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## **Better Focus - Better Results!**

By Barbara Cannell

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## About the Author

Barbara Cannell has used the tips and strategies which she explains in her ebook to improve the results she gets in all areas of her life.

Barbara said, "I would have loved to have been taught at school, or even in college, about how to focus better, sort out what were the most important tasks and how to achieve better results when I did them."

Like most people, Barbara found herself unable to achieve the results which she felt that she was capable of.

"It wasn't until I was a teacher that I started to realize the importance of focus so that I could deal with the ever-increasing study and other commitments, including my part-time job."

"Of course, there were lots of distractions then and there are even more now. So, I believe that my book can help people to make a better life for themselves by helping them to develop better ways to handle their work and personal commitments."

Barbara has a husband and two children.

"This is my first book and I think it was only completed because I maintained my focus, despite the distractions and demands of my family and the community groups which I am a member of."

"I really enjoyed the experience and will write more. But, they will probably be romances or mysteries, because those are the type of books I most like to read. Of course, I will use the tips and strategies which I discuss in this ebook!"

"I have based my ebook on personal experiences of my husband and myself as well as a lot of research. I feel I've explained everything in plain language and believe that the book will probably be useful to anyone of any age who wants to get more done, achieve better results and do all that while reducing their stress and enjoying every day a bit more."

## Introduction

Everyone, from children at school to people in every kind of enterprise, is finding it harder to make sense of their world and to achieve their goals.

I believe that my ebook will show you some ways to cut through the clutter and achieve your personal and professional goals. At the same time, the suggestions which I have written can help you to reduce the effects of stress and other pressures.



It has been proven that anything you do which improves your self-belief or helps you to feel more positive will make it easier for you to improve your concentration and focus.

As you progress to having a more powerful focus, you will also increase your level of self-belief. That will help you in all of your personal and business activities.

The important qualifier is that the improvement will only occur when you can see there is a realistic basis behind your expectation that your situations, prospects and results can and will improve.

These methods may need you to change the way you think about some things connected with your business, study or other pursuits. That sort of change is not always easy, because our current mental and physical habits have often developed deep roots within us through years of use.

It will sometimes take persistence, a firm focus on the goal we want to reach and even some changes in the way we view some things.

But this information does not depend on you believing in any particular philosophy or theory or changing any of our core beliefs.

It is not cutting edge or new. It is information that I've seen demonstrated in the methods of farmers, treasure hunters, teachers, business executives and many others.

When you start to see the results you get, you will understand it better than

I can probably explain it.

When you achieve your first victories and see the improvement in your situation, those gains may be small.

It is important to remember that even great oak trees start small too!

While not everything will be of equal benefit to every reader, I believe from my own experience that you will find plenty of useful material which you can use to help ensure that your plan is comprehensive, workable, has some room for modification and helps you get the results you desire with minimum delay and frustration.

You don't need any special training to use the tips I have explained in this book.

It may be useful to use your computer to implement some of the suggestions if you are comfortable doing that.

But, there are no costs involved if you have some writing materials or a basic word processing program on your computer.

If you want to use your computer and you cannot afford or don't want to buy the well known but very expensive programs, I suggest that you consider getting the open office suite from <http://www.openoffice.org> for free. You will find many ways you can use that. Please understand that I have no connection with the mostly volunteer group which provides the open office software.

I just know many people that use it for both their private and business needs.

## Reasons or Excuses?

The one thing which will delay your progress to becoming more productive and successful is if you put off starting to take action.

These are among the most common reasons and excuses which people use to themselves and others to put something off and delay their own progress toward greater success.

### **It's not up to my standard (it's not perfect)!**

Few, if any projects should ever be held back from completion until they are perfect.

Whether it is a new hi-tech device, a big-budget movie or a new website, it is unlikely to be fully developed before it is unveiled to the public. All of these projects have the benefit of experts in the relevant fields and often the budgets are very high.

The companies behind these projects often spend large sums to test the work within focus groups and surveys during its development. And, even then, most will be reworked after being released for a short time to the public.

It's a great ideal to want to give the public a perfect product, but nothing is perfect until it's polished after feedback from real user experience.

### **There is not enough time!**



This is a very common response why something should not be started. But, it is often possible to find some time which could be used for some work on the important project rather than being used for something which has less urgency and potential benefit.

You may not have time to complete all the parts of a project today, but you and the project will benefit if you can do some part of it, without rushing, so



that there is less to do tomorrow.

It often happens that we will not find out some important facts about the project until we start to take action.

**I have other things which are more urgent!** Are they more important or even just as important?

We often have to decide whether important stuff has to give way to something which is only urgent. If the first item is really important, you might have to abandon the urgent item so that you get the maximum long-term benefit.

**I need pressure!** If you like pressure, go diving!

But, you are cheating yourself, because you are risking serious effects on your health and your reputation by creating a pressured environment around you. That also creates a risk for your reputation with co-workers and clients.

You may be comfortable about working as the hands of the clock scream around the dial toward zero hour but your boss or your client may not.

And they might decide to save you, and themselves, that pressure in future by working with someone else.

You are also denying yourself the benefit of the extra available time that would give you extra time for review and polishing before you release the results of your work. That could usually ensure that you get even better results than you do now, improve your reputation and leave you in better shape to enjoy more time with your family and friends.

**I want to do this other task first.** This is one of the most common reasons for putting off something which is of equal or greater importance to your current task, but maybe a lot less pleasant to do.

There's no harm in doing this occasionally – it might help you maintain a good frame of mind when you get to the less pleasant task but, anyone that does this a few times has set up a routine which their subconscious will routinely follow.

That focus on the easier or more enjoyable tasks can soon become a habit which is likely to have negative outcomes for the quality of their work and their own peace of mind.

And, once it is a habit, it will take much more effort and time to change than it did to set that routine in place, if that change can be done at all.

**I need to rest so I can make a greater effort when I feel refreshed.**

That may be true but many people get into a habit of stopping too soon.

You can benefit from following the example of successful athletes and other top performers.

They often have no greater physical or mental ability than those who don't quite reach the same level of success.

Of course, they use the best equipment and usually have the best professional advice on training, diet, medical and financial matters.

But, most have one other thing in common: their path to success depends on their determination to excel.

That usually involves being the first into the gym and the last to leave.

They keep going when the others feel they've done enough.

That may only make a very small difference on the day of competition but that is all that is needed.

You can see in the results of any competition that most races involve very small margins between the first and second place-getters.

But, the rewards for the winners are always much greater!

My belief is that you don't only get out of some project what you put into it.

Your dividend is often proportional to the difference between your input and that of your most successful competitor.

## One Page Time Management



One of the most repeated business stories is about a United States steel magnate in the 1920's who is said to have paid more than a thousand dollars to an efficiency expert who suggested that his first task every morning should be to write a list of tasks he wanted to complete that day.

The consultant said to list them all in their order of importance.

The adviser said, "Start on the first task at the top of the list and ignore all others until it is completed, before starting on the next."

"Then, and only when it is completed to your satisfaction or its completion by members of your staff is guaranteed to be successful, should you switch your focus and energy to the next task on your list."

Of course, like most people, you probably don't have the choice of focusing on just one task at a time.

But, the point is that we can all save time and effort and ensure that we get better results if we list our tasks that way and spend the majority of our time on the most important ones.

Some people write out their list each morning as the business owner was advised.

But, I have found most people get better results more often, and with less effort by preparing their lists whenever they have a few spare minutes after they have finished their day's work.

At that time, they still clearly remember the various matters which occurred through their work day. So, they can more easily sort out and complete a list of the most important tasks which they should focus on tomorrow.

When they complete their list, they can comfortably put aside their work and concentrate on the family and other activities.

While they do that, their powerful subconscious will start to draw together relevant memories and ideas which will help them when they focus back on those tasks the next day.

## Multi-tasking

This method of working has been very popular and it's tempting to use it with the expectation of getting more done in the same amount of time and being more generously rewarded as a result.

I have found it more effective to put my focus on one important task at any particular time. When I try to spread my effort between several tasks, I become more tired more quickly, my concentration may suffer and there is more chance that a mistake, or even more than one, will occur.

A lot of research is backing my preference. Researchers say that people who multi-task are just mentally switching back and forward between a number of tasks instead of actually spreading their effort appropriately across all the tasks which they are doing.

One of the negative effects from this practice is that they usually don't produce the best possible results for any of the tasks.

There has to be a trade-off; getting results of varying, but usually lower, standard with a number of things in a shorter time against the overall quality of the results which are achieved with the various tasks.

It has been shown through lengthy and careful research that many people who regularly switch their focus and their effort between several tasks are likely to cause some negative effects on their own well-being through a noticeable increase in the stress which they have to deal with.

Research strongly suggests that most people cannot maintain their best efforts when they switch



between tasks which require similar high levels of effort and concentration.

We can improve the quality of the results we get if we train ourselves to a higher standard, but that requires time and study. There will also be an initial period where we may actually be less efficient than before while we get used to dealing with the greater demands we are taking on.

Our brain and body needs some time to refocus on the next task and get up to speed with doing it. Some people may only need a minute or so, while others need about five minutes.

That is not very long but the accumulated time lost can be a significant part of the time that they have for completing the various projects.

Every improvement in our performance requires a period of adjustment.

It is also important that we adjust our personal view of our ability so that we support our greater level of effort.

## Fitting Everything In

I always believed that planning my day was important.

And, I felt that relaxing at times during even the busiest days was better than trying to keep dealing with something work related even when I was supposed to be having some lunch.



I always felt a bit guilty if someone came in with a harried look and a bunch of files while I was sitting quietly and sipping from a glass of water.

But, all the research I've done and the feedback from friends and colleagues in a wide variety of businesses and other organizations supports the idea that being a workaholic is more likely to get you early retirement for medical reasons

than it is to help your chances of success.

Although different people are likely to find any particular system of lesser or greater value to them as individuals, these tips have got good feedback when I shared them with some friends and colleagues.

Remove as many distractions and delays as possible from your day. If you are finding it hard to complete your work or fit in sharing some social time with your closet friends (that includes you husband, wife or partner, of course), look for blocks of time which you can re-purpose.

One thing which I think many people are connected to for too much of their available time is their television or other forms of entertainment.

It's always got to be a personal decision but I think spending time with real people who really like you beats pretending to share the concocted dramas and fun of people that are designed to act and say whatever is likely to appeal to a particular advertising demographic.

After that, the biggest problem that many people have is trying to handle too

many things in a limited time frame.

I found that I could get more done and achieve equal or even better results when I set down blocks of time for each task which I wanted to make progress on.

For that time period, barring real alarm bell emergencies, I focused my efforts on the allotted task. This worked very well and I got more done in less time.

The main points which I believe contributed to the success was that I set down fairly short periods for each task and made sure that there were breaks at reasonable intervals where I could relax for a few minutes.

But, I really focused to the best level I could during the specified periods. I could not have kept up the pace through longer periods (more than half an hour each) and I was happy to push myself for those short periods, especially when I saw the improved results.

I found this helped to reduce pressure from the people I worked for and also left me with more energy and time to enjoy with my friends and family.



## Fixing the Desire for Quick Results

When you start to try to improve the way that you focus on and deal with your most important tasks, one factor which can work against you is the natural desire to get through the work as quickly as possible and grab some reward.

That can tempt us to cut corners on parts of a project.

This impulse is encouraged by the fact that we are all constantly bombarded with offers of instant gratification of various kinds, from a lottery ticket to a new kitchen gadget.

But, the reality for most of us is that our surest path to lasting success, both personal and professional, will require a lot of time and effort in line with the potential rewards which we seek.

When I had just started work, I understood that some long-term thinking was probably essential, and dealing with the harder longer tasks in their order of importance was likely to get better results. But, I didn't always follow my that path.

That usually meant that I was tired and had less available energy when I tackled them.

When I started to suffer some negative effects because of my earlier decisions, I looked for ways to become more enthusiastic about the important but mundane and difficult parts of the project I was doing.

The suggestions here worked for me. Some were my own ideas and others were learned from watching people that were, usually without their knowing it, my role models along the way from where I was to where I wanted to be.

Keeping these points in mind may help you too:

- Q Putting some difficult tasks off will usually ensure that they take longer and your results may not be as good.
- Q Dealing with all parts of the task in order of their importance (where possible) will ensure that you are able to apply yourself to

them properly.

- Q You won't fall for the temptation of instant gratification as readily if you focus on the main target. That helped me to realize the benefits from reaching that were far greater than the other things which I had been letting distract me.

One thing which I have always found very valuable for keeping me focused on my short-term goals and long-term ambitions is to have a reminder of them where I see it regularly; at least every day.

This may be the often-used picture on the door of the refrigerator (or in your wallet or purse).

It's an old idea but it is also very helpful in keeping you motivated.

## Dealing with Disappointments

There may be times when you find that your best efforts don't produce the results you expected.



A review of what happened can be useful. But, too many businesses use reviews to look for what went wrong and who to blame.

That wastes time which could be used to find:

### **Things that someone did right:**

Sometimes, there may be someone that has to be held responsible. But, even when a project did not work

out entirely as expected, there will probably be some things which went well.

The people that were involved should be recognized for the good work they did. If the focus is entirely on fault-finding (perhaps as a way of shifting blame for the result down the line and away from the executives who made the major decisions), the whole business could suffer much more in the future.

All the staff are likely to think that the risks are too great to do anything which is innovative and not pre-approved.

This will limit the potential for new ideas from everyone and possibly result, over time, in the business losing its most talented and creative employees because they feel that offering their best ideas in that environment could become too risky.

**What can be improved:** Someone may have failed with a project but the reasons for that failure may be beyond their control. They may need more training or there may be problems with communication, supply lines or other aspects of the company's operation which were significant factors.

On a personal level, if we just look for reasons that we failed, we'll probably

start beating ourselves up because it ended less than perfectly. That might make us think that anything we attempt in the future will probably fail too. That could limit our expectations and our potential in our own eyes and with the people that we want or need to make our dreams successful.

## **Support your new Skill**

When you start to improve your focus, you will probably think that it will be easy to stay focused in the future.

The truth is that you will have to consciously re-enforce your new level of effort against distractions of all kinds which will keep trying to degrade the results you get.

Always use the planning procedure you developed as you went through this ebook, at least in its most basic form, on any new project, big or small, which you take on.

This will ensure that you get better results and also give greater definition to the mental pathways your new procedures are developing in your conscious mind and also your subconscious.

I said that you should avoid delays in completing or even just starting on something important by resisting distractions and minor indulgences.

But, that doesn't mean that you should not give yourself smaller rewards at certain points as you make progress through the project and wait until the end of a project.

You do need to have breaks where you can focus on other things or even just relax. They can be a reward for a certain amount of progress and also a means of refreshing yourself so that you are more enthusiastic and energized when you start the next stage of your current task.

The main thing is to have set times for those diversions, or less important tasks, which are long enough for you to get some benefit from them but which don't make your schedule so tight that your most important tasks and the results you achieve suffer.

## Look with Fresh Eyes

Some readers will not find this exercise easy at first. Others will find it fairly easy. It depends on your experiences and how you approach your work.



But, even if it is hard for you, I just ask that you give it a few serious trials before giving up on it, because the possible benefits are worth all the effort<sup>1</sup>

I want you to choose some activity which you do regularly and examine it more closely than you usually do.

For instance, if you walk to work or just for the exercise each day, start a few minutes earlier and look more closely at your surroundings and, especially, the people and events which you see.

We all tend to take the many interesting things and people which we see around us for granted, because we are mentally occupied with our immediate personal situation and responsibilities.

This makes our lives less interesting, so our senses become dulled and our enthusiasm for life and all it offers is reduced.

Too many people live in a grey world and don't see the rainbows of opportunities and experiences around us.

We all think our own lives, problems and dreams are very important and perhaps even fascinating but we pass by possibly hundreds of people each day that know nothing about us and we don't really care.

If you start to take a greater interest in the people around you without intruding on them, your knowledge and appreciation of this wonderful world will increase.

This is likely to help you be more perceptive in your other daily activities.

## Systems Smooth Your Path

A system is just a description of the most basic steps required to complete a task successfully. We do many things each day without much conscious thought, from brushing our teeth to driving our car.

But, we first had to learn and adapt a system for doing each of these procedures which we found comfortable and productive.



We probably will only ever start to look closely at any of these regular behaviors again if and when we notice a problem with the results we get.

Because we tend to devalue the importance of these routine tasks, it is likely that we might benefit from an occasional review of the patterns we follow to see if they, and the results which we get from them, can be improved.

This applies to how we do things in our business activities as well as our personal lives.

It's the same process which athletes do regularly to try to fine-tune their performance.

These are the main steps to reviewing and improving any system which we use:

1. **Review it carefully.** Try to look at it as if you were a disinterested observer. List each step in the process. This will take more thought than you may realize at first because we can overlook some small but important steps in any routine process which we do regularly. Look for areas which might be improved. You aren't judging how well you do it, so your personal standards and feelings are not involved and should not be an issue.
2. **Make notes.** Look for anything which you believe should be changed or even dropped from the process. Write down everything but leave any decisions until you've finished the review and have got an

understanding of the whole process.

You can also try to make notes about anything which might be improved that you notice while you are doing that task. You might also ask someone that is familiar with the process to watch you do the task and then give you some feedback which might help you improve how you do it.

- 3. Decide if the changes would be worthwhile.** Ask yourself and maybe also the person that you asked to help you if the improvements could make such a significant difference to the outcome that it would be worth the extra time and effort required to make changes to your routine. It is very important that you are honest with yourself here. If the changes involve extra cost and effort, it can be tempting to put them off even where the benefit in the long-term might be significant.

Saving a few seconds when brushing your teeth is not as important as improving the cleaning process, even if that costs you a little more time.

If you decide to go ahead, your next step is to dissect the process into its most basic parts. The level of detail will depend on the importance of the task and the perceived extra benefits you expect to gain.

I have found that taking enough time to consider all the details of important tasks is never wasted because it gives you more options for making improvements. Doing a deep review will probably mean that you won't need to do another review until there is a significant change in the procedure or the outcome you are getting.

For me, the easiest way to do this is to imagine that I have to explain the procedure to someone that has never done it before.

The first time that you do this, you will probably be surprised at how many of the most basic steps you forget to include in your outline.

The effort which you put into this will improve your ability to focus on other matters which may be far removed from what you are currently looking at.



## Good and Bad Mistakes

Some people are so afraid of making mistakes and being held accountable, that they avoid trying anything new and unproven even when it might improve their work or their personal lives.

If you are someone that tends to avoid trying something new, I hope this Chapter will help you to change your attitude so that you can achieve more than you may have realized you are actually capable of.



Thomas Edison is often quoted as saying he did not fail hundreds of times when developing his version of the light bulb, he just proved that those particular methods would not work.

That's how we should view mistakes; an inevitable part of everyone's life.

The only people that don't make mistakes are people who don't do or achieve much at all.

If we let mistakes stop us, we are wasting the time and other resources we put into that project up to that point.

We also start to build a pattern of behavior where we accept that we are not likely to succeed because we have a history of mistakes.

But, so does every successful person. In fact, many of the most successful people have a history of making many more mistakes than most people do.

They succeed because they are not afraid to make mistakes. They always try to include in the plan for any new project how they will deal with whatever problems might arise and even prepare as well as they can for what they will do if the whole project fails!

For them, a mistake is an opportunity to learn what not to do.

They know that some things cannot be even guessed at before you actually start doing something. But, they have planned as well as they could, so they

get fewer surprises and they are able to deal with almost any outcome. The only bad mistakes are those which are the result of poor preparation or any that the person has made before, but not learned to avoid.

## **Your Example can give Your Children a Head Start in Life**

Wise parents can help their children by giving them a head start in life.



A great way to do this is by helping them to learn and benefit from your knowledge of how better focus improves the results you get.

When a child makes a mistake, some parents chastise or make fun of

the child, which can stop them from ever wanting to try anything where they are not sure of a positive outcome.

That obviously makes it more likely that they will have less self-confidence and may never achieve the level of success which they are actually capable of.

Smart parents handle those situations much better.

Some things which can help children to maintain a healthy attitude about mistakes are:

1. Look for positive aspects of the incident. They may have tried something which was a significant challenge, they told you about the mistake and any problems which might have been caused by their actions and tell them, where appropriate, that you believe they will do better because of what they have learned from the experience.
2. Tell them about a similar incident in your own childhood if there was one. Re-assure them that they still have your confidence and support.

## Do It Yourself?

One of the biggest mistakes which limits the progress which many people make is to try to do too much by themselves.

There are many possible reasons as to why they don't get someone else to do some parts of the work.

But, many people taking on more tasks than they have the capacity to deal with efficiently is a major reason for poor (or no) results!



They will have reasons and even see benefits but they often don't give adequate regard to any possible negative consequences.

### **My boss told me I had to do all this myself.**

It's not unusual for someone to be required to do more than is reasonable by their employer.

That means that they have no choice but to comply.

But, they may find that, when they have accomplished some of the tasks which they are given, they will have an opportunity for some level of negotiation about other parts of the task.

### **I can save money instead of paying someone to do this.**

This type of reasoning is only valid if you have a sufficiently high skill level that you will produce something of comparable standard and also that your other work won't suffer because of the time and effort which you put into this task.

If you have the funds available, you can often save time and pressure by paying someone that is a specialist in doing that sort of task to do it. They will probably do it quicker and produce a more professional result.

That will give you time to either focus on some other task or take a short but refreshing break.

**I don't have enough money to pay someone to do it.**

If delaying the task will have a serious negative impact on your work or other important parts of your life, you might be better off to consider re-organizing your expenses and putting off some other less-important purchase so that you can start enjoying the benefit which paying someone who does this for a living will give you.

**I don't want someone else to get the credit.**

This is a fairly common reason though, of course, it is rarely actually one that anybody admits to having behind their actions.

But, this can mean that that person takes on more than they can successfully complete to an appropriate standard.

The result can be that all of the work they produce is not of good enough quality. So, their reputation and future prospects will suffer.

The best possible reason that you can have for asking that someone else do a task which you get is that you know they will do it well. I know some tradesmen that have referred me to their nominal competitors when they are too busy because they know that the other firm or person will not let their customer down. Sometimes, it is because the other firm has specialized in that particular type of service.

Yes, they miss out on the work that time but most of their customers appreciate their professional attitude and come back to them when they need something else done.

The other company is also likely to reciprocate when the opportunity arises.

## Procrastination



Most people can always find some reason for putting off almost any task. That's why we continue to have problems dealing with the biggest productivity killer of all – procrastination.

My experience is that this is that we need to take

positive action to overcome procrastination and that is a necessary step for anyone before they will ever be able to reach the level of success which they are capable of.

It can be hard when we are just starting to improve our ability to focus but it will become easier when we start to achieve small gains. If we use those positive results as re-enforcement for our self-belief, the time it takes use to progress significantly is likely to be a bit shorter.

One benefit that we get fairly quickly is a greater understanding of what is really important to us and our future.

We will probably still have some tasks which we see as having more downsides than benefits.

But, we realize that they have to be done and that getting them out of the way sooner rather than later will make the rest of our work much easier to deal with as well. It is a mark of our increasingly professional attitude that we do whatever has to be done which is within our personal set of values to achieve the results which we and our employers or clients need.

I do this by altering the way I regard the task. Instead of just seeing the less pleasant aspects of the job, I tell myself that it is a key part of my

preparation for more interesting and rewarding activities.

When you get that less appealing job done, you will have more energy and enthusiasm to help you forge ahead.

It's like the reaction of someone that has to have a large sticking plaster removed from a cut. Pulling at it gently and slowly is likely to cause more pain than taking it more quickly because our mind will have more time to magnify the possible discomfort out of proportion to the reality.

Many people do not realize that there are some other benefits which come with a reputation for handling all kinds of work well.

Doing whatever tasks that are required to be done gives you a chance to understand how other people may feel about doing similar work when and if you are employing or supervising them at some time in the future. That understanding can be a great help in getting the work done to everybody's satisfaction.

Doing whatever is required of you will also ensure that your reputation is enhanced and you are likely to be among the first to be considered when there are new opportunities available.

***One phrase which has been some help to me is,  
"If you will do for one year what others do not want to do, you could  
be doing what others may only dream of for the rest of your life!"***

## Focus and Teamwork

Most of us need to work with other people to get our work done.



This may include colleagues, suppliers, councils or other regulating bodies, competitors and, of course, our customers.

This Chapter is focused on some useful tips which will help you be a good team member and an individual that others will like working with and may even recommend to others.

Whatever your relationship with any particular person, it is always important to treat them as you would want to be treated.

Try to look at things from the other person's perspective. This can reduce conflict and sometimes even eliminate problems before they occur.

When someone else is speaking, focus strongly on what they say and don't let yourself be distracted by that attractive person on the other side of the room or the joke which someone else is telling nearby.

Always be sure that you understand what they mean. If you are not sure of that, don't hesitate to ask them to confirm what you understood them to mean. They are not likely to be offended but rather to appreciate that someone is demonstrating a strong interest in their views.

Take whatever time is necessary to make your points clearly and always check that the other people in a discussion understand what you mean. Some business people I know probably don't realize that they lose a lot of opportunities to develop their businesses because they talk AT people rather than with them. They don't listen when others are talking because they are just thinking about what they want to say next.

Use someone's name when you speak to them. It is, as Dale Carnegie said, "the most important words to anyone". If you did not hear their name clearly, or even if you forgot it, ask them to repeat it. I am sure that they will



appreciate your genuine interest. But, don't ask them again ten minutes later.

Make a sincere effort to plant their name in your memory. That's not hard. Just listen carefully, ask them for clarification if you did not hear it clearly and use it, preferably twice, in the following discussion.

Be polite. In the hectic and ever-increasing pace of our daily lives, a lot of people take short-cuts in their speech and manner.

That's generally okay, but you will add to your reputation if you maintain a professional attitude and treat everyone with respect, especially in business situations.

Give credit where it is due. You probably acknowledge other people's contributions to projects you are involved in but you may not realize the effect that can have on them. The fact is that everyone craves recognition of their efforts but various studies reveal that fewer people make that small effort. So, your sincere public or private endorsement is likely to be very welcome and greatly appreciated.

Be careful when asked by anyone for feedback about something they did or said. Always try to find something positive to say without bending the truth. Keep any criticism focused on the work and not the person.

## Changing Viewpoint

This simple technique may be a great help to you as it has been for me.

When you are considering options that you have about an important matter, pause for just a couple of seconds and move yourself mentally out from your physical self.

Look at your situation as if you were a good friend or some sort of adviser that you had asked to examine the situation and to help you in your evaluation of all the options which are available.

The main benefit from this exercise is that it helps you to focus on the main points and reduce the effect of other matters that are unrelated to the main one on your thinking.

You may not find it easy at first. But, you could find it very valuable if you are prepared to stick with it and give it a fair trial. You can use this approach to examine all aspects of just about any situation more clearly.

You can also use it to examine your current methods of doing something or the views you have held, perhaps since childhood, about some topic.

To help you focus better on important but boring work, you can try to link the task with the benefits that getting a good result might bring your way.

If you have to do something which you have found very difficult in the past, you might shift your perception from, "I always do poorly with this type of work" to "I can use my bad experiences in the past to ensure that I succeed this time!"

This is a method which is widely used by people that use Neuro Linguistic Programming, but the basic techniques don't require that you do a course, just that you give the strategy some serious effort with an open mind.

When you open your mind to a wider range of possible outcomes, you start to give yourself permission to reach greater levels of success.

## Dealing with Stress

The "Changing your point of view" technique which I explained in the previous chapter can be very valuable for you if you are having any problems dealing with stress and its effects in your personal or business life.

The first step is to think about how you react to stress in its various forms.

Please understand that stress affects every being on the planet, from the sloth on the limb of some tree to the human variety in the office next to yours.

Our bodies' reactions to stress are related to the instinctive "fight or flight" response which has protected all humans from all kinds of danger through the centuries.

Problems related to this reflex response have become more common in our modern world because we are constrained from using the basic responses of fighting someone that attacks us or running away.

Unless we have practiced controlling how we react mentally to these things, we will probably be negatively affected by the pressure and our inability to get rid of the stress within us.

One effect is a feeling of powerlessness and frustration.

You can deal with this by immediately telling yourself that you cannot always deal with the pressure as you would like to, but you are confident enough about your own self-worth that you won't let the pressure have any lasting effect on you.

Basically, if you let stress from outside pressure settle into your mind, you can expect further problems and will find it even more difficult to deal with similar pressures in the future.

You may be pleasantly surprised at the impact this simple technique may have in the particular situations which you have to deal with.

But, remember that all these tactics are just to help you to think more positively about your abilities so you will be able to use them to their full

extent. It is surprising how much many of us badly undervalue our natural abilities and acquired skills.

### **Other Real Life Examples**

If you need more proof of the effectiveness of this technique, I will show you how professional salespeople, media commentators and even medical professionals might employ the technique when they are working with clients and patients.

Salespeople in all fields and copywriters that prepare media advertising are able to change people's perception of the product or service they are promoting through the careful selection and use of words.

Successful salespeople listen closely to everyone they meet because this helps them to understand how they need to approach different people to be most effective.

Commentators will tell you a version of the news. Often, they select the words and pictures they use to promote their own particular views while appearing, especially to those who have similar views, to be impartial.

Nurses may ask a patient, "is your leg still sore?" rather than, "Is the pain in your leg still as bad?". The difference is that "sore" is probably thought as less serious than "pain".

Subtle touches like this can help to change the way some patients view their own ailments and reduce their stress levels.

Since it has proved effective for people in all these areas, you will probably find it worth trying in your particular situation.

## How to Focus like a Champion!

If you are looking for examples of people that have developed their ability to focus on the task at hand far above the average, just look to the people who are at the top in your favorite sport.



You will see that, while some of them may have considerable natural talent, the common attribute which they all have is the ability to focus very strongly on whatever they are doing at any particular time.

Very few of us work or play in situations where we need to develop our bodies and minds to the degree which a top athlete does.

But, I believe that their methods are worth studying and adopting to some degree.

Under the direction of their coaches and other advisers, they dissect and study each part of every action which they use in their sport.

They also carefully monitor their thought patterns and discard or replace anything which may have even the slightest negative impact on their confidence and concentration when they perform.

They look after their physical and mental health so that they are able to produce their best when it is needed.

They rarely become upset about a setback, but focus on what they need to do to recover from it and come back stronger than ever.

And, with rare exceptions, they are respectful of their opponents and their fans, even though it is obvious that some from each group don't make that easy to do!

## Planning

Many people underestimate the importance of planning when they start to work on improving the strength of their focus.

They are enthusiastic about getting started with their new point of view and reaping better rewards from their efforts.

But, it is very important to remember the adage, "Those who fail to plan, plan to fail!"



I feel that the truth within that simple statement has been proven by thousands of people. We know that many products, from cars to big budget movies don't succeed despite the most careful planning by teams of very experienced and highly paid professionals.

But, people still grab onto some idea which they are told will make them rich or happy, or even both, and then max out their credit cards and start their new venture without checking anything!

This section will give you some simple tips which will take very little time and effort to set up. You can use them to avoid the most common problems which people have with their planning.

Some people fail because they don't plan, but there are also potential problems which might occur even when you do prepare a plan.

Probably the most common problems are to let your enthusiasm make you rush ahead instead of employing the natural caution which we all possess to some degree.

When you set up a project, whether it's a lottery syndicate or a full business partnership, you need to be realistic about its potential and very careful to ensure that everyone involved is committed to the same outcomes.

As well as the risk to any funds and other resources (including your time and your reputation) which you contribute, you are also forgoing the potential

benefits which you might have got from other opportunities which you could have taken part in instead.

The terms of each person's participation, responsibilities and potential benefits should always be discussed and put in writing.

Another common saying spells it out, "A verbal contract is not worth more than the paper it's written on!"

You should always have a written plan. A common way that many enthusiastic entrepreneurs cause problems for themselves is when they don't ensure that their plan includes all the important and relevant factors.

The best time to think about and plan for your exit strategy from a venture is while you are actually planning to start it!

If you are in a deal with other people or businesses, you would be very wise to discuss and put in writing various potential circumstances in the future of the business might be handled.

Having prepared everyone for the possibility of them occurring and getting a written agreement about how they will be handled is the best way to ensure that the following scenarios do not cause friction or loss later on.

Your written agreement should cover how such possibilities as the winding up of the venture or how the desire of any of the people involved to dispose of their interest will be handled.

Unless you have a clear idea of the potential benefits and also all the risks associated with a particular venture, you will not be able to focus on the day to day operation.

Some leave their planning too late. They notice a trend or a new type of technology, but they take so long to make up their mind and set out their plan, other people that are better prepared and more action oriented grab the best locations and sign license agreements with the producers of the best products.

Sometimes, some people find that they really enjoy the planning and preparation and dreaming about the profits they are certain will come their

way or they start to feel intimidated by the potential risks they face when the venture is launched. In extreme cases, this may lead to them extending the planning stage and finding reasons for delaying the launch.

While they stall, there is no money coming in but there will be expenses for equipment, stock, professional advice and surveys as well as other costs which will eat away at the operating capital before they even open the doors.

This is bad enough when they are the only person involved, but it is even worse when they have family, staff or other people that have invested time, money and effort in the venture.



## Milestones

When we lay out our plan for a new venture or one which includes improvements to our present system of operating, we need to have one or more ways to measure our progress toward our goals.

Some people will be happy to just have a straight line with a start point and a finish point.



But, it's also a very good idea to put some intermediate markers on the timeline which indicate the point where certain intermediate goals should be reached.

This helps you or your group, to be aware of any slippage from the original timeframe or, if things are going better than expected, can encourage greater enthusiasm and effort from everyone that is involved.

For each milestone that is shown on your timeline, you should discuss, at least in broad terms, what options might be available if there are signs that a particular marker will not be achieved by the expected date.

It's inevitable that some things will not work out completely in line with the predicted rate of progress. The milestones helps you to see most potential problems while there may still be time to do something which will help you to reach the desired goal on or very close to the marked date.

### Beyond Two Dimensions

Sometimes you want to express your plan in a way that does not fit into a simple timeline.

You might want to include pictures or details about some of the suppliers, clients and contributors and display any inter-relationships within the project.

I use a mind-map. This method can be done with a computer but, if you have limited computer skills and no time or desire to improve them now, you can just use a large sheet of paper.

It's easy to lay out all the parts of your plan on a large sheet of paper or several joined together, or on a whiteboard.

You start with a circle representing your current position in the center of the sheet and another circle representing your goal at another point, some distance away on the sheet.

This gives you plenty of leeway to add whatever other important factors with their own geometric shape wherever you like on the sheet.

Then, you connect those which have specific relationships with different colored lines.

There are, of course, computer programs for the various kinds of computers which you can use to draw simple or even very sophisticated mind-maps.

I have found FreeMind, a free program which is available for any computer which has java installed (that's most of them) very easy to use but there are others, both free and paid. They all have their particular features and advantages.

## Picking Your Mood

This technique works for most people that use it for a reasonable period.

I have used it myself and found that it helped me in some serious and important situations.

This strategy is an easy way to use the feelings you had when you have a previous success or enjoyable experience to raise your spirits when you are under pressure or about to tackle a task which seems very difficult for you to complete.

The best way to start this procedure is when you are feeling above average because of some challenge you have met or other positive outcome.

While you are enjoying those good feelings and increased self-confidence, press the thumb and middle finger of the hand you use least together firmly. Do this discreetly without drawing attention to it.



If you want to try this but are not actually close to a major positive result at the moment, you can get a similar connection by finding a quiet, private area where you can relax and think back in your mind to a previous success which you had.

Immerse yourself in the occasion, remember as many of the details as you can; what people said about your success, the sounds and even the smells which were around you.

The more clearly that you can visualize that event, the more effective will be the outcome for this procedure.

When you have the clearest and most detailed recall of the event that you can manage, press the thumb and middle finger of the hand you use least together firmly as I explained in the earlier example.

If you are using past events as the basis for this trigger action, you need to try even harder to get back as much of the detail as you can to make your memory as clear and powerful as you can. You might want to do this with more than one prior success. Put the same level of effort into re-enforcing the vividness of your mental image. Then, when you are satisfied with it, press the thumb and middle finger of the hand you use least together firmly. You should use the same finger/thumb combination so that you get the two images when you press those two digits together in the future.

If you are using recall of previous successes to set up a trigger, I think it may work better if you do it where you have some privacy and can also minimize any distractions by turning off music or other entertainment, closing the door and, perhaps the curtains as well.

I found using previous successes took more concentration but it did work for me. The extra practice in concentrating usually only took a few minutes and have helped me get better results many times since.

As you achieve more successes and other great memories, you can add them to this trigger combination. You may find that the more recent events tend to block the recall of earlier events which you had recreated.

That won't matter. Whichever type or combination of memories you connect to the trigger combination will help you to deal with future stressful situations.

When you are feeling under stress, or are faced with some significant challenge, just press those two digits together and you will feel the positive feelings from those earlier times pushing back any doubts or negativity which has started to appear in your conscious mind.

You are not limited to just one trigger. You can use any other combination of thumb and finger or two fingers on the same hand to set up images and feelings which represent some other desirable state.

I suggest that you try it and hope that you gain as much or even more benefit than I do.

## **Last Word from Barbara**

I hope that you have enjoyed and gained some benefits from my book.

Some people may need to make more effort to accept that these simple tactics can give the sort of results I said. But, believe that they will soon start to have their own successes with some of these suggestions.

Then, they will realize the same benefits which I and many others enjoy.

It is slowly becoming more obvious that there are many simple and free methods which can help each of us to improve every area of our lives and have a significant impact on our success,

But, strangely, many people are still bogged down with their belief that the only relief from problems comes in a tablet or high-priced course.

I have found these tips increase the enjoyment which we get from each day and I hope that you and your family will get some of those same benefits from my ebook.

Learning to focus your efforts better will not only make your chances of success, however you see it, much better but it will also help you to enjoy every day more for the rest of your life.

Best wishes and success in all you do!

***Barbara Cannell*** 2011

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