

# Eat That Frog! Summary

By Brian Tracy

Procrastinators unite!... Tomorrow... How often do you find yourself replying to emails, scrolling through social media platforms, or loading the dishwasher instead of tackling your one important but daunting task for the day? All these other distractions might make us feel busy, but being busy isn't the same as being productive. What we *really* should be doing, first and foremost, is to be attending to our *frogs* – our challenging yet critical tasks.

*Eat That Frog* teaches us twenty-one practical ways to overcome procrastination and manage our time better. Author Brian Tracy suggests we live by Mark Twain's advice, 'Eat a live frog first thing in the morning, and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.'

Author and productivity guru Brian Tracy, uses Mark Twain's frog as a metaphor for the most significant and challenging task we need to do on a particular day. The task is most likely to be one that significantly impacts our business and career success. But it's also often the task we have zero motivation to complete, which makes us more likely to procrastinate. It's normal to feel overwhelmed by our to-do list, but if we learn to "eat our frogs" we'll up our efficiency and happiness.

We'll briefly explore key tips from the book, to help us identify and prioritize our ugliest frogs. We'll also learn how to *compl'eat'* them, in order to beat procrastination and maximize our productivity. We're shown why it's essential to work out and write down our goals, and why "to-do" lists are great. Finally, we'll learn how to rank our "to-dos" with the tried and tested, A B C D E system, what "posteriorities" are, and how to be a

"creative procrastinator."

## **First, Set the Table**

Before we can get down to frog-eating, we have to set the table. By this, Tracy means, set some goals.

Have you ever heard the adage, 'Don't just sit there, do something?' Well, the key to kickstarting our productivity might be the opposite: 'Don't just do something, sit there!' In other words, think and plan before you take action.

The idea of goal setting isn't new, however, it's importance shouldn't be underestimated. We should decide on our goals by clearly visualizing what we'd like each area of our lives to look like in 5, 10, or 15 years. Your life domains might include areas such as career, family, health, personal development, social, and community. Tracy says all we need is to take half a minute – yes, just 30 seconds – to write down three goals in each area. Then, in each domain, choose one goal that you believe will significantly impact your life.

Tracy urges us to "think on paper."

If you implement one piece of advice from this book, it's "write things down." Numerous studies show that the simple act of writing things down on paper improves productivity and retention. So kick it old school and embrace the magic of pen and paper. Furthermore, our head is for creating ideas, not for holding them. Only 3% of adults write down their goals, but according to Tracy, those who do, accomplish five to ten times as much as other people.

The next step is to make a checklist of everything needed to plan for, and to do, to achieve a goal.

Did you know that productivity goes up by 25% when you work from a list? So it's best not to skip this step. Make a checklist of everything you need to achieve each goal, as well as the obstacles that might stand in your way. Consider action steps, barriers, personal limitations, resources, and other people who may be able to help you achieve your goal. A helpful way of doing this is to ask, 'Why isn't this goal already complete?' If you start with the end in mind and work backward, this will help you formulate a clear plan.

With our goals to guide us, and our checklist in hand, it's time to prioritize what needs to get done.

## **Find Your Frogs**

Tracy's first rule of frog eating is, 'If you had to eat two frogs, eat the ugliest one first.'

Frogs are good at hiding in a disorganized to-do list. So it's crucial to

discern which tasks will contribute most to our goal. Once we've assessed which one this is, we know where to begin.

Here are some of Tracy's tips to help us separate the frogs from the tadpoles: Apply the 80/20 rule. Consider the consequences of not doing something, and use the A B C D E method.

The 80-20 rule, known as the Pareto Principle, asserts that 80% of outcomes (or outputs) result from 20% of all causes (or inputs) for any given event. Our goal therefore, is to identify tasks that are potentially the most productive. These tasks should be the main priority. So when it comes to our checklist, two out of every ten tasks will have the most payoff if completed first.

A great trick to figure out which of our tasks (or frogs) are the two that we need to start with, we can consider the consequences of not doing it. We need to ask ourselves, 'What if I did nothing on my list for an entire week? What would the long-term consequence be? Which of these undone tasks would be fatal to my goals?'

Based on our reflection, we can use Tracy's A B C D E method, to help prioritize our list of tasks. Assign a letter from A to E for each task. A is for "must-do tasks" – there will be severe consequences for non-completion. B is for "should do tasks" – there will be mild consequences for non-completion. C is for "nice to-do items" – there will be no consequences, irrespective of whether or not we do the task. D is for tasks that you can "delegate" – the ones you can give to someone else to free up more time for the things that only you can do. And E is for tasks we can "eliminate" – the activities that are not essential to our work and our goals.

Once we've established our A's – our ugliest frogs and highest priorities – it's time to take action. Tracy's second rule of frog-eating is, 'If you know you have to eat the frog, it doesn't pay just to sit and look at it. Just eat the damn thing and get it over with.' Easier said than done, so here are a few digestible tips to help us stop procrastinating and start chewing.

## **Take it One Bite at a Time**

One of the best ways to overcome procrastination, is for us to get our mind off the daunting task in front of us, and focus on a single action that we can take.

Tracy tells a personal anecdote about traveling in Algeria, where he took on the challenge of crossing the Sahara Desert. He writes, 'The desert was 500 miles across a single stretch of sand without water, food, a blade of grass, or even a fly. It was totally flat, like a broad yellow sun parking lot that stretched to the horizon. Many years ago, the French had marked the track with black 55-gallon oil drums, 5 km apart, which was exactly the distance of the horizon at that curvature of the Earth.

Wherever you were in the daytime, you could see only two oil barrels—the one you passed and the one 5 km ahead. Tracy believes he was able to cross the biggest desert in the world by simply taking it "one barrel at a time." In the same way, we can accomplish the most challenging tasks in our lives if we just approach our most difficult tasks, one step at a time. Our author says, 'Go as far as you can see, and then you'll see far enough to go through that.'

So what project are you putting off today? Can you pick just one task, no matter how small, and get started on it today? And then tomorrow, simply look for the second?

Another important habit is to make sure we complete each task before moving on to the next one.

## **Single-Handle Every Task**

"Single handling" is one of the most powerful things that we can use to manage our time. More than any other skill, the ability to start and complete our most crucial task determines our productivity.

How often do you sit down to start a task, and before you know it, you're checking your email and social feeds?

Multi-tasking is the enemy of productivity. It's estimated that our tendency to stop-start a task, which means to pick up on a task, put it down, and then come back to it – can increase the time needed to complete the task by as much as 500%. We think that multi-tasking makes us superior, and the type of people who can "do it all." However, this simply isn't true. Each time we stop what we're doing, we lose momentum. After watching our favorite cat video and returning to the task at hand, we have to re-familiarize ourselves with where we were at, and what we still have to do. We have to overcome inertia and get ourselves going again. This blocks us from getting into a productive work rhythm.

By concentrating single-mindedly on our most important task, Tracy says

we can reduce the time required to complete it by 50% or more. To develop the habit of single-minded task completion, we need to get organized, then work on our most crucial frog wholeheartedly until completion.

Here are three tips that can help: time chunk, prepare your workspace, and develop a sense of urgency.

Often our biggest tasks require large stretches of unbroken attention. Keep a clear map of the day ahead, and make appointments with yourself to tackle your frogs. Then stick to them by chunking the day into time slots. We also need to choose periods to work when our brain feels particularly creative and sharp. Tracy suggests we use time-block periods for focused work, preferably in the early morning, where we're most alert and where we may have fewer distractions.

It also helps to make sure our workspace is conducive to focused work. Any chef knows that the key to preparing a great meal is to start with a clean and organized workspace with ingredients prepped and utensils on hand. Find the suitable space where you can think, make sure it's a clean and clear space, and ensure you've laid out everything you need to start and finish your task.

Then you need to be sure to develop a sense of urgency. Even though planning is essential, don't wait too long to get started. We can only get into the mental state of flow once we're working consistently. So, develop the habit of task completion. Get organized, then work on your most crucial frog singlemindedly until it's complete.

In the next tip, we reflect on how to identify limitations that hold us back and affect the speed at which we want to achieve our goals.

## **Identify Key Constraints and Overcome Them**

Key constraints, or "chokepoints," as Tracy calls them, are the limiting factors that stand in the way of achieving goals.

Several things can hold us back: people, weaknesses, or a lack of resources. It's tempting to blame the external world for our failures. But we can't overlook internal factors. What skills and experience do we need to achieve our goal? It's easy to limit factors that we're not responsible for, but harder to tackle the internal ones.

To avoid getting overwhelmed, identify a single factor that's causing stress and try to alleviate it. Focus on one area of improvement and work steadily on that. But setting ourselves up for success isn't just about targeting weakness; it's also about developing our strengths and critical skills.

## **Always Strive To Improve**

To prevent a loss of skills and boost our confidence, we should always be looking for ways to develop ourselves.

Think about what's easy for you to do, but that's difficult for others? Or look at what has helped you to achieve the things you have? This might give you an idea of what strengths you already possess that are worth enhancing. However, you might wonder how you can find extra "learning"



time.

Easy. Just make use of unproductive time. Do you know that the average driver spends from 500 to 1,000 hours on the road each year? Tracy suggests using this 'unproductive' time by listening to podcasts, audiobooks, programs, or language tapes. These little bits of learning add up. Take notes while in a queue, read while you're waiting for someone, or learn French when doing the dishes.

We can take advantage of many situations to set ourselves on the self-improvement track. However, the journey to success requires one more important tip. We need to motivate ourselves to act.

## **Stay Optimistic and Self-Disciplined**

Did you know that we can train ourselves to be more optimistic in our thinking and more disciplined in our actions?

95% of our emotions result from how we talk to ourselves. As the saying goes, our attitude determines our altitude, so we need to build our optimism. Having a positive outlook can empower us and boost our focus, creativity, and confidence.

Just as we can train ourselves to be more optimistic, so we can learn to be more self-disciplined.

Discipline isn't just about mustering the willpower to sit down and work; it's also about how we look after ourselves outside of work so that we can be more productive when busy. We need to tune into how we care for ourselves mentally and physically. Our body is the engine of our

success. When we're physically and mentally energized, we work more efficiently. Like any engine, it's essential that we don't over-exert ourselves. According to Tracy, after eight hours of continuous mental work, our productivity starts to decline. We need to get enough sleep, rest, and physical exercise.

However, developing self-discipline doesn't have to be the end of our procrastination. We can be "creative procrastinators." We can creatively select the activities we procrastinate with. Most of us put off important tasks, but efficient people procrastinate on less valuable activities like watching TV. And if priorities daunt you, set the opposite of priorities, which Tracy calls "posteriorities." The things that can be done later, or maybe not at all.

We can motivate ourselves into action through optimism and discipline and stick with the tasks until they're completed.

## **In Conclusion**

There will always be too much to do. However, a "lack of time" is just a lack of priorities. Tracy's core message comes down to doing the hardest task first.

This advice might not be rocket science, but common sense isn't always common practice. What makes this book distinct from other productivity self-help books is that Tracy's advice is actionable, and stems from his own personal career journey.

To date, Brian Tracy has over 25 million followers across different platforms, and writes books on personal development. Our author might

be a productivity guru with a high-flying career, but what some of us may not know is that Tracy struggled in his early-stage career. He worked in sales, and recalled feeling inadequate and inferior to his peers. He says, 'I had fallen into the mental trap of assuming that people who were doing better than me were actually better than me.' He later learned this wasn't true. He says 'They were just doing things differently, and what they had learned to do, I, within reason, could learn to do as well.'

Throughout his career, he discovered and rediscovered a simple truth: 'The ability to concentrate single-mindedly, be on the most important task, and do it well, and to finish it completely, this is the key to success and achievement across all spheres of our life.'

So, maybe you should swap out your favorite breakfast cereal for a box of frogs instead?