



Faculty of Dentistry
The University of Hong Kong



mental floss

Tips for life-long learning & knowledge exchange

Spring/Summer 2014



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Keep your eyes open for learning opportunities

In today's fast-paced world, it's important to keep finding opportunities for learning and for personal development.

There are plenty of opportunities every day, and not just in an educational setting.

For example, life-long learning and self-improvement can occur through problem-solving and teamwork, by reflecting on what processes work and what don't, by keeping up with technology, by networking and sharing experiences, by trying something new, by volunteering, or just by thinking twice about what you do routinely or take for granted.

I hope this newsletter will provide some ideas that you can try. Please get in touch by e-mail (dentke@hku.hk) if you have any comments or if you'd like to share some of your own ideas.

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Take a closer look

Improve your problem-solving skills by reflecting on your performance

Imagine your team has just successfully finished a project. After celebrating, reflect on your individual performance both honestly and critically. Relate your strengths and weaknesses to the team process and product, and to BO, ISONBO, or BONISO.

BO: “because of”

If you did your best while bringing the best out of your team mates, and the success was really because of your ideas, skills, and hard work, then congratulations, keep it up!

ISONBO: “in spite of, not because of”

Maybe you said or did the most, but the success was actually in spite of, not because of, your efforts. You might have overridden someone’s suggestion, making the project go off-track—but the team nevertheless solved the problem without you. If you were the leader, maybe the team cooperated well despite an overbearing (or underwhelming) leadership style. Next time, to offer help rather than a hindrance, motivate all team members to contribute. Group, sort, and focus ideas and develop a plan of action collaboratively, without domineering or any personal attacks.

BONISO: “because of, not in spite of”

Maybe you feel you didn’t contribute much or that you lacked relevant knowledge or skills. However, the success may still have been partly because of, not in spite of, your performance. Your input may have clarified and improved the project, you may have noticed a mistake missed by everyone else, or your unique perspective may have made the project more effective. Turn negatives into positives: your contribution, however small, could make all the difference!

Test yourself

Which of the two horizontal lines below is longer?



Compare the lengths against the edge of a piece of paper or use a ruler.

For convenience, we often quickly come to a judgement or decision through an assumption based on past experience. But closer examination will get an accurate answer. (This is not the well-known optical illusion.)

Source: The Mind Gym. Time Warner Books, 2005.



Planning toolkit

When companies review their capabilities and performance, they may use planning tools such as SWOT, PESTLE, and SMART. You can use them too.

- **SWOT** stands for your Strengths and Weaknesses, and external Opportunities and Threats. Companies use SWOT analysis to identify future problems, so they can plan appropriate solutions.
- **PESTLE** analysis helps companies prepare for external changes involving Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental factors.
- **SMART** goal development helps companies define their goals and ensure they are realistic; SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely.

What's your next step?

Making a personal strategy plan

Just like companies the world over, you can plan ahead by considering and aligning your Vision, Mission, Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Tactics.

Vision: Your vision statement describes what you intend to achieve. You could have short-, medium-, and long-term visions. (For example: *I will record an album to raise money for charity.*)

Mission: Your mission is what you now do. You could include the Values (principles or qualities) that underlie your approach. (For example: *Use my musical talents and spare time to inspire others.*)

Goals: These are overall aims linked to your mission. (For example: *Keep evenings free; improve guitar skills.*)

Objectives: These are specific targets for each goal. (For example: *Finish work on time each day; prepare for guitar exams.*)

Strategies: These are activities that will lead to your objectives. (For example: *Set up stable work routine; take music classes.*)

Tactics: These are specific tasks within each strategy. (For example: *Start work earlier and take short lunches if needed; study recommendations for near-by music classes.*) —**Good luck!**

Test yourself



Value-added tasks

You are more likely to succeed in reaching a goal if your aims and strategies are truly personal to you, so they have added meaning.

For example, learning something can be personalised: try reciting the order of the planets in our solar system, going away from the sun (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune) or the colours of the rainbow (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet). Can you remember them 5 minutes later?

Instead of rote learning, you could make up a mnemonic, or memory aid, and frequently test yourself. You could fit the words to a tune, spell out the initial letters as an acronym (M-VEM-J-SUN; ROY-G-BIV), imagine a funny scene, or make up a sentence, or acrostic, using the same initial letters (Mercury Vanishes Every Morning, Just Shows Up Nightly; Red Oranges Yell "Get the Blueberries In the Van!").

Source: Michelon P. *Max Your Memory*. Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2012.



Activate yourself

Activity types affect how effective you are

When working, solving a problem, or learning or researching something, we need to perform efficiently and usefully. It's best to be interactive, proactive, and, if needed, reactive.

Interactive: Working with necessary communication with others to achieve what is needed, in time and within budget

Proactive: Working wisely, taking the initiative to make improvements, anticipate opportunities, and prevent problems

Active: Being/looking busy, but the output might be irrelevant

Underactive: Not doing relevant work fast enough

Inactive/Non-active: Not doing anything, or anything relevant

Overactive/Hyperactive: Doing a lot or working fast, but it may be superficial, irrelevant, or inaccurate

Retroactive: Catching up on work that has missed a deadline

Counteractive: Fixing a problem due to underperformance

Reactive: Responding to a new problem (known as damage control or crisis management)

Under-reactive: Not doing enough to respond to a new problem

Unreactive/Non-reactive: Not noticing or responding to a problem

Over-reactive/Hyper-reactive: Doing a lot or something extreme or fast (but maybe irrelevant) to respond to a new problem

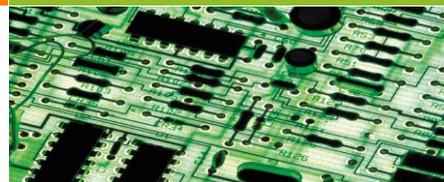
Know yourself

People have different preferred ways of processing information, making decisions, and interacting with their surroundings. Your approach to a task (and even preference for job type) may be dominated by your personality, so be aware of your own styles of doing things (and other people's styles) and learn to adapt your style or work to your strengths so as to get the best results.

Source: Tieger PD, Barron B. *Do What You Are*. Little, Brown and Company, 2007.

QUIZ: Please e-mail dentke@hku.hk by 31 October 2014 to win a souvenir:

"Insert Symbol"...What is next in this sequence?



Wise connections

Today's information and communications technologies let us keep in touch, network, share ideas, and much more. But it takes discipline to separate work from play.

Social networking or networking?

Using social media to socialise while working or studying may reduce your performance. Time wasted downloading or finding an Internet connection may make WWW become your World-wide Wait.

Multitasking or multislacking?

When multitasking, you can't do all the tasks at the same time and have to keep switching between them. Trying to use multiple webpages, applications, or technologies (especially if not work-related) divides attention and may reduce efficiency. Remember, sometimes less is more.

Efficiency boost

When you do a task or study something, your full attention and focus are important for efficiency and accuracy. You perform more optimally if you remove distractions and attend to one thing at a time.

You can test this out by timing yourself and checking your accuracy when you write each of these numbers backwards (852, 379384, 4300942, 97991638, 6837622270) while at the same time spelling out loud the letters in the names of five family members or friends, all while the radio or TV is turned on. Then, do the two tasks in turn and without distraction, and compare your performance.