

Three Ways to Optimize Your Day

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Do you keep a “to do” list, either mentally in your head or physically on paper or in some electronic device? If you do, it is highly likely that its contents influence greatly the type of day you are likely to have. How you experience your day influences the effort and enthusiasm you bring to the workplace, which ultimately can increase or decrease your effectiveness. Let me suggest how you may use your “to do” list to optimize *your* day.

First, take a minute to read through your “to do” list with this thought in mind: what do its contents indicate about how you are likely to experience this day? For example, does the list contain actions or outcomes you cannot wait to get to because they make your heart sing? Or is it comprised of a series of “have to” or “should” do tasks that invoke dread or anxiety? Are there so many items that you feel overwhelmed? In short, how would you rate your “to do” list’s performance in terms of setting you up for an uplifting, joyous, productive day filled with the possibility of wonderful experiences?

If your answer is “Very good” or better, congratulations! There is no need to read further. For those who gave a less than life-affirming response, let me suggest three ways you can use your “to do” list to help transform the way you experience your days.

1. Though there are many situations in the workplace (and in other parts of our lives) over which we have little or no control, we ALWAYS have a choice about how we view them. Those choices determine to a large extent what kind of experience we have. Thus we can choose to view our “to do” list as a tool for achieving important outcomes, or as one that represents a necessary evil. That perspective helps shape the way we experience the day ahead. For example, would you rather face the day full of anticipation and curiosity about the possibilities and opportunities it brings, or would you choose to go into the day with a sense of foreboding or resignation at the thought of the burdensome tasks awaiting you? Set high positive expectations for your day, then go forth and meet or exceed them!

2. Keep the big picture clearly in sight. “To do” lists generally contain a myriad of tasks or activities to be accomplished. Our objective generally is to check them off as quickly as possible so we can get through them by the end of the day. We get so caught up with the goal of checking off the items that we lose sight of the REAL goal, the reason why we are doing these things in the first place. And we forget to ask some important questions such as, “What outcome is this item supporting?” (If the answer is “None,” then why is it on our list?) While activities are necessary to achieving outcomes, the focus always should remain on WHY we are doing them – i.e., the purpose they serve. If we have no good answer, or if the answer

represents a low priority, remove the item from the list. Delegate it if necessary. Your day will have much more meaning when you keep the big picture in front of you – and you will get rid of unnecessary activities.

For more ideas on how to ensure the details of your “to do” list do not overtake the big picture, see the article *Your Day, Your Choice* in the Articles section of this web site.

3. Take a look at how the CONTENT of your “to do” list is working for you. Most lists are filled with tasks or activities that are hardly life affirming. What if you include content that is? For example, try adding a statement like this to your list: “Today I choose to ____.” Here are some suggestions for how you might fill in the blank:

- ...be inspired by those around me.
- ...be curious about what my staff have to say, even when I think I’ve heard it before.
- ...feel grateful for the abundance in my life.
- ...feel energized by my work.
- ...appreciate others for their contributions.

Adding just one statement like these to your “to do” list can help optimize the way you experience the day. Imagine spending a day seeking out inspirational acts, feeling grateful for what you have, feeling energized by your work, or expressing your appreciation to others! Simply looking for these things ensures that you will find them.

For a list of additional suggestions for life affirming content, see the article *Transformative Choices: What’s on Your “To Do” List?* in the Articles section of this web site.

This brings us back to my first point, which is that we always have choices. Just as we choose to add items to our “to do” list, so we can choose to remove them. Similarly, we can decide to measure our progress by the number of activities we complete or by the outcomes we achieve and the quality of our day.

How will you choose to experience *your* day? ➔

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