

Leadership Insight

Prioritize your focus; think about 40 chances.

An emerging mantra in business management and leadership is really quite simple — do less! You are probably wondering how that can actually attribute to success. But when you realize that many of the things you do are truly distractions to your primary focus, it starts to become crystal clear.

Evan Williams, a co-founder of Twitter and several other online platforms, said in an *Inc.* magazine interview that “anything I’ve done that really worked happened because, either by sheer will or lack of options, I was incredibly focused on one problem.”

He continued, “When you’re obsessing about one thing, you can reach insights about how to solve hard problems. If you have too many things to think about, you’ll get to the superficial solution, not the brilliant one.”

Williams is also a believer in gut instinct. He says, “The things that keep nagging at you are the ones worth exploring.”

Inc. magazine columnist and software business owner Jason Fried described honing in on your focus as akin to pruning an apple tree. Fried

notes that cutting things back is a way of favoring what is left; you help the tree flourish by picking the winners.

He adds that pruning opens up new opportunities. Light gets in where it couldn’t before; air circulates better; and new growth appears. If you did your pruning right, you’ve given your tree (aka your business) a stronger foundation for the future — and you’ve given yourself the chance to analyze what’s there, minimize the distractions and possibly sprout some new ideas.

But network more

After just having told you to eliminate distractions and do less, it may seem counterproductive to advise you to network more. But, that’s exactly what you should do; the more people you meet and network with, the more opportunities you are creating.

Tony Hsieh, chief executive officer of the online retailer Zappos, was quoted in an article saying, “I think you can create your own luck. The key is to meet as many people as you can without trying to extract value from them. You don’t need to connect the dots right away. But if you think about each person as a new dot on

your canvas, over time, you’ll see the full picture.”

Evaluate 40 chances

As you prioritize your “to do” list, you might also consider this perspective: What if you knew you had 40 chances to get something right, to fix a problem or to change the world — what would you do? Philanthropist and farmer Howard G. Buffett recalls hearing a farmer at a conference say that most farmers have 40 seasons to get farming right. And, according to Buffett, the average person also has about 40 productive years in his life.

That’s the premise of Buffett’s new book titled “*40 Chances: Finding Hope in a Hungry World*,” co-authored with his son, Howard W. Buffett. The authors describe the lessons learned on Buffett’s own farm and from their travels around the world, and they talk about the solutions to world hunger that many of the most disenfranchised folks in the world are finding in their own communities.

The principles of “*40 Chances*” lay out critical questions for anyone looking to use his 40 most productive years efficiently:

- Am I acting with purpose and urgency in my life?
- Am I taking smart risks?
- Am I learning the right lessons from my mistakes?
- Am I improving upon every chance I have?
- Am I making the most of my chances in life?

These are questions you might ponder.

Motivate your brain

Another tool to enhance your innovative abilities is to surprise your brain every once in a while.

Research by neuroscientist Gregory Berns suggests the human brain craves novelty (aka new and different things). But, Berns points out that most people work in the same place every day, which results in thinking in certain ways.

To break that monotony, Berns suggests shaking up your routine, traveling to places or doing things you haven’t done before and stimulating your brain. The ideas that come forth to your same old problems just might surprise you. **HW**