

Don't Try And Work Out The Workout

By Stuart White
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I was at gym this morning doing repetitions of crossover flies (this will be meaningless to most – even to me half the time) when I caught my personal trainer setting up the weights for the next exercise – bicep curls (one of the many of my least favorites). I groaned thinking about what was coming next, and shifted my focus to dreading how to handle the next stage of my workout. I lost my rhythm and will and struggled to complete the set I was doing. I should have known better. If I had to start each gym session thinking about everything I had to get through in the hour I would be defeated before I started. And I know this to be true in my life – thinking about what lies ahead can be so daunting that it messes with what we have in front of us.

We spend a great deal of time looking to the future while we waste away the present, aspiring to a future that may never arrive (read cross over flies vs. bicep curls). When we are worrying in our lives about what is coming next it is easy to be overtaken by emotions - uneasiness, anxiety, tension, stress and worry. All of these fears are caused by too much future and not enough present. They haven't happened yet and they might not, so what's the problem?

Nowadays we over-subscribe to the notion of being in the future. With sayings like “the future belongs to those who prepare for it today” and “we should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there”, plus our preoccupation with planners and schedules – it's all screaming future. As the saying goes, “the future is what happens when you are busy making other plans”.

Living in the moment – also called mindfulness – is a state of active, open, intentional attention on the present. It is taught in ashrams throughout the world, and even your local yoga class, with the aim of attaining peace, achieving goals and adding value to our lives. While I am not suggesting we all become Zen (but wouldn't that be rather nice and peaceful), I have just 4 mindfulness principles that, if we adopted, work would be a lot better:

- **Stomp out fear.** When fear of the future starts to creep into your mind, stop and ask yourself, “Are the businesses’ basic needs being met right now in this moment?” If they are, allow yourself to express gratitude that business is good. Let go of the “what ifs”: What if I lose my staff / my competitors start to offer the same products at a cheaper price. I am not saying don't think of these things... just don't get too caught up in them. “What if” is not “what is”! And on a personal level, how much fear do you carry about job security, promotion, salary increase (all future things) and how does that ‘fear’ impact on your job today?
- **Let go of the past.** Remind yourself that you can no longer change what happened but you can learn from the experiences and enjoy the present moment because you are now wiser. This is the basis for the learning organisation. Each failure is seen as a learning opportunity – a situation that you need never repeat because you have learned from it.
- **Recognise thoughts as just thoughts.** It's tempting to avoid the things that bother us or to fight the feelings head-on, but openly accepting our feelings and labeling them as just that – feelings, not realities – can help cope with the emotion and turn your attention to the present. I deal with a lot of people whose biggest barrier to achieving workplace goals is their feelings of inadequacy. Sometimes our thoughts are our worst enemies.
- **Embrace your childlike spirit.** When children become upset over something they usually get over the incident in a matter of minutes and return to their joyous selves. They live moment to moment with little regard for the past or future – just pure captivation by the present. How many employees do you work with that are so caught up in last month's office argument or still grieving over their biggest work disappointment that happened two years ago? Let it go – move on.

I am not saying don't analyse, plan and strategise; neither am I advocating sticking your head in the sand and shutting out the world. Just cultivate a coping mechanism that lets you concentrate more on what you have to do right now than worrying about anything you might or might not have to do tomorrow. That way you just might be pleasantly surprised.

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