

exercise (Kappes, Singmann & Oettingen, 2012), enabling chronic back pain patients to achieve greater mobility (Duckworth, Oettingen & colleagues, 2012), and quitting smoking (Oettingen, Mayer & Thorpe, 2010).

In her book *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation* (2014), Oettingen provides a useful acronym for the MCII process that she labels WOOP. This breaks down the key aspects of the mental contrasting technique into a four step WOOP process consisting of **W**ish, **O**utcome, **O**bstacle and **P**lan. Moreover, WOOP is also available as a WOOP app for most smart phones and tablets enabling you to record/save your wishes and goals, to share these with your friends, and to observe and chart your progress. This app offers information about the important steps to get into and through college and provides support for taking the necessary steps for reaching your goals.

Two of the authors of this text have devised a way to expand the effectiveness of WOOP for situations where initial motivation is low and/or to minimize the discouragement that can flow from the focus on obstacles. They propose adding a step to the beginning of the process whereby an individual pulls up a memory of a previous success experience, using vivid visualization, to lay a foundation of expectation for success. This is especially useful if the success remembrance is in any way similar or related to the WISH step. The revised version then becomes SWOOP, a five-step process consisting of **S**uccess, **W**ish, **O**utcome, **O**bstacle, **P**lan.

Why does WOOP or SWOOP work? Basically MCII helps you to set rules for yourself. In terms of how our brains operate, there is a neurobiological reason why rules work (Kessler, 2009), whether you are using them to avoid junk food, to structure study time, or to tackle a daunting project at your workplace. When you are making rules for yourself you are utilizing your prefrontal cortex, the site of the all-important **executive functions** of your brain which include planning, judgment, focusing, screening out distractions, organizing, using and integrating new information, and inhibiting thoughts and actions. This helps tame the more impulsive, short term reward driven parts of your brain. Rules are not necessarily the same as willpower. Rules can become habits which, if followed over time, can substitute for willpower. By making a rule for yourself, you can sidestep the painful internal conflict between your desires and your determination to resist temptation. Rules give us a structure to prepare for encounters with temptation and allow us to redirect our attention elsewhere. If you follow a rule long enough it becomes a habit. Effective habits and character ultimately become the same thing. William James said that our nervous system is analogous to a sheet of paper which is folded over and over again until it develops a crease, which then becomes your default option. If your creases (habits) are in the direction of self-control and perseverance, this becomes a reliable part of your character. Developing new habits is facilitated by practicing the new behaviors regularly. Remember this important tip: Your brain will adopt a new habit more readily if you practice once a day for fourteen straight days than if you practice once a week for fourteen straight weeks (Atkinson, 2014).

Questions

1. The various forms of MCII utilize _____ and _____ together in strategic combination.
 - A. self-control; self-indulgence
 - B. indulgence; dwelling
 - C. IQ; EQ
 - D. motivation; volition

2. Why do MCII or SWOOP work?
 - A. They automatically enhance your motivation.
 - B. They automatically improve your volition.
 - C. They help you set rules for yourself and activate the executive functions of your brain.
 - D. They deactivate your self-control.

3. The full SWOOP strategy for enhancing motivation involves:
 - A. visualizing success, goals, and plans to overcome obstacles
 - B. visualizing success
 - C. goal setting
 - D. dwelling on obstacles and making plans

4.4 Managing Yourself in Time: How to Use Your Time Wisely

Identify eight effective strategies for using time wisely.

When we think about effective people, what typically comes to mind are individuals who are accomplished and productive, who not only do most things competently, but who do them in a timely manner. Effective people respect deadlines and usually finish tasks on time, sometimes with time to spare. But effectiveness is much more than just producing a lot of work. The quest for optimal functioning requires organization as well as creativity. Effective people are typically well organized, and have learned to juggle multiple responsibilities, projects, and tasks while still making time for relaxation, enjoyment and personal relationships. Success in our current world usually requires an ability to see the big picture followed by a sustained focus on the critical details for getting it done. What enables effective individuals to develop and maintain competence and maximize their chances for success is that they are adept at culling out what is important, and then they use their time wisely.

Indeed, the ability to use time wisely is typically a hallmark of effective individuals. Please notice that we are not talking about time management, but rather about *managing yourself in time*. We often hear people talk about needing to “make more time,” as if we all didn’t get just 24 hours in a day. The key is to manage yourself and the decisions you make regarding how to use the resource that is time. To do that you need to be wary of the common tendency to confuse efficiency with effectiveness. While effective individuals are typically well organized and they may be efficient, an over-emphasis on efficiency will actually diminish your effectiveness.

Have you ever spent a day, at work or at home, where you were busy almost nonstop, but by the day’s end you felt as though you had accomplished nothing? Perhaps this was because you put your focus on doing busywork, trivial jobs that were easy, or tasks requested by others, but which were of low relevance to your own agenda. Perhaps you felt you had accomplished little because nothing was finished, or because you were immersed in multiple tasks in a disorganized fashion, flitting back and forth and never really making any headway on any. Every one of us has had at least one day like this, but if you find yourself fitting this pattern on a regular basis, it is time to look at how you manage yourself in time and experiment with more effective strategies. Even if you are adept at utilizing time, you may find at least a few tips or tools here that will refine or add to your skills.

4.4.1 Eight Strategies for Success

If you follow these central strategies for everyday success, you will increase your productivity and your effectiveness, and as a side benefit, you will lower your stress level.

FOCUS FIRST ON HIGH PRIORITY ITEMS Think in terms of the Pareto principle, a concept from economics, which is also called the 80/20 rule. The Pareto principle teaches that 80% of the benefit comes from doing 20% of the work. Figure out the most important and beneficial 20%, and make that your priority to tackle first. Completing the important 20% often expedites completion of the remaining 80% of the work.

How do you determine what is or should be a high priority? How do you know what is really important? This is not always that obvious. Tasks, jobs, or things you have to do are rarely either important or unimportant. Importance lies on a continuum ranging from low to high. Covey (1991) recommends that you determine importance based on how closely an activity is tied to your life goals and desired results as defined by your “personal mission statement” which will be explained in Chapter 8. Time management expert Dru Scott (1980) advises completing “marginal matters,” the hundreds of relatively trivial but time-consuming tasks (i.e., washing dishes, looking through email, running errands, or updating your files), last. Many people try to get these little tasks out of the

way first to make time to focus on the important stuff. But too often these small, marginal tasks end up consuming your whole day, and before you know it, nothing of lasting value is accomplished. Give these tasks the lowest priority. That does not mean that you ignore them. After all, these tasks do have their place in the scheme of things. Just do them last when possible.

GROUP RELATED TASKS AND DO THEM TOGETHER It is common sense that when you group similar jobs together you can accomplish them faster than if you did each one separately. For example, if you have three errands to run, it is certainly more efficient to do all in one trip rather than take the time to drive your car three different times.

GET ORGANIZED Lack of organization contributes to ineffectiveness. When you approach your work in a disorganized fashion, tasks generally take longer to accomplish, and the finished product often is not as good. Experiment with the following tips for improving your organization.

a. Things To Do Lists

Making a list of Things to Do on a daily or weekly basis is an excellent way of getting yourself organized and helping yourself to remember tasks that are easily forgotten. Post your list in a prominent place (like the bathroom mirror or the refrigerator door) where you will likely see it often, or keep it in your phone to refer to regularly. Scratching finished items off your list becomes rewarding, leading to a sense of relief and accomplishment each time an item is crossed off.

b. Create a Realistic Schedule

Things to Do lists are very useful, but they have their limits. Avoid getting caught in the trap of spending all your time on marginal items to scratch off your list while ignoring important, difficult and time-consuming tasks. Without some sort of schedule, you can create stress by wasting time, working inefficiently, and missing opportunities because you didn't plan ahead. But over-scheduling yourself is stressful as well. There is an art to creating a workable daily, weekly and monthly schedule. Start by compiling a list of all you want and need to accomplish over a certain time period, say a month. Begin your daily schedule by arranging time for any scheduled appointments or meetings. Next, block out chunks of at least an hour for high priority projects that require sustained work over time. The earlier in the day you can get to these, the better. Then build in time for other required tasks. Complete your schedule with the routine, quick or easy, marginal tasks that need to be completed that day. Make your schedule flexible. Build in time for interruptions, unexpected events, problem solving, and travel time, as well as for breaks and relaxation. If you can't finish everything, and this may occur often, postpone the lowest priority items. Following a schedule will not guarantee that you always get everything done that day, but if you have made progress on your high priority goals, you will feel more in control. Engaging in this type of planning may seem time-consuming at first, but it will increase your time in the long run.

c. Get Rid of Unnecessary Papers

Is your desk at work or at home piled high with stacks of papers waiting for your attention? Do you feel overwhelmed just looking at the paper piles? If so, follow these guidelines. Handle each piece of paper only once, if possible. Each time you handle a piece of paper do something to move it along (i.e. pay that bill, toss out junk mail, file that important paper, fill out that form). Most importantly, when in doubt, **THROW IT OUT**. If you don't, it is likely to just sit there on your desk, collecting dust and adding to your pile. Once you have made sufficient headway on clearing the pile, keep your desk cleared of everything except the highest priority items.

BREAK IT INTO DOABLE CHUNKS Many tasks, particularly if complicated or time-consuming, can appear overwhelming, leading to avoidance, delays, or disorganization. We can't emphasize enough how helpful it can be to break big jobs into workable steps. Taking time to initially subdivide the project into steps, then listing and ordering those steps, will save you time later on. It will help you to proceed more smoothly, and often with less frustration. Approaching the task in an organized fashion minimizes chances of forgetting an important step, allowing you to feel a sense of completion as each step is finished. Remember, a skyscraper may look huge, but it was built one brick at a time.

DEVELOP AND USE TIMETABLES We humans are much more likely to begin and to complete something when we have committed to a deadline. Deadlines bring home the reality that we have to get moving. If you do not have a deadline from an external source such as a boss or a teacher, set your own target date or time for completion. After breaking the task or assignment into doable chunks, estimate how much time each chunk will reasonably take to finish. Then give each chunk its own target date or time for completion. Doing this gives you an opportunity to plan accordingly, leaving yourself ample time for task completion. This will help you to avoid the stress of last minute rushes, or settling for slipshod work if you run out of time.

For example, if you are a student facing a big assignment, such as a term paper that is due in two weeks, you could chunk the job in a format such as the following:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 1. Get relevant articles and books from the library. | 2 hours |
| 2. Do Internet search. | 2 hours |
| 3. Read through sources and pick out relevant information. | 4 hours |
| 4. Organize report into 3 sections. | 1 hour |
| 5. Write introductory paragraph. | 1/2 hour |
| 6. Write section one. | 2 hours |
| 7. Write section two. | 2 hours |
| 8. Write section three. | 1 hour |
| 9. Edit and Proof read report. | 1 hour |

You would next assign each chunk to a date and time of day to work on it within your school or work schedule. You have nine chunks to be divided over fourteen days. The four-hour preparatory chunk (reading through source material) could be sub-divided into two two-hour chunks scheduled for consecutive days for continuity. This schedule takes a large intimidating job and makes it doable.

FOCUS ON ONE THING AT A TIME It often helps if you focus on one task at a time. People with problems managing themselves in time often flit from one project to another, or try to do several things simultaneously. The end result is often delays, mistakes and disorganization which waste rather than save time. Uninterrupted concentration on a task, when possible, produces a better product in less time. Arrange your work space to minimize distractions. This does not mean that you can only do one thing at a time. It is certainly possible to type your term paper while your clothes spin in the dryer. The key here is *not to try to do two or more things that require concentration or focus at the same time.*

FINISH IT FULLY Effective individuals finish what they start. This involves utilizing the signature strengths of perseverance and industriousness. No matter how much work you may do in the course of a day, if you don't finish anything, you may end up feeling frustrated and your effectiveness is diluted. You will be far better off with three finished projects as opposed to six half-finished jobs. Finishing will boost your personal satisfaction and motivation, lower your stress level, and enhance your ability to concentrate because you have fewer tasks with which to be concerned. That is, you only have three tasks to finish rather than six. Finishing tasks on a regular basis has a large impact on how others view you as well, whether you are perceived as effective, dependable, and successful. Starting many tasks or projects and leaving them unfinished wastes time and energy, contributes to disorganization, and also makes mistakes or careless errors more likely. Although attempting to focus on one task at a time sets the stage for task completion, we certainly realize that in the real world this is not always possible. At work phones ring, colleagues interrupt you with pressing concerns, meetings must be attended, or equipment breaks down. But when possible we recommend that you opt for task completion rather than switching to another task that is neither pressing nor vitally important.

DO IT WHEN YOU THINK OF IT Oftentimes it is just the sheer volume of tasks which makes you want to delay. By doing the task immediately, if possible, you can avoid the inefficiency involved in relocating the necessary materials, which saves time and effort. You also prevent yourself from forgetting to handle it.

4.4.2 Common Time Wasters and Effective Antidotes

There are always a myriad of potential time wasting or time consuming influences, both internal and external, which can interfere with accomplishment. Which of the following obstacles apply to you? Consider how you might put these

suggestions to good use to creatively turn potential time wasters into opportunities for getting something done.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD SABOTAGES DECISION-MAKING Your ability to make decisions can be significantly slowed or stymied altogether by **information overload**. Do you feel that you always have to do exhaustive research in order to make the best decisions? Do you then find that because of the abundance of available information, the more data you acquire, the more confused you become? The science of decision-making has demonstrated that too much information can paralyze you, or lead to poor choices on your part which is referred to as *decision fatigue* by East and Tinker (2015). The easy availability of information online contributes to this dilemma. Research has shown that many decisions benefit from letting the issue percolate. Opening yourself to a steady stream of new information interferes with that process. Why? Incoming information presents you with choices. Do you attend to it, ignore it, or reply to it? Decision science shows us that there is a tipping point; when you have too many choices or too much information, you are apt to postpone a decision or make an unwise choice. Although many people desire to accumulate more information to assist with decision-making, past a certain point this actually becomes “debilitating” according to Sheena Iyengar (2010) in her book *The Art of Choosing*.

The more data you have to juggle, the harder the decision, particularly when information is complex and/or the stakes are high. The reason for this has to do with the capacity of our brain’s working memory, which can typically hold an average of seven items at one time. Therein lies the beauty of seven-digit phone numbers. Anything beyond seven items represents an overload and is much harder to remember in its entirety. Furthermore, if you exceed this limit your focus is lost and judgment likely falters. According to JoAnne Cantor (2009) in her book *Conquer Cyber Overload*, when overloaded our brains struggle to figure out what to discard, which inhibits decision-making.

Research reveals the important finding that some of our best decisions are made through nonconscious processes rather than just rational analysis. It can be harder to reach a decision if you expose yourself to a constant barrage of new data because you are not giving your nonconscious, intuitive mind the time to make the connections that lead to a wise judgment. Taking a break allows your brain to subconsciously integrate new information into existing knowledge to guide you. That is why the notion of “sleeping on it” is a good idea. How can you shield yourself from the effects of information overload?

1. Recognize that you need to set a limit on how much data you gather to avoid exceeding your tipping point. Focus on gathering data for one to three criteria that you determine are most important for your decision. For example, let’s say you want to buy a used car. The possibilities are endless. You could narrow your search by emphasizing three criteria with built in limits: (1) your budget; (2) make of car (i.e. only consider Hondas); and (3) mileage on the vehicle.

2. Deliberately take breaks to allow your unconscious mind to process the information.
3. Don't be afraid to make snap judgments regarding inconsequential, everyday matters. If nothing of any significance is riding on your decision, then just pick because either way it will not matter very much. Whether you pick chocolate or vanilla ice cream does not really matter.
4. Restrict your intake of digital messages. Gold (2017) reports a study at FSU where researchers interrupted students with texts or calls during a task and found a 25% increase in error rate compared to when students completed the task uninterrupted. Deal with tasks like emails and text messages (part of the ongoing barrage of information) in batches rather than piecemeal all day long.
5. Lastly, when you start to feel overloaded, take that as a cue to stop searching because you probably have more than enough data from which to reach your decision.

WORRYING Do you spend a lot of time worrying about all you have to do or would like to do rather than doing it? Rumination can be a major time waster as it is neither a productive nor rewarding use of your time. But trying not to worry is destined to fail. Telling yourself not to worry is the equivalent of commanding yourself, "Don't think about pink elephants." What happens? Of course, the first thing you think of is a pink elephant! The key is not to try to stop worrying, but rather to schedule it, to literally set up a time devoted exclusively to worry at a convenient time. Effective individuals worry just like everyone else; they just limit the distraction of nonproductive worry by scheduling it. To this end, try the following exercise.

Positive Psychology Exercise

The Worry Appointment

If frequent worrying is an issue for you, set up a fifteen minute period to worry to your heart's content. Avoid scheduling your worry time right before or at bedtime as this could disturb winding down for sleep. If you do not worry on a daily basis but have difficulty letting go of worries when they pop up, schedule a weekly half hour worry appointment. Scheduling such worry times helps put your mind to rest. Then if fears or obsessive concerns enter your mind, remind yourself that you will definitely consider this later at your worry time. Sometimes we worry for fear that we will forget to handle something unless we remind ourselves with worries. The value of scheduling worry time is that it makes it easier to let go of those concerns because you know that you will get to them later, freeing you to focus elsewhere. Many people find that once they begin their worry time, some concerns have already evaporated and others can be dismissed quickly. You may end up finishing your worrying appointment even before your time is up.