

Bringing it all together

A summary of the key points as you end this series.

Session one – sizing your week

Time is a precious resource. There will always be more demands on it than the amount you have. You can do anything with time, but you can't do everything. And there is a natural tension between the why, what, how and when of work. Time can be the rub.

Rethinking time as a human construct that you can leverage rather than lament, is the start of a new relationship with it.

Introducing constraints like a time envelop forces you to prioritise what's most important. It also helps you 'go home' on time.

Working like this takes practice. Practice makes permanent.

Session two – clearing the desk

A desk or desk top laden with files is a distraction. It forces the eyes away from the task at hand to the yet-to-be-done tasks, and your mind starts thinking about those, in essence multi-tasking. Multi-tasking lengthens the time it takes to get work done.

Working from a clear desk sends a signal to the outside world that you're organised, you become discerning about what to keep and how to let things go. When clutter reappears it is useful, early cue that workload may be getting out of hand and a reset is needed.

Regular resetting refreshes the mind and reduces the risk of overload and at the extreme burnout.

Session three – prioritising

Prioritising one thing over many is tricky for humans. It involves choice. Choice means saying NO. Saying NO can make us feel bad – we've let someone down, they may not like us, we might get fired. So, we say Yes. We now have more commitments to do before we've completed the existing ones.

Creating a list of all the things you have to do gets everything rattling around in your mind out. From there the most important naturally rise to the top. If you wait a few seconds longer the most important will.

A priority with focus is a powerful performance enhancer.

Session four – scheduling priorities

Many people avoid the discipline of scheduling work for fear the constraint will limit spontaneity when the opposite is true. Scheduling is a quick and easy way to identify space in your calendar to think, plan and deliver major pieces of work that deliver impact.

It is important to adjust for the fact that we overestimate how long it takes to do minor work and underestimate for major work. Having someone else size work can help.

Finally doing that work at a time when you know you typically have the most energy gives your work effort and your sense of achievement a turbo-charge.

Session five – emails

The ability to use email has transformed the way we can communicate. In the absence of constraint, the processing of mail is also eating into almost two days of every working week.

The untested expectation that a response to an email must be immediate is a key contributor to urgency. Chronic urgency is stressful to sustain.

Having a clear email inbox at least weekly and ideally daily is a sight to behold. The act of clearing them out provides unique insights into how the way we're thinking, feeling, and working is holding us back from delivering our best work.

Session six -urgency

Urgency and inefficiency go hand in hand.

As humans we tend to major in minor activities even though we feel unproductive. The explosion of technology, especially email and our continuous connection to cell phones doesn't help.

Thinking about your longer-term goals and projects and prioritising those first will squeeze out the unimportant. Remember the urgent problems are not important are never urgent.

Lessons from the All Blacks

Anyone who watches the All Blacks play will see them come together from time to time during a game for about 15 seconds to reset: this is what they do...

Breathe in for four counts, hold for four counts, breathe out for four counts. Hold for four counts. 15 seconds whenever you need to reset.