Push's Quick Guide to…

How to Survive & Thrive

Time & Stress Management

Digging a hole, filling a hole

Imagine you are working hard trying to dig a hole and every single time you scoop some mud out, someone fills in the hole. You'd be working hard and getting no results. This is the same as working hard to complete tasks, but having factors working against you: no one can deny you're not trying your best, but external factors get in your way, meaning you tire yourself out and end up further away from completing your goals – usually with added stress. And chronic stress can block our motivation, and ability, to complete important things.

Work smarter

Life is a series of tasks. Instead of working hard for little reward, you can work smart to complete tasks: this involves using time effectively, minimising distractions and maximizing your productivity during peak focus times in your day (and week). The best way to work out what needs doing is to follow these 2 simple equations…

How important? Critical / Important / Unimportant
When? Urgent / Needed / Sometime

PRIORITY = IMPORTANCE x URGENCY

How long? Quick / Hours / Days

ALLOCATION = TIME ÷ HOW LONG

Start with a plan

- Don't launch into your tasks, otherwise there will be nice order and the chaos of juggling all of them without a clear head will generate unneeded chronic stress (the bad type which blocks your focus and drains your energy):
- List all of the tasks you need to complete
- Mark each of your tasks with C (CRTICAL) or I (IMPORTANT) or U (UNIMPORTANT)
- Mark each of your tasks with U (URGENT) or N (NEEDED) or S (SOMETIME)
- Now, you can work out HOW to order them: for each task apply the equation PRIORITY = IMPORTANCE times by URGENCY
- Your list of tasks should now be rearranged, like a download chart, with the tasks that are equally important and urgent, at the very top of the chart. The ones that are least important and only needed sometime soon, at the bottom of the chart.
- Now, you can work out HOW LONG each task will take. Write 'quick', 'hours', 'days' next to your chart of prioritised tasks
- Now, you can work out WHEN to do them – slotting the tasks into your week, at times when your energy peaks: apply the equation ALLOCATION = TIME divided by HOW LONG
- Finally, list some rewards you'll treat yourself to (they can be the smallest things) if you complete your tasks. The brain works on a reward system: if we give effort to things and get something good in return, our dopamine is released in the anticipation of achieving a goal (not actually for the goal itself). Eventually, when you get good at certain tasks, like putting on the laundry or creating memory recall exercises for an important est, you can remove the reward altogether.

The right type of stress

Mild stress, when used in the right way, can help us thrive. Athletes performing at elite level are in a constant state of mild to moderate stress: it sharpens our focus and help us be more productive per minute. Let's look at the important difference between the 2 types of stress:

Chronic stress	Mild / Moderate stress
- suppress immune system - upset digestive system - increase chances of anxiety and depression - speed up ageing process - heart disease - heart attacks and strokes - high blood pressure	- increases blood flow to the brain and muscles - Removes tau proteins, stimulates neurons and produces a chemical that protects brain cells - pulses which stimulate 'interleukins' chemicals which boost your immune system and stimulate the body

What causes stress imbalance?

There are various things that can cause an imbalance in our stress levels. The main ones are our diet (too much sugar and caffeine can provoke stress), a lack of good sleep (our brains don't filter out toxins from the day before and these build up) and too much screen time. I know the irony: you're most likely reading this guide on a screen. And we live in a world dominated by them. That is why it is even more important to give ourselves the right amount of screen time, balanced with non-screen time, and that we switch off from staring at digital screens an hour before bed. Screens suppress the production of our sleep chemicals (those ones that get us tired and ready for deep sleep), and the less sleep we have, the more lilely we are to be unfocused, irritable, and get anxious when we have tasks to complete.

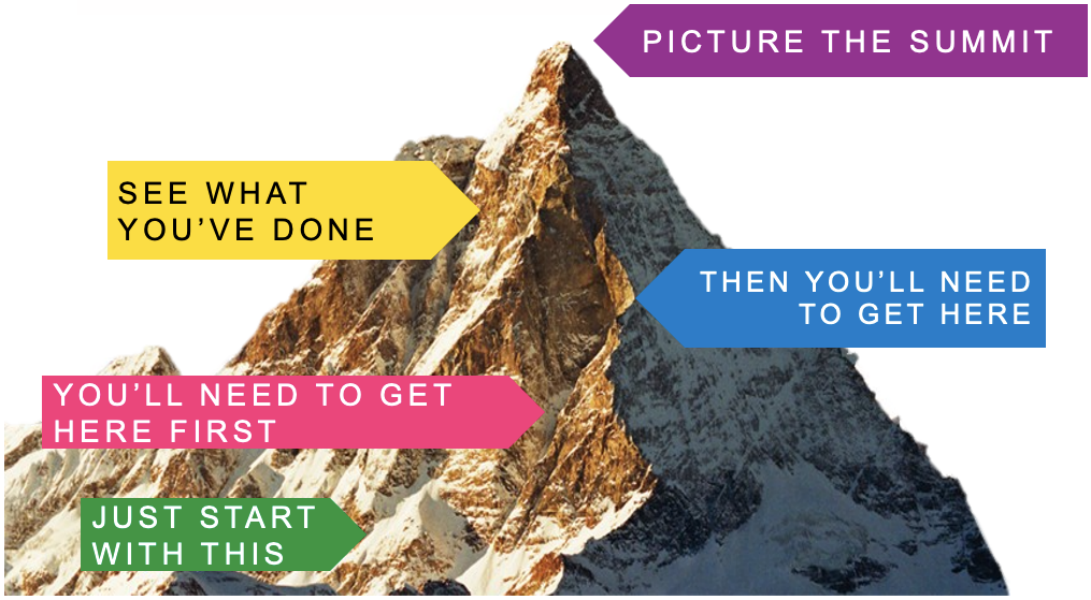
Build tasks into a timetable

A good weekly plan includes work (prioritised allocated tasks) and play (those rewards mentioned) and leaves room for change. Creating a timetable might seem like time wasted when you could be doing tasks, but you'll be putting in your prioritised allocated tasks, scheduled for times when you will be at your peak focus, and with a clear view of the challenge ahead (to boost your motivation). This will all mean you'll complete your tasks quicker, and better, meaning you're more likely to hit to ultimate goal: getting everything done when you wanted it done. You can try copying the one below, for a week coming up. Answer the questions on the left to help you prioritise and allocate, as you create your personalized timetable…

- What's your deadline?
- Work out priorities backwards from the deadline
- What key tasks need to be done?
- How long will they take?
- What tasks are not as urgent, and could wait?
- Have you left yourself wiggle room?
- Have you factored in breaks and rewards?
- Start each day with the plan: but be willing to adapt it

Picture the summit

We all have things we need to do. Some things we don't want to, but they just need doing. In the moment, they can feel rubbish…and all the while that Xbox or Netflix show, or call from a mate to come out, is lingering in your mind. Isolating tasks in a list is important at first, but then once they are prioritised and isolated, and we have built them into that timetable, it means we can clearly see the 'route to completion'. That's the same as a mountaineer tackling the challenge of scaling a tall peak: they map the route to the summit into small tasks, and they dedicate to each one, with a quick rest now and again to eye up the peak. A lot of their individual tasks will seem challenging, but with a quick eye now and again on the summit, they know – even before setting off – that the ultimate goal (completing all of these tasks) will be worth it.



Let's recap

There is a great and simple phrase which sums up just how much of task completion (and maintaining stress levels) is down to our mindset…

"Whether you think you can do it or not, you're probably right."

- **PLAN**: after the visualization of the tasks (feeling ready to face them and listing them) the plan is the most important part of task completion. The plan needs to be simple, starting with priority and deadlines, then leading into…
- **TIME CHUNKS**: the amount of time you realistically need to dedicate to each task. Can you make time more effective by combining certain tasks or grouping them together? When are you most focused in the day? Focus quickens the time needed to complete tasks.
- **REWARD**: what will you get (it can be the smallest thing) if you complete these tasks in the time you dedicated? Rewards don't have to be physical things, they can be things that generate emotion, like a walk with the dog, a rest to good music, a run, or perhaps a little sweet snack.
- **LOOK BACK**: after you have completed tasks, is there anything different you would do for the next run of tasks?

A quick guide to time management

A quick guide to handling stress