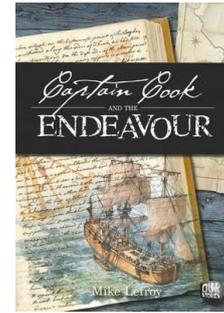


The Cook Endeavour Blog

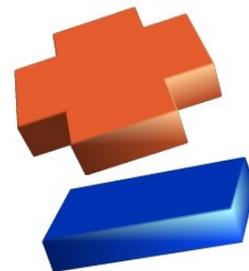
*Thoughts on Sports, Business and Life...
from a lifelong gymnast.*



Subtraction by Addition

by Steve Cook - 4 January 2016

I know it sounds backwards, but I'm offering a slightly different take on both personal and organizational improvement. The opposite has been said for too long. *Addition by Subtraction* theorists will tell you "that the team got better when they got rid of problem player X" or "I finally got in shape when I stopped my late night snacking."



Well, I'd like to flip the script. You've no doubt heard the comment that if you really want something done, give it to the busy person. Those people that just do more than the average person are fascinating.

I know a young woman like that, and you may know her too, or someone like her. She's a dedicated marathon runner and enjoys an occasional triathlon. On top of her daily workouts, she embraces a love for worldly exploration and regularly posts her reviews on tripadvisor. An adult curiosity in music has led her to become a cellist for the County Pops and Symphony group that she rehearses and performs with every week. Her longstanding love for baking means friends and family are regular recipients of sweet treats. Enough! Oh, and she enjoys a good read of the paper and the crossword – so she devours TWO... everyday.

As you might imagine, this all takes a lot of time, but she has decided that these things are important to her... so she has made a personal commitment to make the time. My point isn't simply to marvel at the person, but to understand the process.

I have long read experts on self-help, business, coaching, and time management that start by telling us to eliminate the unnecessary time wasters in our lives. Eliminate the small talk around the water cooler and spend that time on strategic planning. Cut the time wasters at practice so the team can spend more time on the game plan. Cut out those nasty carbs and sweets and carbonated drinks to make room for fruit and vegetables, and water. It all sounds correct, but why doesn't it always work or last?

I think it's because we don't react well to *Don'ts* – especially when there aren't enough meaningful *Do's* to fill the day. *Do's* are much more effective... and rewarding. I believe that to make permanent change you need to start from the opposite point of view. Rather than eliminating the negative (addition by subtraction), I'm suggesting we focus on adding the positive.



I'd like to turn the table on the well-known Steven Covey Demonstration where he fills an empty jar first with big rocks (life's important things), then with pebbles, followed by sand and then finally water. His very effective (and valid) point is that you must put the big rocks in first, or won't fit them in at all.

While I love this illustration, I'd like to add one twist of reality. These days, none of us are starting with an empty jar. Our lives are already packed full. The truth is that you've had to push something else aside to read this blog... which is precisely my point.

You could start by making a list of all the time wasters in your life, applying an inverse priority ranking, and then make the cull from the bottom of the list. I'm sure that would work, as long as you get your rankings right (and don't turn the exercise into another time waster!). But the woman I described above has proven there is a better way.

Instead of carefully calculating which pebbles to remove from the bottom of the jar so you can add another project, hobby or friend (rock), just put it in!... and watch as the waste/water spills out of the top. Decision made, life improved.



With this woman as my inspiration, a couple of years ago the penny dropped and I and started trying this approach. Despite a PE degree and a career in the sports world, for years I never had the willpower to stick with regular exercise. I finally decided it was really important, I put it in the jar, and something else was spilled out of my life. I don't even know what, but I know that my workout now fits into my life without a struggle.

Then I decided that I should increase my professional knowledge by reading more. I felt this was not only important but exciting. Twelve books a year didn't seem too daunting a task and... ABRACADABRA! I found the time.

Ok, enough with my illustrations. What do you want to add to your life? If you want a better diet, don't start by eliminating anything. Start by adding. Maybe one piece of fruit a day or a salad for one meal a week. By adding it, I'm pretty sure it will force something else out of your diet.

If you're a salesman and need to add in new accounts, start today and make

that one new call, or appointment, or meeting per week. You'll wash out some fluff, but your results will be impressive and rewarding. You will soon find that you have time for everything that is truly important to you. You will have subtracted the unimportant by adding the important. File away that list of your personal time wasters and watch as your new addition makes the subtraction decision for you.

And, the next time you want a busy person (like yourself) to do something, don't ask them to make time for it. Just convince them that it's important! Wishing you and your families a happy, healthy, and rewardingly full new year.

-Steve



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