



How to avoid majoring in minor things

Robyn Pearce

Eddie came up to chat after hearing me speak.

“I’m the business manager of a large school, with many demands on my time. I’m known as a good manager of my time. At first I wondered why but what I’ve realised is that, unlike many of the people around me, wherever possible I act immediately. I’ve noticed that many people say, ‘I’ll do something about it later’ or ‘leave it with me’, and of course all the ‘laters’ pile up around them, weigh them down, and make them feel less effective (and they are!). No matter how much I feel like deferring a decision or an action, wherever possible I push myself to handle it on the spot.”

I completely agreed with his analysis – with one qualifier.

If we always drop what we’re doing to attend to other peoples’ demands we run the risk of never completing our high-level tasks and projects.

The key is finding a technique that works for you, so you remember to go back.

Here’s one of my mine – it might work for you too. With some obvious variations the same method applies to both physical paperwork and email.

If I really don’t have time (or choose not) to make decisions and or action a pile of material, I put everything together in one pile and place

it behind me on my desk return. I don’t want it to dominate my actions, nor my eyes, while I’m engaged on something of the highest priority, and I don’t want to forget it either. As soon as I finish the priority task I’m working on I take a few minutes to check the pile and make the relevant decisions.

You may say, ‘Well, this is what I use an in-tray for’. And that will be true. Problem is, for most in-tray owners there’s something sticky and semi-permanent about the tray – it’s as if it lovingly embraces every piece of paper that touches its sides, goes ‘yippee, lunch’ and never wants to release things again! Beware the rapacious in-tray. Also for most people

its unlovely carcass is parked right where your eye falls as you work, creating untimely interruptions as we described earlier. It's almost as if, once paper lands in an in-tray, you've given it permission to rest awhile. And stay it does – sometimes for months. The issue is not really whether you have an in-tray or not: rather it is how you handle the contents, and how long it takes you to make your choices.

And many Inboxes are the digital equivalent – depressingly obese.

Example

As I'm writing this piece it is 6.15 am on a beautiful salmon-pink morning. I love to write first thing in the morning, and then can happily get on with the rest of my day's work. This morning when I walked into my office there was a small pile of information and a couple of actions from a network function had attended the night before. I'd been just too tired to put things away when got home, so had emptied the briefcase but left the information on my desk.

This morning I could have acted on it immediately I arrived at my desk, but guess what would have happened? Chances are, no writing

would have been done today. If I'd taken even the short time needed to sort, act and file, the resulting activities could easily have distracted me and the wordsmithing that goes on at this keyboard would have at best been reduced, or at worst deferred. In another few hours the rest of life will flood gladly in, and the production of this article would have been pushed back yet another day.

So I made a choice – and placed the little pile behind me and *did not* turn on my email. As I sat at my desk, although I knew there was work waiting, it wasn't a distraction – because I couldn't see it. All I needed to do was to commit to actioning the heap as a second priority – once the writing time was over.

And where does email fit in our priorities? Very rarely will there be anything in your Inbox that can't wait another hour or two. For me (and it won't be the right decision for everyone) email comes later in the day – usually before morning tea but sometimes later if important tasks need focused attention.

What is your highest priority? Do that first, and don't be side-tracked by less important matters.

The vital skill is your ability to make decisions quickly, not your ability to be a fabulous paper pusher or email processor. A messy desk and overloaded Inbox is visible proof of deferred decisions and poor decision-making skills. It's also visible procrastination - not the habit of a seriously successful human being

So, two key points here:

Act as soon as practicable.

Don't major in minor things – keep focused on the big picture, or all your pictures will be little ones.



Robyn Pearce helps exhausted overloaded teachers find more time, control their paperwork and get home earlier. She is a Certified Speaking

Professional (top speaking accreditation in the profession of speaking) held by only about 800 people around the world. www.gettingagrip.com.

**Less technology integration...
More curriculum enhancement.**

Authorised as an APD expert

We provide Apple Professional Development workshops. Showing you how to integrate Apple products into your school environment for a richer learning - and teaching - experience.

www.iSupport.com.au
Doug Loader 0433 230 743

Consultants Network

