

You can't chase two hares

There is a Japanese saying that translates as 'you can't chase two hares'. If a hunting dog chases after a hare it has a 10% chance of catching it. But if the dog hedges its bets and tries to chase two at once, its success rate is reduced to nil. The dog quickly learns that 10% is the way to go!

Yet executives and managers continue to find it difficult it is to chase one hare and can become obsessed with the amount of work they have and the length of their 'to do' lists. "Are you busy?" is a typical opening question at the coffee machine.

The problem is that effectiveness is not related to 'busyness' in any way. In fact busy people can be detrimental to an organisation. By trying to achieve many things simultaneously they run the big risk of achieving precisely nothing and, in the process, create needless work for others.

The pressure for you to be busy rather than effective comes from three main sources:

1. **Organisational requirements.** At work your time does not always belong to you. As long as the organisation pursues a busy, two-hare approach to work you are likely to be caught up in it to some extent.
2. **Peer pressure.** If others in an organization are rewarded, even informally, for their ability to work long hours it is easy to be seduced into following a similar route to the top.
3. **Your own work ethic.** Many of us carry around a strong work ethic and gain satisfaction from how having many things to do.

So what can you do? Here are five practical actions you can take to help you focus on one hare rather than seeking to bag two:

1. **Know your #1 priority.** If you achieved nothing else in the next 12 months, what single achievement would most contribute to the success of your organisation?
2. **Plan for success.** Break down the priority into bite-sized chunks or milestones so that you can track and celebrate your achievements as you go.
3. **Critically review your diary.** Review your diary regularly to ensure that enough time is spent on the things that matter, and not just on stuff that you have difficulty recalling even one day later.
4. **Block out chunks of time for your #1 priority.** Find a day or half a day a week to work solely on your top objective. As Peter Drucker once wrote, *"Even one quarter of the working day, if consolidated in large time units, is usually enough to get the important things done. But even three-quarters of the working day are useless if it is only available as fifteen minutes here or half an hour there."*
5. **Don't expect perfection.** You can't control everything and shouldn't expect perfection. But, for many of us, there is a great deal we can do by re-focusing our time on the few things that matter, rather than being busy on the many things that don't.

How many hares are you chasing, and what other things can you do to increase your chances of catching one?