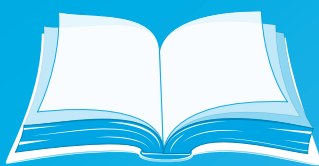


A SUMMARY OF

THE WAY WE'RE WORKING ISN'T WORKING



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BUSINESS BOOK SUMMARIES



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Lesson #1

We need activity and rest to perform at our best.

Way back in 1993, Anders Ericsson performed a ridiculously interesting study that was designed to explore the practice pattern among violinists. You've probably heard some version of his findings before - most likely in *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell. As Gladwell puts it, "the people at the top don't just work harder, or even much harder than everyone else. They work much, much, harder." This has been widely circulated as the 10,000 hour rule. But that only scratches the surface of the mystery that Ericsson unraveled. Here's how the study went down.

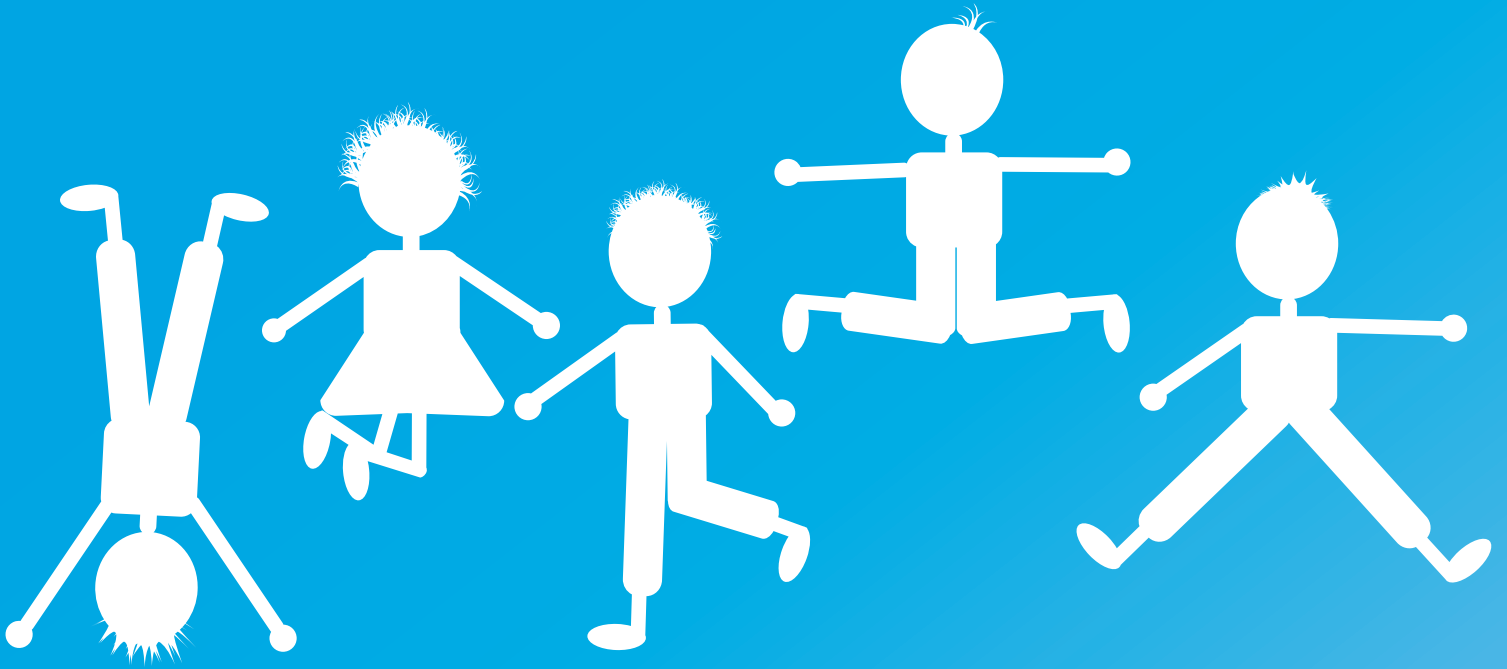
They looked at 30 young violinists at the Music Academy of Berlin and put each of them into one out of three groups - the great violinists (those destined to become soloists), the good violinists (those destined to become orchestra members) and the mercifully named "third" group (those destined to become music teachers).

The top two groups both averaged 24 hours a week of practice, and the third group averaged just 9 hours of practice. Add that time up over a span of years, and it's clear why the third group sentenced themselves to a life of tubas and triangles. But the story doesn't end there - it turns out that there's a little more nuance to this than 10,000 hours would suggest. You see, the top two groups practiced an average of 3.5 hours a day, but split that time into intervals of no longer than 90 minutes, and always took a renewal break in between sessions. Additionally, they also slept for an average of 8.6 hours a day, while our tuba loving friends only slept for an average of 7.8 hours a day. AND, the top two groups also took almost 3 hours a week - to NAP!

One last point about these high-performers - they didn't like to practice anymore than the third group did. What they realized is that if they made it a habit, and set realistic expectations around how long they could do it (90 minutes at a time), that 3.5 hours gets a whole lot easier. Self-control is a depletable resource, and you need to spend it wisely.

As it turns out, the best performers in the world realize that we need intense periods of focus and activity, AND consistent periods of renewal if we are to perform at our best. As the authors say, "by moving rhythmically between activity and renewal in each of these four dimensions, we fulfill our corresponding needs: sustainability, security, self-expression, and significance". Let's look at those 4 areas in turn.

LESSON #1
WE NEED ACTIVITY AND REST
TO PERFORM AT OUR BEST!



Lesson #2

Keep fit with exercise, sleep and good food.

Let's start off with an activity that many of us seem to enjoy a little too much of - eating. As the great French playwright of the 16th century said in one of his masterpieces, "Il faut manger pour vivre, et non pas vivre pour manger." One must eat to live, and not live to eat. If we were to do that, we would probably start by taking stock of how our eating habits affect the quality of our life when we aren't eating.

Most of us wake up after hitting the snooze button 5 times, and then slowing down enough to kiss the baby on the way out the door, forget to eat breakfast again. Then we grab a muffin and coffee at work, eat a small lunch, until finally, at the end of the day, we sit down to our largest meal of the day - dinner, where we eat until we have to pull an Al Bundy and unbutton our pants. We are consuming the most energy precisely when we need it least - at night when we'll be vertical and snoring our faces off in less than a few hours. When we need energy most, we eat nothing or something that will give us a boost in the short-term, but cause us to crash and burn sooner or later.

The advice? Eat smaller, more frequent meals filled with foods like lean proteins and complex carbohydrates. Except this time we're not talking about losing weight, we're talking about fueling yourself up to perform like a well oiled machine. You may not care what you look like at the beach anymore, but I bet you care about how big your brain looks in the boardroom. So smarten up. If you have to, keep some healthy food in your bag so that you never find yourself without fuel.

You also need to get your rest. This isn't new advice. But the part that's new is HOW and WHEN you get your rest. Your body runs on a natural cycle where your energy waxes and wanes. The technical term is ultradian cycles. As we've already touched on, you don't run like a computer, you run like a human being. Although there are plenty of studies that show that different people need different amounts of sleep, there's a good bet that you need at least 7-8 hours to function properly the next day. So get that sleep.

But what about the rest of the day? Go back to kindergarten for a day, and see how they do things. It's non-stop action in short spurts, with rest periods throughout, and a nice big nap in the middle of the day. It's unlikely that you work in an environment where it would be ok to bring a pillow to work and snooze from 2-3pm. However, you might in the future. Places like Google, known for their forward-thinking culture, have installed "sleep pods" throughout their campus so that people can have a quick afternoon renewal. It's more likely that you'd be able to get out of the office for a walk, or if you really want to get crazy, go to the gym. In fact, if you made your break in the afternoon a gym break, you'd be killing two birds with one stone by sneaking in your exercise as well. That should make the part of your brain that likes to believe it can multitask proud.

LESSON #2

KEEP FIT WITH EXERCISE, SLEEP AND GOOD FOOD.



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Lesson #3

More calm, less angry

Remember back to the last time you felt calm, optimistic, engaged and invigorated. Now think about your performance. How was it? Now think about the last time you were irritable, frustrated or angry. How was your performance then? You just experienced the difference between the “Performance Zone” and the “Survival Zone”. Studies show that most people in organizations operate in the Survival Zone more than any other.

Your irritation, frustration and anger is also self-perpetuating and you get more irritation, frustration and anger in return. You also have an enormous impact on those around you. What’s it like to be around a person like that? Not much fun, you might say. But it’s worse than that, because those feelings are kind of like SARS - they get transferred to anybody that comes close enough for you to breath on. It’s not a good scene.

Consider what Jill Bolte Taylor has to say about not being a victim of our own emotions: “It takes less than 90 seconds for the limbic system to be triggered, surge throughout the body, and then be completely flushed out of our systems. If you stay angry after 90 seconds, it’s because you’ve chosen to stay angry.

One of the most powerful things you can do to control your emotions is to understand the difference between stories and facts. For instance, let’s pretend that you and I are good friends. You call me and leave a message on my cell phone asking me to return your call. Two days pass and you call and leave another message. An entire week goes by and I still haven’t returned your message. By this point you might be thinking that I clearly don’t think you are important, and start questioning whether or not I’m a good friend, because you clearly stated in the message that it was important that I get back to you. You probably start calling me some nasty names as well. Let’s pause and take a look at the situation. The facts are that you called me, left two messages, and you didn’t get a return call from me. Everything else, the authors would say, is your story about the situation. I may or may not be a good friend, and I may or may not think you are important to me. But you don’t know. Because it’s equally possible that I switched phones and can’t retrieve messages from the old one. Or that I did call you back, but your roommate or spouse forgot to pass on the message.

Because of the way we are built, our tendency is to take a set of facts, and tell ourselves the worst possible story about the situation and then pretend as though that’s reality. The key here is to notice when you are doing this, and then give yourself at least one or two other possible explanations, and realize that it’s just as likely that the positive story is true.

LESSON #3
MORE CALM. LESS ANGRY.



Lesson #4

You need focus to perform.

First, study after study shows that the best way to engage somebody else fully in their work is to give them a manager who truly cares about their well-being. So, don't hire or promote assholes into manager roles. It's probably best just to keep them off your team entirely.

Second, regardless of what you might think, you do not have the ability to multitask. To use the computer analogy, you can't run more than one program at a time. Compounding this problem is that every single time you are interrupted you have to re-engage your attention again, which takes time. Every time the phone rings and you pick it up, every time your email pings and you open it up "just to check", you are becoming more and more inefficient and ineffective. In short, you have a poverty of attention, and you need to be very careful how you spend what you have.

The last part is the fun part. Your ability to pay attention for sustained periods of time (all the way up to a full 90 minutes!) is a skill that can be cultivated. As it turns out, it's a lot like going to the gym. The more you practice it, the better you get. Conversely, every time you check your email or take a phone call when you should be focussed on something else is like eating a Boston Cream donut - you get your "fix", but there's no question that it's a setback in your fitness plan. So what causes all of this? The exact same thing that causes children to be unable to resist a chocolate chip cookie before dinner - your inability to delay gratification. You don't see it that way - you see it as something you "need to do", because who knows when an urgent need will come along that you need to respond to immediately? Most people will complain that they get interrupted at work far too often and it impacts their ability to work. Well, most of us would interrupt ourselves just as much if we were completely alone. Of course, it's just a bad habit that we've formed that you can reverse. Here's how.

Mischel came up with the term "strategic allocation of attention" to describe what the delayed gratifiers were able to do. It wasn't that they had some magic ability to ward off cravings or the impulse for gratification, it was that they didn't think about the marshmallow at all. As Mischel puts it, "If you're thinking about the marshmallow and how delicious it is, then you're going to eat it. The key is to avoid thinking about it in the first place".

So, give yourself the ability to work in spurts where you can have no interruptions, including email or phones. Those emails and phone calls can wait, unless of course it's your job to pick up the phone when it rings.

LESSON #4
YOU NEED FOCUS TO PERFORM.



Lesson #5

Passion and Spirit Tie It All Together.

Who are you and what do you really want? Take a few minutes and pause this video and think about this. Far too many of us don't take the time to slow down and ponder what might be one of the most important questions of our lives. As Nietzsche once said, "He who has a why to live for, can bear almost any how". The spiritual level of development transcends the other needs (physical, emotional and mental), but includes them at the same time. At our best, we are using all of our capabilities in the service of a higher purpose.

In the other three dimensions, the key is to move between spending energy and refueling. Similarly, the work in this section is between reflecting/refining our purpose, and getting out into the world to get it done. As the authors note, "There is no shortcut and no steps we can skip". So it's hard. But the rewards are ultimately to live a life that you feel is worth living. Big stuff, indeed.

To know how to do this first requires that we know we keeps us away from it. The challenge relates back to delayed gratification. We are all players in the same game - survival. We'll do anything to stay alive. That instinct is the same thing that gives us the "I want it all and I want it now" syndrome. Ultimately, it's saying that all we will pay attention to is the 6 inches in front of our face, and we'd love that space to be filled with hundred dollar bills (or insert your own favourite vice here). This is the DNA we share with almost every beast in the animal kingdom. The one thing that sets us apart is the ability to reflect. We actually have the ability to witness our thoughts, feelings and sensations without becoming captive to them. This is what allows us to have a spiritual side.

The first step in your spiritual journey is to become more mindful. So, at two different times during each day, take a minute and just breathe in and out while focussing on observing your thoughts, sensations and emotions. Then let it go and carry on with your day.

How much of these four needs you take on is up to you. But, as T.S. Eliot puts it "Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go".

LESSON #5

PASSION AND SPIRIT TIE IT ALL TOGETHER.





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