Little Powerful Steps Can Lead to an Amazing Finish

As you face a project, it can feel overwhelmingly big regardless of its real size. You only want it to be finished -- yesterday. So, you push yourself to get started, hunker down, and attack it until it's done. As you walk away, you are exhausted and hope you never see a project like that again.

Every achievement is born of many small processes. We forget this when we experience or hear of completed projects. We also forget this principle when we encounter successful individuals or organizations. On this side of achievement, people talk more about the success versus the process of many incremental steps, some forgotten, that achieved it. Your imagination can lead you to think that the successful finish came easily and quickly. Then, you may wonder why you have not achieved the success you want or why you must work so hard for your successes.

It's important to have goals. Your brain uses a stated goal to assist with focus, attention, and management of limited processing capacity. However, attention to a process including incremental achievements – mini-goals – leads to achieving the overarching goal. An incremental approach works especially well for creative, strategic, and problem-solving work.

There are several advantages to an intentionally incremental approach.

- It gives your brain time to work.
    - When you get a good night's sleep, your brain reorganizes things and takes out the trash. That's why you wake with new perspectives. As your brain does its work, you may have flashes of insight that can only come with time.
    - When you walk away from the project and get involved in something else for a time (a break), you can return to the project with a new perspective.
- It helps you sustain productivity for the long term without burning out.
- It can make better use of your energy. Your brain is only 2% of your body weight but requires 20% of your energy resources. Cycling into and out of the increments of the project can give your brain time to recover energy through proper nutrition and rest. This cycling is one way to avoid "brain fog."

You can reap the advantages of an incremental approach only through planning, patience, and discipline. You can't hurry the process. You may not produce as much in the short term, but you will most likely produce more in the long term and with greater quality.

If you like to "get 'er done" and finish it all in one sitting, you may be taking poor advantage of the way your body naturally works. Try to see each increment as a completed task to be celebrated.

If you are interested in trying an incremental approach, choose one project to do in this fashion. See below for several ways to approach it.

If I may assist you in implementing it, don't hesitate to get in touch with me.

Tips for Planned Incremental Approaches to Projects

Definitions:

      Project session – A single time block that serves as an increment.

      Project segment - A part of the project that serves as an increment.

Time-guided Model. Works well when the project has more clearly defined components to complete for project success.

1. Create project *sessions* of 25-45 minutes each in your calendar. You decide whether 25, 45, or something between will work best for you. Avoid stacking the sessions in a back-to-back fashion, especially if they are related to the same project. You could do as many as two sessions per day per project.   You could have more sessions in a day if their projects are unrelated.
2. Divide the project work into *segments*. List these segments in sequence in which you need to do them. Size each *segment* so you can complete it in a single *session*.
3. As you end a session,
   a. Celebrate what you achieved in the session.
   b. If you did not complete the segment, make notes to bookmark your next starting point and look ahead to your next project session. This evaluation and bookmarking will help you maintain a sense of progress and avoid the feeling that every session starts "flat footed."
4. You will tend to overestimate what you can accomplish in the time allowed. As a result, you may not finish a segment in one session and will need to push some work to the next session. You will need to adjust your previously established segments as a part of the process. Your bookmark notes will help here.

Quantity-Guided Model – Works well with more creative projects that require consistent work, but the segments are not as clearly defined.

1. Session times are still held to less than 45 minutes to manage fatigue. You may feel like you can go longer in a single session, but the long-term effects on your energy and project quality will not be as desirable.
2. Quantities in a session.
   a. Complete as much as possible in a session. Use a single project session to do as much of the project work as you can in the time allowed. Then stop, assess, bookmark for the next session, and walk away from the project until the next scheduled session.
   b. OR commit to goals like "write 300 words" to complete in a single session.
3. In the next scheduled session, use your bookmarks to help you efficiently pick up where you left off in the previous session.

You can combine the two approaches. The keys to using the incremental approach effectively are planning, patience, and discipline.