

THE ELITE SPORTSMAN... AT WORK!

Economists remain baffled as UK productivity continues to show the biggest gap compared to other leading western economies since modern records began. Being 18 percentage points below the remaining G7 group of industrial nations is not something to be proud of, so what's changed and how can UK PLC get better results? The answer is simple... we must become elite sportsmen and women at work!

Back in the early 1980s when I started my career, we communicated by phone, post and fax and technology did not interrupt our day. We were very focused on time management; we all had Filofaxes (remember those!) and we were very disciplined about how we organised and spent our time. Forward wind 25+ years and today's permanently connected world completely wipes out that structure and discipline is tested daily.

So how do I become elite?

Elite sportsmen and women talk about being in the 'flow state'. This is where they are totally focused on their game, their inner voice is silent and, hence, all their brain power is focused on the matter in hand; they are at their best. Flow is an optimal state of consciousness when we are in rapt attention and totally absorbed. Action and awareness start to merge; time either speeds up or slows down. If we are to reach our full potential at work, we need to be able to access this state... but when was the last time you were so focused that you lost track of time?

The Flow State is a four-step process:

1. Struggle – this is the loading phase where we consciously work on the project/problem/activity. This is the learning phase, we acquire skills. This is the frustrating state where we must take things to the point our heads are about to explode!
2. Release – after the hard thinking, it's now time to take our mind off the problem. The easiest way to do this is low-level physical activity; long walks work really well, watching TV does not.
3. Flow – this is the state described above. Focus, concentrate, achieve. Don't be side-tracked. Be disciplined. When you are in true flow state, inspiration takes over, you come up with your best ideas and you achieve results almost effortlessly.
4. Recovery – this is really important because being in flow needs a lot of energy. Give yourself time for recovery.

Some research of top executives by McKinsey showed that when they are in 'flow' performance, they are five times more productive than normal – that's a 500% boost in performance or, put another way, you would only need to work on Monday and take the rest of the week off!

To help create the business sports elite of the future, and to get into the flow state, we've put together our ten top tips:

1. Only review emails at set times in the day – 1 hour, twice per day, would be a good start. Turn off your email notifications outside of these times.
2. Learn to say 'no'. You don't have to accept all requests for your time, what can only you do?
3. Set aside time each week to work on key projects. These are often important but not urgent. These are the things that, over time, will make the difference. Book this time into your diary for others to see.
4. Start by listing all your tasks (having reminded yourself of your priorities).
5. To do list – to be done daily – a good way to start and/or end the day. Break tasks into component parts, key steps and timescales linked to each.
6. Manage your boundaries... no-one else will! Decide what are your non-negotiable personal activities, which could be time for exercise, a morning with your family or even 'date night'.
7. Schedule your time. Decide how long each task will take and double your first estimate to be realistic.
8. Get regular sleep – at least 7-8 hours per night. If you don't, performance will deteriorate.
9. Take regular breaks – at least once per hour.
10. Look after your diet, you can't think straight if you are not providing the brain with energy. Avoid caffeine and sugary snacks.

How many of these 10 are regular aspects of your day? If you can start adopting these tips, I'm sure we will all help UK PLC to improve its productivity!

I'D LOVE TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS. If you would like to talk more about training programmes for your organisation, please do get in touch.



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