



## You Only Coast One Way

By Jason Bader

Many of us pride ourselves on the sheer volume of tasks that we accomplish in a work day. From dawn until dusk, we overcome challenges, remove barriers and drive through another day. Without a doubt, we produce a flurry of activity worthy of any beehive reference. With all this output, our organizations should be growing at breakneck speed. Unfortunately, the sheer volume of work does not always produce the kind of financial results we are looking for. We work harder than ever; but are we really getting smarter? If we really want to see results, we have to quit obsessing over completing tasks and focus on solving problems.

As the title of this article implies, many of us coast our way through the work day. Don't get me wrong. Managers are not sitting at desks playing solitaire or meandering down the black hole that is Facebook; but people tend to coast. Again, the volume of tasks is not the problem. Executives are busy. Answering phones, responding to email and attending meetings are all important. But do they really move the needle? By doing all of these activities, we tend to avoid the meaningful projects worthy of our attention. Instead, we tend to coast our way through the daily firefighting regiment so that we can feel good about an honest day's work. It's time to quit rolling downhill and start climbing the up mountain.

As you can probably guess, procrastination is not an unfamiliar concept to me. Trust me, several of my editors probably have an opinion on this. I was an 11<sup>th</sup> hour madman when it came to term papers or finals in college. Why do today when it can be put off until tomorrow? Sadly, that type of mentality tends to follow you into the professional world. Again, I don't want to suggest that anyone here is lazy; but people tend to fill time with activities of lesser importance. The small transactional stuff gets done but the really big meaningful projects tend to remain in a place called future.

Several years ago, I ran across a book that had a profound impact on my level of output. *Eat That Frog! 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*, by Brian Tracy, has been a best seller since it was published in 2001. I think I picked it up because I thought the title was intriguing and a bit repulsive at the same time. The title comes from an old expression, and I am paraphrasing, "If you eat a live frog in the morning, you can go through the day knowing that it is probably the worst thing you are going to have to do all day." Essentially, do the hardest things first and everything else gets easier.

As I dove into the simple wisdom behind Brian Tracy, I began to research some of his other offerings. Believe me, there is no shortage of Brian Tracy information on the World Wide Web. I found several YouTube videos exceptionally amusing. In spite of some of the more dreadful video productions, a majority of his concepts really resonated with my desire to work smarter not harder.

### Develop a Day End Routine

This is one of those concepts that I find applicable to so many different levels of management. It also works great with field sales personnel. When we get extremely busy, some of our commitments tend to slip through the cracks. We may have written it down, but we didn't make a plan to take action. How many of you have woken up in the middle of the night thinking about something you needed to follow

up on? I know that I have. In order to avoid these nocturnal panic attacks, we need to take time to mentally close out the previous day.

A day end routine can incorporate several elements. For this discussion, let's just focus on creating a task list. Before you leave work, carve out 20 to 30 minutes of quiet time. Just sit down and make a list of all the things that need to get done tomorrow. Just doing this simple gesture will help with that whole losing sleep aspect of management nobody told you about. Try this for a week and see if you start getting more things accomplished. By writing out the tasks, do you find more time in the day? It has been my experience that when I take the time to write out the things I want to accomplish, and review my appointments for the next day, I tend expend less energy accomplishing the work. When I know what I have to do, my stress level decreases.

### **Prioritize Your Tasks**

The next step to becoming more productive is to rank your list of tasks by level of impact. When you started working off the list you created the night before, did you find yourself wanting to bang out the quick little tasks first? I know that I did. There is a sense of satisfaction checking items off the list. Again, this is our brain telling us that more work is better work. Unfortunately, by doing all the little tasks first, we often run out time for the high impact items on the list.

Go back to the *Eat That Frog!* concept. If we really want to become productive, we need to eat the "biggest, baddest frog" on our list first and then take on the tadpoles. During your day end routine, take the time to assign a ranking to your list. Mr. Tracy suggest an A, B, C, D and E methodology. 'A' items are those that have a high impact on your work and also carry the most consequence if you fail to complete them. B items also have a high impact but carry a lesser consequence. C items are items that are good to do, but don't have much impact on your work either way. D items are those that should be delegated to others. This is really hard for some managers. If you want to become more productive, you must work at your pay grade. If you are a \$35 per hour employee, do \$35 per hour work. Let others take care of the \$15 per hour tasks. Finally, an E item is something that you should eliminate. Do you run a report that no one, including yourself, reads? Perhaps you shouldn't be doing it anymore.

In order to make a meaningful impact, tackle those A level tasks first. For me, that means writing an article, drafting a proposal or working on a presentation. For you, it may mean creating a job description for the next member of your team or putting together a perpetual dead stock plan. Making sure that a truck is being loaded right is something others can handle. Bang out those A and B tasks. That is what managers are paid to do. If you are having difficulty prioritizing tasks, go seek guidance from your boss. I am sure that they will have some thoughts on the matter. If you are the top dog, perhaps you should give me a call. I am always here to help.

### ***About the Author:***

*Jason Bader is the managing partner of The Distribution Team, a firm that specializes in helping distributors become more profitable through strategic planning and operating efficiencies. The first 20 years of his career were spent working as a distribution executive. Today, he is a regular speaker at industry events and spends much of his time coaching individual distribution companies. For more information, call (503) 282-2333 or contact him by e-mail at [Jason@Distributionteam.com](mailto:Jason@Distributionteam.com). Also visit The Distribution Team's website at [www.thedistributionteam.com](http://www.thedistributionteam.com).*