

Bringing Out Their Best, Part One

We all have days during which we feel as though we are running at full speed from the moment the alarm goes off in the morning till the time we stumble into bed late that night. These are the days of deadlines to meet, tasks to accomplish, meetings to lead, and ... the list goes on and on.

Do we ever stop to think that our busyness might actually be dangerous?

Busyness can be dangerous, because it causes us to focus on pressing problems rather than on priorities. When that happens, we can miss strategic, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities – like developing the leaders on our teams toward their highest potential.

THE QUICK SUMMARY

From the *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *Great by Choice* comes an authoritative, practical guide to individual performance—based on analysis from an exhaustive, groundbreaking study.

Why do some people perform better at work than others? This deceptively simple question continues to confound professionals in all sectors of the workforce. Now, after a unique, five-year study of more than 5,000 managers and employees, Morten Hansen reveals the answers in his “Seven Work Smarter Practices” that can be applied by anyone looking to maximize their time and performance.

Each of Hansen’s seven practices is highlighted by inspiring stories from individuals in his comprehensive study. You’ll meet a high school principal who engineered a dramatic turnaround of his failing high school; a rural Indian farmer determined to establish a better way of life for women in his village; and a sushi chef, whose simple preparation has led to his restaurant (tucked away under a Tokyo subway station underpass) being awarded the maximum of three Michelin stars. Hansen also explains how the way Alfred Hitchcock filmed *Psycho* and the 1911 race to become the first explorer to reach the South Pole both illustrate the use of his seven practices (even before they were identified).

Each chapter contains questions and key insights to allow you to assess your own performance and figure out your work strengths, as well as your weaknesses. Once you understand your individual style, there are mini-quizzes, questionnaires, and clear tips to assist you focus on a strategy to become a more productive worker. Extensive, accessible, and friendly, *Great at Work* will help you achieve more by working less, backed by unprecedented statistical analysis.

A SIMPLE SOLUTION

We all know the feeling of not enough hours in the day to accomplish all the tasks in front of us. The platitude, “work smarter, not harder” often rings hollow in our ears. Yes, we must work smarter, but work oftentimes **is** hard, and there’s no way around that fact.

Conventional wisdom states that people who work harder and take on more responsibilities accomplish more and perform better. Countering this view, management experts recommend that people focus by choosing just a few areas of work.

“Doing more” is usually a flawed strategy. The same goes for being asked to “focus harder.” Focus isn’t simply about choosing to concentrate on a few areas, as most people think.

The smart way to work is to first do less, then obsess.

People in our study who chose a few key priorities and then made huge efforts to do terrific work in those areas scored on average 25 percentage points higher in their performance than those who pursued many priorities. “Do less, then obsess” was the most powerful practice among the seven discussed in this book.

“Doing more” creates two traps. In *the spread-too-thin trap*, people take on many tasks, but can’t allocate enough attention to each. In the *complexity trap*, the energy required to manage the interrelationship between tasks leads people to waste time and execute poorly.

Here are the three ways you can implement the “do less, then obsess” principle:

1. *Wield the razor*: Shave away unnecessary tasks, priorities, committees, steps metrics, and procedures. Channel all your effort into excelling in the remaining activities. Ask: *How many tasks can I remove, given what I must do to excel?* Remember: *As few as you can, as many as you must.*
2. *Tie yourself to the mast*: Set clear rules ahead of time to fend off temptation and distraction. Create a rule as trivial as not allowing yourself to check email for an hour.
3. *Say “no” to your boss*: Explain to your boss that adding more to your to-do list will hurt your performance. The path to greatness isn’t pleasing your boss all the time. It’s saying “no” so *that you can apply intense effort to excel in a few chosen areas.*

Morten Hansen, [Great at Work](#)

A NEXT STEP

Set aside a two-four hour time block when you can work on the principle outlined above by Morten Hansen: First do less, then obsess.

Create three chart tablets, listing each of the three phrases above on a page.

Review the activities listed under each phrase, and brainstorm how you can accomplish each.

After you have completed the task, schedule a time to review the results with your supervisor, and work toward a mutually-agreed upon plan of action.

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