMZ". This represents:

- Use your **C**ompass
- To choose your activities and projects: **I**mportant, **I**nvesting and **I**nteresting.
- Record them on your **M**aster list
- When executing them, remember which **Z**one you're in: 'at work', 'with partner', 'with family', 'for me'.

Use the following checklist as you wish. Put aside a day and make it all happen in one 'big bang' approach. Or roll it out over say 10 days. If you take the latter approach, don't take a day off, simply keep it going: do something on each of the 10 days. Use momentum to build success.

### DAY 1

Today give plenty of attention to the 'Vital Beliefs'. They are repeated here. Remember that beliefs are our personal software, they drive our behaviours. Our success at Boosting our Productivity is dependent upon both our mind-set and the mechanics.

#### Vital Belief 0

**I can choose my mental model.** I simply choose to do so by building my self-awareness.

#### Vital belief 1

**I can manage my time.** I simply implement these ideas. I focus on CIMZ.

#### Vital Belief 2

**I do this by choosing the correct kinds of task.**

Those which are important, investing and interesting.

#### Vital Belief 3

**I deliberately do less to achieve more.**

In particular I set up supporting systems.

#### Vital Belief 4

**I am unlikely to be able to do everything I might wish to in all areas of my life.** And that's OK. I

focus on the vital few in each zone and every role.

#### Vital Belief 5

Above all, I shift my measure of productivity from what **I do**, to a better one of what

**I achieve/create** to an even better one of who **I am**. When we 'live and breathe' we achieve.

And in particular I no longer have to fight a time management system. It's natural to me through focusing on direction management.

**DAY 2**

Today write down the answers to what are the important things in your Life to which you are determined to give more attention? Do that now. Think about work. What would be the breakthroughs there? Think about you. What would be the breakthroughs there? And in your most important relationship? What there? Write, write, write. Distill some actions. Integrate these actions with some of your work on beliefs.

**DAY 3**

Today we'll get your Master List up-and-running.

- 1.** Choose your format. If in any doubt, get a hard-back note book. Whatever format you choose, follow these instructions:
- 2.** Now write-off the top of your head:
  - things you need to do at work and home
  - things you want to do at work/home
  - wishes

Importantly, as you write do not categorise or prioritise. Simply Capture.

- 3.** Now find any old lists. Review these and add relevant points to your new developing MASTER LIST.

Now keep this with you all day. Add anything that comes up in a meeting or strikes you.

Tonight, review it and decide the priorities for tomorrow.

**DAY 4**

Let's start by setting up the core system. Answer these questions.

- 1.** Have you got your MASTER LIST format agreed and up-and-running? If not, go back to check day 3.
- 2.** If you are paper based and you only have a few large tasks at any one time, break them down on your Master List. In future do any automatically as they arrive.

If you are PC based or have a lot of large tasks to break down, then use categories in Outlook.

If you are heavily involved in major, multi-aspect projects use MS project, which is beyond the scope of this piece of work.

That's your project sheet. Now your daily focus. If you are paper-based, simply jot down the day's priorities. If PC based, use a ! in Outlook.

### **DAY 5**

Practise today being very tough in choosing by pay-off. Think Pareto. Think 20/80.

### **DAYS 6/7/8**

Set up supporting systems. Which of these do you need? Set up no more than two on each of days 6.7.8.

### **DAYS 9/10**

Focus on establishing M-E-D-S

### **Congratulations!**

This will make a dramatic improvement to your life. For more support, come to one of my seminars.

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