

Australian American Chamber of Commerce San Francisco

Newsletter July 2014

“STRIPPING FOR SUCCESS.”

Now this headline has your attention, I'd like to share something that will make your life easier and more effective: how stripping, or whittling back, our goals in life can help us achieve more.

For me a typical coaching engagement commences with an overloaded, mentally fragmented executive telling me how exhausted they are, how much they have to do, and also how they would like to achieve more in their role, their life, their organization. Maybe you can relate...?

The older I get the more I'm inclined to ask, in regard to their life or organization, “Well, what needs to go? What are you willing to sacrifice?”

Most people don't like this question as, by nature, none of us likes sacrifice. However the truth is that anything in nature requires sacrifice in order to flourish. This includes us. It includes enterprise. Overcoming our childlike expectation that we can have everything, do everything, master everything takes prudence, maturity and discernment.

Despite our best efforts to ignore the glaringly obvious, our resources of time, energy, finances are not infinite, and we're unlikely to find anyone with a superabundance of all. Which brings us back to sacrifice. What do we really want *above all else?*

But therein lies the rub. Ascertaining what we really want above all else is often the primary work in coaching either individuals or organizations, and is worthy of several future articles. However, assuming you're lucky enough to have a definite objective that you're clear about, it's now time to free up your resources.

This approach is backed up by evidence. I have a white paper on the topic, so if you'd like more information just email me at katherine@powerhouse-coaching.com or request it through LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/katherinehosie> - but for now here's the skinny.

The average person pursues fifteen personal goals and strivings at any given time (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2010). These are by definition "unfulfilled goals". Typically coaches are engaged to help an executive clarify and achieve additional goals. Add those to the fifteen above and you've got a hell of a lot of unfulfilled goals swimming around in an executive's mind at any given time.

All of these unfulfilled goals tax your 'executive function'. Your 'executive function' is what enables you to control your thoughts and actions, including maintaining information in working memory, focusing your attention, and switching from one task to another. However all of those unfulfilled goals compete for this executive function, *without you even knowing it*, which hampers your ability to concentrate effectively on all of your other unrelated tasks and goals, and diminishes your 'self-regulation' (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2010), which is *critical* for goal attainment, and sometimes referred to as the 'master virtue' (Baumeister & Exline, 2000).

What exactly is 'self-regulation'? Self-regulation is essentially self-control and is described as "the capacity to alter one's responses, such as by overriding some impulses in order to bring behavior in line with goals and standards" (Mead et al 2009). Self-regulation is a limited resource, much like a muscle that quickly becomes exhausted. (Self-regulation can also be strengthened through exercises in restraint and self-control, but that's another article!) When our self-regulation becomes exhausted, as everyone's does on a regular, if not several-times-daily basis, we experience 'ego depletion'.

Here's an example of what happens then. Individuals experiencing 'ego depletion' are more likely to rely on simplistic strategies and judgments (i.e. make bad decisions), present themselves in ways less likely to make a good impression, drink more

alcohol, be dishonest, spend money more impulsively, break their diets, and engage in inappropriate sexual behaviors, amongst other things. (Baumeister et al, 2006; Mead et al, 2009).

If you think this doesn't include you, just think back to the last time you over-reacted, did a slapdash job, sent an email you regretted, or made a hasty decision. You would have been experiencing 'ego depletion' without even knowing it. We see examples of this all of the time in the media: someone in a high profile role doing something completely random. They're often decent people, but trying to do too much invariably leads to 'ego depletion' and can destroy reputations, careers, and sometimes families. That's one more reason to get a hold of this, right?

OK, so too many unfulfilled goals tax our executive function and self-regulation, leading to ego depletion, which can create havoc.

People that do too much seldom master anything. We only have so much executive function (ability to think well) and self-regulation (self-control). By stripping back we replenish our ability to harness both. Like wise parents that insist their children give away an old toy when they receive a new one, we can do the same with our goals and priorities. There are ways of doing this that work, however that may be for the next newsletter. If you want to know more, let me know. This is enough for today.

Bottom line: "If you try to catch many hares, you won't catch one." If you're serious about succeeding at anything, strip your priorities, engagements, distractions, in fact any goal that is not mission critical (whilst maintaining wellbeing and important relationships, which have been proven to give us the most meaning and happiness anyway - but that's another article as well!).

Considering again, what is it that I want *above all else*, for my organization, for my life? Once you clarify this, through reflection, your faith, discussion, or coaching, sacrificing minor goals can become something you do willingly.

Wishing you clarity and self control,

Kate



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Recommended Reading:

‘Necessary Endings’ by Dr. Henry Cloud

‘The Highest Goal’ by Michael Ray

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