

# Five useful techniques to keep on track

We've all developed a number of ways to keep ourselves on track in our life. Here are five useful ones that can help you and me when times get a bit difficult, and it becomes difficult to keep from going astray.

## 1. Remember where you're going.

Seems simple, but it's true -- when you lose track of your destination, it's easier to wander around a lot. Sometimes, you can find some interesting things when you wander, and as the fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien wrote, "Not all that wander are lost," but most of the time, when you wander, you are lost, soon will be lost, or are wasting a whole lot of time.

I've been a wanderer through the years; I wander through a lot of interesting things, and sometimes, I've lost sight of my way. It always helps me to remember what my destination is -- and then set off for that destination by the best possible route.

This one thing is what makes goals so powerful -- goals provide a destination that we can move toward.

Years ago, a physics professor taught me a very useful lesson. He taught me that velocity was not mere speed -- it was speed, combined with direction. A housefly has speed, but as anyone who's watched one knows, it lacks direction. It'll fly around in circles for hours. Oddly enough, many people are like the housefly. They don't know where they're going, but they're making good time.

## 2. Remember where you've been.

I know -- I always say to live in the present -- and I'll keep saying it. Still, the past is useful as a learning tool. By definition, wisdom is "experience mixed with reflection," and we all need a bit more wisdom. We should remember where we've been -- and make sure we only make the same mistake once.

## 3. Keep your task list active.

If you've got a lot on your mind, or a lot on your "plate" at work, nothing beats a task list. Put things on it, and then check them off. The famous steel magnate Andrew Carnegie learned this trick from an efficiency expert -- write down what you need to do, order it by importance, and then systematically check things off

when you've completed them. The next day, pick up the items that you didn't get to the previous day -- add the new items, rank, and go through the list again.

If you haven't tried this, take my advice -- you accomplish more items, in less time, than you ever will with any other method.

Personally, I use a technique I learned from a program built by Brian Tracy. I order everything ABCDE. A is important and essential; B is important but not essential. C is not important, but desirable. D is items delegated to a subordinate. Anything marked "E" is eliminated. "E" items are not important, essential, desirable, or delegated. "E" items are chaff, good for nothing other than to be cleaned out.

Take my advice -- set up a task list for a day -- and watch how your day changes as a result. It doesn't need to be anything fancy. Some of the most efficient task lists are nothing more than a slip of paper or an index card tucked inside a shirt pocket or a purse.

#### **4. Constantly refresh your knowledge.**

When you aren't learning, you're getting stale -- and nobody likes "stale."

Set aside an hour a day to learn new things. Three days out of the week, spend that hour reading in your field. One day a week, spend that hour reading pure, positive entertainment. The other three days, spend on learning something that is new territory -- or is only marginally related to your field of business. By reading in your field of expertise, you constantly gain new skills. By reading for entertainment, you give your mind some entertainment and dreaming room. By reading outside your area, you form new concepts, many of which will be instantly applicable in your area of interest.

As an example, I learned management techniques by reading Harry Potter books -- and by reading books in military history, business biographies, westerns, negotiation, and communications systems.

The big problem with "unrelated" reading is pretty soon, you learn that almost everything is applicable -- and you have to constantly widen your sights to pick up more items that qualify as "unrelated."

#### **5. Recover "lost" time.**

There's a lot of "dead" space in the typical day -- and it's time that can be spent usefully when "recovered." Personally, I listen to audio programs in the car during my commutes. This technique doesn't usually work well when the traffic is challenging -- but for the majority of your commute, it's a really useful time to learn. Those of us who spend a lot of time on planes and trains, or who spend

time in waiting rooms, traffic jams, or waiting for a meeting to start, can recover that lost time, and put it to good use.

Get in the habit of taking a notebook or blank index card with you in your purse or coat pocket. Use your "lost" time to think up new ideas and observations, and write them down (not when you're driving, of course; it's unsafe, and you can't read your writing -- trust me, I know). Clip out articles that you don't have time to read, and put them in your pocket for later reading when "lost" time becomes available.

Recovering your "lost" time is actually quite easy to do -- and it becomes a game after a while. A friend of mine memorized poems during his "lost" time -- he can now quote poetry at will.

Once you get off track, it's sometimes challenging to bring yourself back where you belong; but with the use of a few techniques, you soon find you can make it difficult to get off track in the first place.

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