

## ACHIEVEMENT THINKING

### CIPFA MIDLANDS CONFERENCE ASTON, BIRMINGHAM – 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2019

What would it mean for your business, work or life if you...

- could deal with change easily
- increased sales with great margins
- became more resourceful
- increased your resilience
- achieved a personal goal like losing weight

Then all the training and knowledge in the world won't help you unless... you have your mind set to think like an achiever.

Many of us can have challenges keeping motivated, focussed and on track when working on our own, here are a few ideas that have helped me and I hope they help you too.



Even though they're specifically aimed at helping you at work they can also be used in your personal life.

It was Steven Covey the author of '*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*' who said, 'private victory before public victory' therefore to achieve a goal we need to control as best we can what goes on between our ears ie our thoughts, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs.

After all, whatever we want to achieve will always start with... a thought.

Nothing man-made on this planet was ever created without it being a thought first and then followed through with constructive action.

Once you have your mind 'set' correctly you'll have the discipline to follow any goal setting process you choose, take on board the helpful information you need and receive and... take action.

There are five basic elements to 'Achievement Thinking':

1. Mindfulness
2. Ask for help
3. Focus
4. Collaboration
5. Staying Energised

### BUT FIRST...

Let's lay down some ground rules.

The foundation of success (whatever your definition of success is) is to take responsibility for our choices and actions. Whatever happens in our lives we are responsible for it. Whether we succeed or achieve a result we

don't want it is our responsibility. Why? Because we are always in a place of choice and any choices we make will have consequences whether we like those consequences or not.

Granted there'll be some events we experience we'll have no control over. In those circumstances we are responsible for how we react to that situation and for the choices we make.

If a choice we make doesn't lead to a result we want, do your best not to beat yourself up. Providing, that is, you can honestly say you did the best you could with the resources you had at the time.

Set the goal, know exactly what you'd like to achieve and be as specific as you can.

How can you tell if a goal is possible? Here's a guide, if someone else has achieved it then there's a good chance you can too.

Now that doesn't mean if someone hasn't achieved the goal you're striving for then your goal is impossible. For example it was once thought space travel was impossible.

And don't be afraid to make it a big and scary goal, as Lester Louis Brown said, *'Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it you will land among the stars'*.

In other words the bigger the goal, even if you don't achieve the goal you'll achieve something much bigger than if you'd aimed for a small goal.

Write down your goal and describe how it will, look, sound and feel. If you can also taste and smell the goal so much the better. Be as emotive as possible, each day spend a few minutes on a morning (ideally as you're waking up from sleep) visualising the goal has already been accomplished. Sense how you feel and be as vivid as possible, think as if you've already achieved the goal.

As you drop off to sleep at night visualise you've already achieved your goal. As before sense how you would feel and be as vivid as possible.

We're working here on our wonderful sub-conscious mind to help us and help us it will.

## **1) MINDFULNESS**

Today the practice of being self-aware is called 'mindfulness'.

Develop an awareness of your thoughts, attitude, behaviours and beliefs, in particular the ones that don't serve you.

To do so you need to become mindful of your self-talk, the little voice in your head. Sometimes this voice is helpful and other times it's not.

In case you're wondering what little voice I'm talking about, the voice that just said to you in your head, 'What little voice is he talking about?' IS the little voice I'm talking about.

Be mindful of the conversations you're having with yourself, and by the way, it is ok to have conversations with yourself. Is the voice encouraging you to do something or talking you out of doing something. This 'conversation' will be based on your beliefs.

For more about this little voice have a read of *'Little Voice Mastery: How to Win the War Between Your Ears in 30 Seconds or Less & Have an Extraordinary Life!'* by Blair Singer.

### **HOW CAN YOU TELL YOU HAVE A BELIEF THAT ISN'T SERVING YOU**

This is a guide: If you want to carry out an action that would be beneficial to you and it's not life threatening and you're giving yourself reasons not to do the action, then there's a good chance you have a belief that's not serving you.

For example you meet someone at a conference. You get on well, exchange contact details and you think there may be some synergy between you. Instead of making the follow up call to arrange a coffee to explore possibilities you talk yourself out of doing so convincing yourself they were only being polite, or you're busy.

Here is a situation of potential benefit, it's not life threatening and yet you don't want to do it, what's stopping you?

Here's another example, let's say you work in a place where it's open plan, there are no private offices your work areas are partitioned. You're trying to get on with some work and someone near-by is on the phone and they're speaking rather loudly. Often when on the phone we can be loud. What's wrong with approaching them and pointing out what they're doing? Nothing! We're just afraid we might offend them. There's a situation if they stopped speaking so loudly would be of benefit to us, making someone aware of what there is not life threatening but we make up reasons and excuses not to do it so there has to be a belief that isn't serving us.

So what on earth is going on there?

Usually it's fear and fear comes in many guises. The biggest fears in our everyday working lives are the fear of rejection and the fear of failure. Fear is usually an illusion, unless you're faced with an angry snarling dog or a life threatening situation THEN you have something to be fearful of.

If there is some physical danger or someone can get hurt (or you could end up breaking the law, not a physical danger granted but wearing prison clothes may not be the fashion statement you want to make ☺) then there is something to be fearful of so don't do it. Any other time give it a go, you might have to do a little preparation but... JUST DO IT!!!

Two simple ways to approach this situation

Give yourself a few minutes to psych yourself up and do the action. In the examples above you'd make the call or speak to the person in question. To quote the title of Susan Jeffers' excellent book, *'Feel The Fear and Do It Anyway.'* You might consider reading this book too.

Think back to the times you've been faced with a task you didn't want to do or was dreading to do such as fill in your tax return or talk to the boss (possibly asking for a raise). Did you put it off? I know I have. Then came a point when you had no option but to do it and when you did finally carry out the task it was ok. I bet often afterwards you were delighted with the results and wondered why you put it off for so long.

Another method is to draw a vertical line down the middle of an A4 sheet of paper. On the left hand side list all the benefits of doing the action, don't forget to list the rewards you'll get. On the right hand side list all the consequences of not doing the action. Be as emotive as you can, write down how you'll feel when you get the reward or when you have to face the consequences of not doing the action.

Also think about this. I've noticed every person we consider to be a success is a failure. That's right, read that line again, every person we consider to be a success is... a failure.

I know what you're thinking, 'How so John?' Because very few of us, no matter how successful, got something right the first time we tried it. Even if we did get a successful result there's usually something that could have been done better, it's a matter of evolution.

Think of Bill Gates, arguably the richest man on the planet. When you consider the software he has available today compared to when he first started writing computer programmes they haven't half come on and he's continually evolving them. Can you tell me when he'll stop? It won't be soon I'm sure.

When you set a goal it's like setting your SatNav for a journey. You know your destination, now it's about the journey and going on the various roads to get there. For a goal it's about taking the various steps to get there.

Like the destination you punch into the SatNav you have to be as specific as you can with your goal. Which is why we write down what it looks, sounds and feels like.

Sometimes on a journey we might make an error and go down a road we shouldn't, if we do what happens? The SatNav reviews the journey and re-calculates the route so we get back on track.

If we make a mistake while en-route to our goal, rectify what needs to be changed and get back on track.

I hate making mistakes but have now learned they're a useful learning aid. Nobody ever learnt anything when things went right, lessons have always been learnt from mistakes and when things go wrong. Think about it, think about a goal you've achieved in your life, once you achieved it you didn't need to correct yourself did you? Along the way I bet you made various adjustments to ensure you were on track.

In my book there is only absolute failure. Absolute failure is when you give in, otherwise when things don't go the way you'd like, it's just a learning opportunity. A learning opportunity so you can refine what you need to do and take the path you need to walk.

## **A METHOD TO COMBAT THOUGHTS THAT DON'T SERVE YOU**

If you catch yourself thinking a thought that doesn't serve you, somehow you need to let it go. If you can't let it go you need to eliminate or change it. You know the kind of thought? You might think, 'I can't cope with the change this time,' or 'I'm no good at my job anymore.' Well, here's what I do. The acronym BRAVE will help you remember, after all we have to be brave to achieve our goals.

**B** - Block  
**R** - Review  
**A** - Affirm  
**V** - Visualise  
**E** - Evaluate

### **BLOCK**

When a thought pops into your head that doesn't serve you, for example, '*I'm useless selling on the phone*'. Block it by saying, '*cancel*' or '*stop*'. Actually say it out loud, not too loud, if you're in the supermarket you might get some funny looks from the other shoppers in the frozen foods aisle. Don't just think it, actually say the word loud enough so you can hear it. It's what psycholinguists call a language loop. It's a double reinforcement as your ears hear your voice giving the order. It helps make your focus clearer. Have you ever muttered to yourself something like, '*Where did I leave my pen?*' Usually the answer shortly follows.

### **REVIEW**

Review the actual out-come you'd like/need. Is there a skill, some information or help you need to acquire? If there is then acquire it as quickly as you can. You might consider some training or approaching a mentor. If you still need to carry out the action, in this example making the sales call, and you're not going to get the relevant knowledge in time then think through the best way of accomplishing the task with the resources you have.

In this case you might think, if I was receiving a sales call what would make me receptive to the caller? Then work out a plan to do it.

### **AFFIRM**

State a positive affirmation both in your mind and out loud. I say out loud, you can whisper it, the important thing is you must hear it (this is another language loop we're creating).

Make the statement positive and in the present tense ie '*The more sales calls I make the more success I have*'. Don't say, '*Soon I will no longer be bad at making sales calls*'. The sub-conscious mind doesn't understand 'negatives' or future or past tenses in sentences, so the last statement will be understood as, '*I'm bad at making sales calls*'.

A word about affirmations. They only work if you are in the process of change and taking action to make a change. For instance, if you state, '*I am a superb athlete and I can run 100 m in 2 minutes 33 seconds*' and

you don't do take the necessary actions to acquire the goal ie do the right training and have the right coaching, you won't achieve your goal no matter how positive the affirmation is and how much you believe it. You'll just become frustrated.

## **VISUALISE**

Visualise yourself carrying out the action. Find a quiet place and for a few minutes mentally rehearse the task you'll be carrying out.

Then do the action/task.

## **EVALUATE**

Once you've carried out the task evaluate what happened. If you achieved the result you wanted evaluate what went well and what you might do differently next time to do it better.

If you didn't achieve the result you wanted carry out the same evaluation and make either a written or mental note what you're going to do differently next time. Also go through the process again starting at the *REVIEW* point.

## **WHY WE FEAR CHANGE AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT**

I've noticed when it comes to managing change a helpful ploy is to remind ourselves of our past successes and the talent we have because we forget just how good we are, we forget because of the way our brains are wired up. If you're interested in the science of how our brains work read the book 'The Chimp Paradox' by Dr Steve Peters.

There's a part of the brain called the amygdala, also called the reptilian brain, which controls all our automatic functions like the heart beating and breathing. None of us ever gets up in the morning and thinks, '*There's something I should be doing right now, what is it? Oh yes... BREATH, I must remember to breath*', it just happens and that's thanks to the Amygdala. In that part of the brain we also hold our prime directive, which is self-protection. And to survive we tend to err on the side of caution and look at everything as a threat until we're happy we're safe, then we relax.

I don't know if you can remember a time when it was the end of the day and off you went to bed. There you are in your onsie and holding tight to Mr Snuggles you lie there feeling snug and safe and it's not long before you doze off. Suddenly in the middle of the night there's a noise, a crash, a bang or for we light sleepers it could be a creak. We wake up and it's not long before we're fully alert. The Amygdala kicks in and we immediately assume the worst, is it a burglar? Are we under attack? Has a water pipe burst? We now consider doing one of the three F's, fight, flight or freeze. Most of us pluck up the courage and think fight, in other words we investigate the noise, we proceed with caution and usually it's something harmless, something has fallen off a wall or next door's cat has somehow got in the house. We then relax, feel safe again, go to bed and doze off to the land of nod.

That's what happens when we experience change in our lives. We tend to class change as a threat because dealing with change usually means dealing with the unknown, which we fear because we think we 'might' fail and nobody likes failure. So it's perfectly natural to approach change with extreme caution. Even the most confident person will have doubt whether they can manage change or not. The reality is 99% of the time there is nothing to fear.

The fact is if we've successfully dealt with change in the past then we can successfully deal with change in the future.

I know I don't know you personally my dear reader but I can prove to you right now that we're all experts at dealing with change. Here's the proof... not many people know this ☺.

We're all experts at dealing with change because... we're all here.

I don't mean in here reading this e-book I mean we're here on the planet living our lives and doing what we need to do. You see, if you got married you had to deal with change, if you got divorced you had to deal with change, if you got kids you had to deal with change, if you lost a job, got a new job or changed jobs you had to deal with change. I could go on all day.

It's part of the human condition to forget we're dealing with change all the time, we're change experts... we just forget.

To have achieved what we've achieved so far we had to adapt, adopt and change. So if we've coped with change in the past then we can do the same in the future. I'm not saying success is a given because it isn't, I'm not saying we can now be complacent because we can't, I'm saying we need to remember we are more resourceful and talented than we think we are and because of our resourcefulness and talent the odds of future success is very very very much in our favour.

## **CHANGE - UNDERSTANDING OUR EMOTIONAL JOURNEY**

When change happens or we experience an event we dislike we tend to go through seven emotions.

Once we understand our emotional journey we can resolve to let go of unhelpful emotions and thoughts and therefore move on much more quickly.

So here's what happens, let's imagine we lose our car keys, we've searched everywhere we think they might be but alas... no joy ☹ So here's what happens:

- 1) **Shock** – Oh no I've lost my car keys where are they? I need them.
- 2) **Denial/disbelief** – I can't believe I've lost them, I know I've searched my bag four times but they have to be there I'll look again.
- 3) **Anger (blame others)** – If it wasn't for Fred asking me to pass by his house I wouldn't be in this mess.
- 4) **Anger (blame yourself)** – How stupid am I, what an absolute idiot I am. How could I possibly lose something so important as my car keys.
- 5) **Depression/despair** – Well that's it, no keys, no car, I'll miss that very important meeting and lose the business.

This is a critical point in the process and how you behave here will determine how quickly you get back on track. Even though we're at our lowest point here, if we can, a good thing to do is ask helpful questions such as, 'What are my options?' or 'Who can help me?' or 'What would x (someone you admire) do in the same situation?'

By asking these questions we'll eventually realise we have more control than we thought.

- 6) **Acceptance** – Ok, what's done is done. Let's make the best of the situation.
- 7) **Moving on** – We let go and forget about it.

## **WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG AND I DON'T GET THE RESULT I WANT?**

Sometimes we do something and we don't get the result we want, what to do? Usually we beat ourselves up about something that could have gone better. Say a conversation when we tried to explain something to someone and we weren't clear or they didn't react as we expected. Being human at the very least we'll feel disappointment maybe even anger. Don't ignore the feeling. Honour it, in other words, if you need to cry, shout, laugh or whatever then do so, don't bottle it up. People think crying is a weakness, it isn't it shows strength and that you have no fear of your feelings. Crying heals.

By the way, if you are going to honour your feelings you might do it in private, bursting into tears as you pay for your sausages at the butchers may not be a favourable public image.

Once you've honoured the feeling, it might take a few minutes, an hour or evening or even a day (the time gets shorter as you get used to this exercise) then let it go.

Evaluate the situation, if you can correct it then do so. If you can't do anything about it ask yourself what actually went wrong? Could you have done something about it? If you couldn't and it was beyond your control, let it go. Worry and stress won't change anything so why get worked up about it.

If you could not have done something about it then put it down to experience, ask yourself what you would do differently next time then next time... do it.

The past is the past it's gone. We can plan for the future but what we do in the present is what counts. The lessons of the past allow us to take the action we need to take in the present so we can create our future.

## **2) ASK FOR HELP**

Make a list of the type of help you need to achieve your goal. What skills, insights and information will you need? Make a list of who might be able to help you.

When you do ask for help if you're rejected move on to the next person who might be able to help.

When asking for help don't just think about what you can get from that person. Also think of what you can give that person in return. It may be payment in monetary terms or payment in kind.

If someone asks for help give it freely if you can, don't expect something in return. There will be times when you receive help and won't be able to repay the favour. There'll be other times when you'll give help and won't receive anything in return. It's all about putting into, what I call, the pot of the Universe. If you put something in the pot you're allowed to take something out.

If you continuously give without receiving you won't be able to grow. We can only grow when we receive, knowledge, insights and experience and apply what we've learnt.

If you continuously receive without giving, short term you'll grow then your growth will become stunted as word will get round you're just a selfish taker. Nobody will be willing to help you.

## **3) FOCUS**

Focus on the positive but be aware of the negative. DON'T ignore problems they need to be dealt with otherwise they'll just get bigger and come back and give us a bigger slap in the face.

Do your best not to let the challenges and problems frustrate you and get you down. Focus on what you want to achieve and the benefits you'll receive.

Thinking positively is great but positive thinking is nothing without positive action.

That last sentence is sooooooooooooooooooooo important I'm going to repeat it again.

Thinking positively is great but positive thinking is nothing without positive action.

Once again, be aware of what you're focussing on. If you find yourself focussing on what isn't helpful to you then think of what you should be focussing on that will be helpful and switch your focus on to that.

Granted that can be harder done than said but here's a tool to help you stay on track and you only need two to five spare minutes. Pardon? What do you mean you don't have two to five spare minutes during your busy day, let me help you find them.

Every morning just after you wake up, go to the bathroom and do whatever you need to do in there. Come out of the bathroom and find somewhere to make yourself comfy, in a comfy chair perhaps, but don't get too comfy. By the way, don't go back to bed and do this in bed or you'll just go back to sleep again.

Set an alarm for however long you want to do the exercise for, let's say five minutes.

Take about six deep breaths breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. I imagine breathing in calm and peacefulness and breathing out any tension and stress. Then just focus on your breathing.

Make your mind go blank, this might not be as easy to do at first but as you practice more and more it'll get easier.

This is a meditation and meditation has been medically proven to help with promoting relaxation and has many health benefits.

If a thought zips in to your head just let it go, don't get involved..

After a couple of minutes ask yourself if what you're currently focussing on (or what you're current task is) is taking you closer or away from your goal. Then let go of any thoughts. After a little while the answer will zip in to your head. If it doesn't that's fine just enjoy the peace.

If what you're currently doing or focussing on is taking you away from your goal, then ask what is the next smallest thing you should be doing or focussing on to take you towards your goal.

If it's taking you towards your goal, ask yourself if there is anything else you should be focussing on that will take you towards your goal more efficiently/quickly.

Now, you might say, during your very busy day you can't find time for this exercise? Then give this a go. If it's practical to do so when you go to the loo lock yourself in the cubicle for a few minutes for privacy. I do the same exercise (yup, you've guessed, on occasion in the loo) between 1.30 pm and 2.00 pm or I reflect on what I've been doing that morning and what I need to do for the rest of the day. I amaze myself the number of times a thought pops into my head and I realise I should be prioritising some other action than the one I'm currently doing.

Also if I'm having one of those days where I'm rushing from one task to another to another, if I can, I take a two minute break between tasks to clear my head, once again I do my best to go to my little oasis of peace. It helps me relax.

I've already mentioned the little voice in our heads. When you next catch yourself thinking or saying you can't do something instead ask yourself, 'where is the evidence I can't do this?'

The mind works in a certain way when looking for solutions.

If you say you can't do something your subconscious mind will not look for a solution it accepts what you've said as what it is, a statement, a fact of truth.

Instead, ask yourself questions such as, 'how can I do this' or, 'what needs to happen for me to achieve this goal?' And actually name the goal.

The subconscious mind will then look for a solution.

You might think of the solution straight away or it might take months. The solution might be to ask someone or something else (for example do a search on Google). This technique does not guarantee results but phenomenally increases the chances of you thinking of a solution.

Here's a bonus tip to improve your memory. How many times have you been in conversation and forgotten a name or fact and said, 'I can't think of it now' or 'The word/name escapes me'? Notice you've made a statement and the statement is not helpful as you've effectively said there is no answer. If there's no answer why would your wonderful subconscious mind look for it?

Here's a helpful statement to help you find the answer you're looking for. Next time say, 'I know exactly what I was going to say and it'll come to me in a moment', or 'I know the name and it'll come to me in a moment' or, 'I know the word it'll come to me in a moment'. Then let go, don't even try thinking about it and the information will usually pop in to your head within a minute or so.

The more you use this little technique the quicker your subconscious becomes at finding the information you need when you need it.

Essentially your subconscious is like a genie and your wish is its command.

And one other thing, as silly as this sounds, say thank you to your genie when the task is complete. You don't have to say it out loud just think it and be grateful.

### ***A MEDITATION FOR RELAXATION AND TO DE-STRESS***

If you've never meditated before this is a great little meditation suggested by Dr Weil which will calm your mind and body.

1. Sit comfortably, ideally with your back straight.
2. Exhale completely through your mouth.
3. Close your mouth lightly and inhale through your nose quietly to the count of four.
4. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
5. Exhale audibly through your mouth to a count of eight.
6. Repeat steps 2 through to 5 three more times for a total of four breath cycles.
7. The breath normally.

Do this twice a day for a month or any other time you'd like to relax. As you become comfortable with this technique you can gradually increase the number of breath cycles to eight.

### ***PUTTING OUR LIVES IN TO PERSPECTIVE – THE IMPORTANCE OF CELEBRATING SUCCESS***

Another issue many of us have is not acknowledging the successes we have, we just focus on the issues, challenges and problems.

I wonder if you can identify with this simplified scenario. You have a problem to solve, you solve it and straight away you go on to the next challenge, you sort that and you go on to the next one. The fact we've sorted/solved a problem/issue/challenge is surely classed as a success, no matter how small. And yet, we don't acknowledge it.

If we're not careful we forget about the fact we've achieve a success or done something well because we're focussing on the problems/issues/challenges. And if we ONLY focus on the problems/issues/challenges without at least acknowledging the successes we can fall in to the trap of thinking our lives are only full of problems/issues/challenges and that can erode our resilience.

Somehow we need to celebrate or at least acknowledge the successes no matter how small. Here are a few ideas how to do that.

### ***SUCCESS IN A JAR***

A friend of mine has a large jar made of glass on her office desk, any container will do as long as you can see the contents in it. She bought some small stone chips from the garden centre. Each evening before going to bed she reflects on the day and thinks of her achievements. The following day for every achievement she puts

stone chip in the jar. As the days and weeks go by she sees the jar filling up, reminder her of the successes she's had.

### *SUCCESS JOURNAL*

Another friend of mine has a journal, a simple notebook. Just before he goes to bed he reflects on the day. He writes down about half a dozen successes or things that he did well. He reflects on those things and chooses his success of the day. At the end of the week he reflects on each success of the day and chooses his success of the week. At the end of the month he reflects on each success of the week and chooses his success of the month. He does the same at the end of the year.

Whenever he's feeling a little down there's a recorded list of his successes to remind him of the good things he's done.

### *SUCCESS SELF-PILLOW TALK*

The easiest way and this is what I do, when I go to bed at night as my head hits the pillow I reflect on the day and focus on what went well. A conversation to myself might go along the following lines: 'That conversation went well, well done. That situation you had to deal with, I know you didn't get the outcome you wanted but under the circumstances you did a good job there, good on you. The way you helped your friend this morning was brilliant, great job John.' This is not about showing off it's about acknowledging what we're doing well.

Why do this? Because it reminds us that we are doing a good job and that we are talented. It puts our lives in to perspective and balances out the issues, problems and challenges and more importantly helps build resilience.

## **4) COLLABORATION**

Whatever our goal we have to do it on our own but we can't do it on our own. We have to do it on our own because we are the ones who need to take the action to achieve the goal but we can't do it on our own because we need the insights, help and support of others.

Napoleon Hill who wrote the book *'Think and Grow Rich'* in 1937 – Chapter 10 – 'The Power of the Master Mind', talks about forming mastermind groups. The idea goes back thousands of years.

Ask three, four or five people to join you in a mastermind. You need at least three people in a group and no more than six. Four or five people is ideal.

You can only really do this with people you know like and trust. Make a list of people and ask if they'd be interested in forming a group.

You can either form a group with people within your organisation, with people within your market or industry or with people who are not your competition but have a similar aim, such as to flourish in business.

Essentially you're forming a mini association, club, call it what you will.

When thinking of who to ask to join your group also ask yourself what kind of help, knowledge and skills do you need? Who can you ask for help? What kind of help can you offer your colleagues? Who can you team up with for mutual benefit?

When you have your group it's a good idea to have an initial meeting face to face. Here's a suggested agenda of what you might discuss obviously you can add and delete questions as you see fit (and I suggest someone notes what's been agreed and circulates it to everyone after the meeting).

- Short introduction from each person, ie who you are (just two to three minutes each). You might want to tell the group a little of your personal background and business experience or your career to date.

- What's the purpose of the mastermind? – To discuss among the group – Is it specifically about a certain interest, or about building a business or just to act as a support group for your life?
- Each person to state what they want/expect from the mastermind.
- If it's agreed, expectations can then be met...
- Each person to state what they'll be able to contribute to the group, what skills, knowledge, resources do you have?
- What is the format going to be? (I'll give an example below).
- How long will the meetings last? A few hours, half a day, a full day?
- How often will they be?
- Who will chair them? You might consider taking it in turns.
- Where will they be held? At a venue or via Skype?
- Will there be support between meetings?
- Do you want more people in the group if so who?
- How often will you review the format, frequency of meetings and if they're working?
- Exit strategy – when will you know enough is enough and how to bow out gracefully.
- When will the next meeting or meetings be?
- What happens next?
- Any other business.

I'm one of a group of six professional speakers, we meet for a whole day once every two months. We take it in turns to host the day which could be in our homes or in a rented hotel room.

Each of us brings an issue we're having to the table, usually a business issue and then everyone else suggests solutions. At the end of that person's turn they have to state the actions they'll do by the next meeting.

Then each person takes their turn to state their issue, listen to solutions and state the actions they are to take. In our case, the process takes about 45 minutes to an hour for each person.

At the next meeting each person has to report the results of their actions. If they haven't done it they have to state why. This accountability encourages action to be taken.

If you'd like to make things interesting you could suggest if an action is not done then they have to pay some sort of a forfeit such as making a donation to a nominated charity.

In between meetings you can also phone or contact each other with support.

When the group is ready to disband or you are ready to leave the group then say so. This is not a pact for life.

## 5) STAYING ENERGISED – TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE

Do your best to have fun. Whatever the task and no matter how arduous give it the Mary Poppins treatment she was right when she said a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.

The most important aspect of this principle is to have some 'me' time or at least put a smile on our faces for a short while.

We all lead busy working lives and often forget or choose not to take a break. Many of us are creating prisons for ourselves where our lives are ruled by our work. Ok, ok, work is important, agreed, it allows us to pay our way in the world and, especially if we enjoy what we do, makes us feel like we're contributing and so we feel valued.

It's just that life is about... balance. Too much of one thing is not good. I love chocolate but would hate to eat a ton of it all in one go. I should know I've tried.

In a busy working day many of us often work through our lunch and coffee breaks, we take our work home with us and some of us even work into the weeeeeee small hours of the morning.

Sometimes we allow our work to take over our lives without realising it, sometimes it can't be helped as a deadline has to be met and we'll let someone down.

So for the times it can't be helped, here are some simple ideas.

If you can't have a proper break at the very least have some 'micro' breaks. I suggest at least 3 or 4 micro breaks a day lasting no longer than 3 or 4 minutes each. WARNING!! Put a strict time limit on the break as you can get carried away and end up just having fun for hours, so, as silly as it might sound, it might be advisable to have an alarm clock or timer nearby (oh, and don't forget to set it for the time you're allowing yourself). This is not only about enjoying our time at work more but also being more productive and by productive I mean actually doing some work.

Why do we need to have a break? How many times have you found yourself wrestling with a problem of some sort, taken a break or decided to go to bed for the night only to find when you return to the issue you've thought of the solution. Well this is the purpose of these exercises fun and increased productivity.

Some of the suggestions may seem a little unusual and take you well out of your comfort zone. They have purposely been designed to do that as the objective is to take your mind off work altogether for a short while and have fun so you'll return to the task in hand recharged, refreshed and motivated.

Some of the suggestions can be done on your own others with a friend, work colleague or colleagues, you decide.

When carrying out most if not all these ideas, if you can, do them away from your area of work. Ideally another room, even if you have to lock yourself in the loo then just do it. Why? Your place of work is your place of work and your subconscious mind will perceive it as such. If you go to the same place to have your micro break your sub conscious mind will eventually associate this area for non-work activities. Also if you stay in your area of work you'll find it harder to relax. The point is eventually you'll find it easier and quicker to relax in your micro break area and quicker to get back to work and be productive when you return to your work area.

Above all else... HAVE FUN!!

### THE MICRO BREAKS

1. Smile: Practice your smile all day and every day. It's been well documented we use fewer muscles to smile than to frown. It's been scientifically proven whenever we engage in a positive physical behaviour, our mental mind-set changes for the better. You might feel silly doing it but you will feel better for it. If you're passing someone in a corridor or on the street, smile and say, 'Hi'. The chances

are they'll smile back. Warning – don't do this when being given bad news or worst still when giving bad or sensitive news.

2. Ask silly questions –

Would die hard vegetarians avoid driving through a town with the word 'ham' in the name?

Is it true Cannibals don't eat clowns because they taste funny?

What would happen if you went on a diet of only garlic, curry and onions? Would you not lose weight but look thinner from a distance?

Have a competition with a friend and see who can ask the silliest question.

3. If you have regular meetings with colleagues or clients, or any meeting for that matter, start them off on a positive note. Begin with the question, 'What's happened since the last meeting that's been good?'

4. Go for a short walk in the fresh air, at least leave the area where you work.

5. If you know it's going to be a stressful day, wear 'fun' underwear (I'll let you interpret 'fun' in whichever way you want). When you're in the middle of a tense meeting, you can say to yourself, 'If only they knew what I had underneath these clothes'. Once again don't smile during a really really serious bit.

6. Meditate for a few minutes. You don't have to be a Zen master to do this, just find a quiet spot where you can sit comfortably and do your best to let your mind go blank. Do not cross your arms or legs or clasp your hands. Just honour any thoughts that may zip into your head and let them go. Focus on your breathing. I know this is not funny but it is soothing. You'll also be amazed at the ideas you'll have and clarity of thought after the meditation.

I've found recently the more I slow down the quicker I get.

7. Celebrate any and all successes large and small. Treat yourself! Crack open a bottle of wine, have a jelly baby forget that have two, buy that Mont Blanc pen you've always wanted. Get yourself a copy of the 'Radio Times' instead of 'TV Quick'... go on... go crazy you devil you.

8. Carry out a random act of kindness. Buy someone in the office a bun for no reason. Put a few coins in the busker's hat. Learn how to make a balloon animal and give it to a child. The quickest way to cheer yourself up is to cheer up somebody else.

9. Have a power nap. If it was good enough for Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher it's good enough for us. I'm not suggesting for one moment you put on your Buzz Lightyear jim jams or your Bratz Big Kidz nightie. Leave Mr Snuggles in the cupboard. You can forget the cocoa too. Don't get too comfy, just find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed for 20 minutes. Power naps are excellent for clearing the head and returning to work refreshed. By the way I'm only suggesting one possibly two at the absolute most during a day.

10. Create clever slogans for local businesses eg:

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Bakery -             | 'Get your buns in here!'                 |
| Travel Agency -      | 'Go away ... please!'                    |
| Gamblers Anonymous - | 'Bet you don't know what our slogan is?' |

11. For the ultimate in silliness and a guaranteed method of releasing tension and stress try this suggestion from my friend Chris Burgess, he calls it 'Blowing Raspberries'.

1. Stand up
2. Lift your arms out in front
3. Relax the wrists and hands
4. Relax the shoulders and arms

5. Shake the arms, hands and fingers
6. Blow raspberries as hard as you can
7. Do this for as long as you like.

So here's the science.

The arms, hands and fingers contain energy meridians by shaking them you release any stuck energy. This creates an energy flow from the associated organs and this balances your physical and neurological system. Blowing raspberries uses the lips which are one of the major sensors of the body. The blowing expels air and releases endorphins and we laugh at the silliness, in other words, the child like enjoyment produces dopamine, which makes us feel good.

Is this silly? You bet! That's why we laugh and the laughter releases tension and stress.

What other ideas do you have to help you through your working day?

Oh, and one more thing before we move on.

Sometimes when the pressures of work and life get me down and I need inspiring I go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and in the search box type in 'any given Sunday speech' for a brilliant speech by Al Pacino.

Here's wishing you a more productive time at work.

## **SOME USEFUL BITS... AND REMINDERS**

Actually, I'll let you decide whether they're useful or not.

If you go off track just review your goal, is this really the final outcome you'd like? Review where you are and decide on your next step and... DO IT! Carry on and don't give in. And yes... I know that can be challenging at times.

You're allowed to be disappointed but don't beat yourself up, you're only human. This is why being mindful of your thoughts, behaviours and beliefs is so important as you'll be able to see quickly if you're going off track.

Be patient, don't expect instant results.

Take small consistent steps. Let me explain. Let's imagine it's possible for a ship to travel from Southampton to the North Pole in a straight line and that distance was 2700 miles. We'll also imagine it's off course by one degree to the West. After a few miles it won't be too far West of the Pole. But if it travelled the whole 2700 miles it might miss the pole by quite a few miles. It's being off course by a tiny amount over the distance that made it miss. The same principle applies when achieving a goal, think what is the next smallest step you can take to achieve your goal and do it consistently.

## **FINALLY**

Regarding your goal, continuously review where you are and where you want to be. You might choose to review minor goals every morning, noon & night and the big picture once every two weeks or once every month.

Even if you make one small change and take one small step nearer to your goal it's better than nothing as Alice Walker the American author said, *'Every small positive change we make in ourselves repays us in confidence in the future.'* And I know as I've used these insights and tools to keep on track with my business and in my personal life to purposely and safely lose 100 lbs of excess weight in 100 weeks.

Well, that's it and it's now over to you to make of your life what you will and I suggest you make it... MAGIC!!!

Good luck.

John Hotowka is a speaker, humorist and magician.

John helps organisations and individuals excel by applying his 'Achievement Thinking' insights to managing change, being resourceful, building resilience and doing more with less.

If you know someone who is organising an event and they need a professional speaker, please visit [www.hotowka.com](http://www.hotowka.com) for more information. Better still when would now be a good time to contact John at [john@hotowka.com](mailto:john@hotowka.com) or call him on 01274 685152.



© John Hotowka 2011 - 2019