



INSPIRED TIPS

THRASHING AROUND? AN ODE TO MANAGERS

Those of you who work in IT may be familiar with the term “Thrashing”. It describes a system that is either very slow or one that has ground to a halt. This usually happens because memory or other resources have become exhausted or too limited to perform needed operations. A reinforcing loop subsequently develops, where the operating system tries to find resources from other processes which, in turn, can’t be satisfied because those other processes are exhausted and therefore there are no resources left.

How many people do you know whose behaviour could be described in this way? They rush round in ever decreasing circles, apparently doing nothing effectively because they don’t know what to do next and are too busy to stop and think.

In my experience of working in many different sectors, thrashing more appropriately applies to managers than to computers today. My work with those managing programmes and projects has particularly highlighted this phenomenon.

So, how do you stop? Here are my top tips to ensure you regain control over your workload and that of your team.

1. STOP! – decide that tomorrow you are going to invest your valuable time in sorting out your priorities.
 2. Let people know what you are planning to do – your team and your manager will have noticed that you’ve been “thrashing”. So, let them know that you’re taking positive action. This will fill them with confidence. It also enables you to put up a physical and or mental “do not disturb” sign during your day.
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3. Gather together all your loose post-it notes, project plans, meeting notes etc. and divide your outstanding actions into categories, such as, Action tomorrow, Action within a week, Priorities for next month etc.
 - o The trick at this stage is to keep the categories broad – if you make them too specific, you may miss ideas and options when you get to later steps. Remember, the only action you are taking today is to sort things out!
 4. Taking each category in turn, ask yourself, do I really need to do this action? If the answer is “No”, does the action need doing at all [if so, bin it!] or could someone else do it on your behalf?
 - o Do not fall into the trap of thinking that it would be quicker to do it yourself! Remember, everyone on your team has been employed for their specialist knowledge, skills and expertise! So, who else could take this action on?
 - o Delegation is an art form and they'll be tips in the next “Inspired Tips”.
 5. With all those actions that you really need to do yourself, take each action in turn and write on the top of each the exact date on which you are going to do it. If you have a paper or electronic time management system use it as an additional reminder.
 - o Make a commitment to yourself, now, that you will only handle that action on the date you've agreed with yourself.
 6. So, it's the end of your day, double check that you've reviewed every action and you've decided who is going to take what action by when.
 7. Let your boss know what you have committed to achieve and when the key actions are going to be completed by. For example, you may have decided during your day that the project priorities need to be reviewed, let your boss know when this will be completed by.
 8. Meet with your team, tell them what you've been up to and explain that you'll need their help and support to get the project on track. Follow this up with 1-to-1 meetings with each individual who you want to delegate actions to.
 9. As other actions come in, as they always will, run through steps 3, 4 and 5. Then ask your team members for help in completing the new actions.
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10. Do you feel back in control? Ask yourself this question regularly and, if the answer is "No", use these 10 steps as a checklist so you can identify at what point you feel less control. As soon as you know, follow the recommendations in that and subsequent steps and stop thrashing!

To beat "thrashing" completely, choose to make this process part of your regular monthly schedule. For best results, set aside a day at the end of each month and follow these steps. In this way you will effectively plan the workload of your team for the month to come.

The benefits of this process are immense. You will notice an immediate increase in your own productivity and that of your team. In addition, because your team and boss are now clear about priorities, team relationships will also improve.

Best of luck!
