

What Not To Do, and How Not To Do It

Get more done, and create extraordinary results by following these steps.

BY PAUL LEMBERG

How can you get more done? Can you possibly do more than you already do? Is there room on your plate for even one more thing?

Doing more to get more done is simply not an option. The answer? Do more by doing less.

Less? How's doing less going to help?

Ask this transformational question: Are all your activities providing the greatest possible payback? Or like many people, do you spend much of your precious time on things which produce a relatively lower return?

To do more, you've got to figure out what not to do. If you're like most people, your time is filled with (1) taking care of routine day-to-day matters, (2) doing things you told other people you would do, and (3) responding to (often trivial) interruptions. To make something important happen, you shove that thing into your schedule.

How well does that work? How well does a five-pound bag hold ten pounds of stuff? You get the idea—not very well at all. Your bag becomes so full that you're overwhelmed, and some of the important stuff spills out. There are so many to-dos on your to-do list that your creativity locks up and your mind can't consider other, perhaps far more crucial things.

You've got to figure out what not to do. During a casual research project, audiences of executives were asked what things they do that they know they shouldn't. Their lists of guilty pleasures include answering e-mails as they come in throughout the day, interviewing all candidates for all jobs, purchasing, filing, writing marketing copy, signing all the checks, and exercising final say on small project changes.

That's not to say these things aren't important—some are, even vitally so. The question is: Are these the most critical things for *you* to be doing, especially at this point in your organization's development?

People often respond by saying that there's no one who can do *that* thing as well as they can. This thinking is

*What's on your list
of guilty pleasures?*

typical of what Adam Smith called "absolute advantage." Smith advocated doing all the things which you do better than anyone else. It is obvious, commonsense thinking. The trap for someone who is by nature highly and broadly capable is that you can end up doing everything, reluctant to let go of anything.

To the rescue is 19th century economist David Ricardo's Law of the Comparative Advantage of Nations. In a bold, counterintuitive bit of reasoning, Ricardo said that, to maximize wealth, each country should devote its energy to producing the goods which create the highest net value per unit of work. Everything else, regardless of how much better you do it, should be done by others.

Ricardo's law boils down to this: That which brings you the greatest return, and only that, is your comparative advantage. Do that and that alone. Outsource or delegate everything else.

To decide what things to do more of and what to do less of, follow these steps:

1. Find out how you spend your time. Keep a list of all the separate things you do during the course of a day, week, and month. You may think you know, but you'll

Are you squandering your comparative advantage?

be surprised by the outcome. Note what you are doing every 15 minutes. Keep this record for at least two or three days; a week or month will reveal even more. (You must write this down. It won't work if you try to keep it in your head.)

2. Ask of each item on your list: Is this action highly productive? Is it making money for your organization, fulfilling your mission, or changing the world? No? That's no surprise. Most people

spend at least some of their time doing low-contribution activities. Even if they consider what they're doing important, there are usually more important things they should do instead.

3. Once you understand how you really spend your time, you have three possible courses of action:

- **You can dump things.** There are always things of such little value no one should be doing them.

- **You can delegate important things** to capable people in your organization or outsource them to firms which specialize in those things.
- **Or you can do the things** that you do best and that make the largest difference.

Apply Ricardo's principle of comparative advantage. Figure out what specific actions contribute the most and do only those, offloading or dumping the rest. Do the same analysis for each department and each member of your organization and create extraordinary results.

To do more—to get more done and create more value—you have to do less. ■

Resources

*Jenson, Donna, "In Search of the Balanced Leader," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 6.

Lemberg, Paul, *Faster than the Speed of Change* (see below).

*Lemberg, Paul, "Why Predict the Future?," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 19, No. 3.

*Muehrcke, Jill, ed., *Management & Planning, Leadership Series*.

*Naughton, Colleen, "Twelve Self-Renewal Steps for Executive Directors," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 15, No. 3.

*Parmenter, Eric, "Play to Your Strengths: Using Outsourcing for Human Resources," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 17, No. 1.

*Stout, William, "A New Way to Evaluate Your Organization's Performance: Measure Your Use of Time," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 19, No. 4.

*Vaughn, Emmett T., "Outsourcing in the Nonprofit Sector: A Strategic Approach to the Challenges of Growth and Staffing," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 15, No. 5.

*Starred resources are available from the Society's Resource Center, 608-274-9777, Ext. 221, www.danenet.org/snpo.

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