



## **Better use your business brain and achieve better business results...**

- What everyday tasks are sabotaging your 'most important work'?
- What is your first job of the day... every day?
- When do you decide what your 'most important work' is?

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**STOP** allowing anything, anytime to disrupt your most important work.

**START** by being a better 'stage director' of your business brain and create some uninterrupted time for yourself every day.



**1. The 'Better Business Brain' question that will increase your productivity, your energy level, and your well-being...**

**Where are you when you decide what your No. 1 most important job of the day is?**

Where is the value in this question?

The value lies here...

You must decide EVERY working day what your No1 most important job of that day is AND then COMPLETE that one job.

If you do this you'll run a better business.

230 most important things get done in a working year (46 working weeks x 5 day week = 230).

- Decide on the most important job of the day
- Outlaw, prohibit and forbid distractions when doing the most important job of the day
- Complete the most important job of the day whilst you and your brain are fresh – before you do, read or engage with anything else



## 2. Everyday Email Overwhelm – beware of the consequences

As soon as you open your inbox every email that you see requires the following attention before you can move on to the next one.

**Understand** – who the email is from and what the content is about

**Decide** – whether to deal with it now or later; decide who else needs to be consulted; decide how important and urgent the email is

**Memorise** – the information in the email for another time

**Recall** – other information that relates to this email so you can decide or prioritise it

**Inhibit** – choose to ignore some emails or even delete them

These 5 brain processes are like the actors on the stage of your brain – they put themselves in the spot light, use your brain energy up and impact your ability to carry out your next task effectively and in a focused way.

Tackle your email overload before you tackle the ‘most important work’ of your day and you’ll struggle to get that ‘most important work’ done... also you will not do it as well as you could.

Like it says in the Business Bitesize report ‘**prioritise prioritising**’ and do the most important work of the day while your brain (your prefrontal cortex) is fresh.

### The No. 1 most important job of the day or your emails?

You arrive early to work to tackle an important piece of work that must be completed today. Turning on your computer results in nearly 100 emails being downloaded and a wave of anxiety washes over you.

Answering all these emails could take all day, but you also have the important piece of work to prepare and two other meetings later on in the day...



You begin to respond to the emails but after half an hour you realise you aren't even 1/5th of the way through them and you need to speed up. You are now listening to voice mail while trying to read emails.

Then you remember that you can't be late home this evening because you are picking the kids up from the childminders and you start to think about how you wish you could spend more time with your family.

Lost in thought you delete a voicemail from a customer. You had already played the voicemail but hadn't registered the actual content so needed to listen to it again.

You turn your attention back to the emails which must each be considered in turn, responded to, ignored or simply read and filed.

### 3. The Brain Strain Exercises or Why Multi-Tasking Doesn't Pay

Here are two exercises that you can do for fun with your team or as an icebreaker (you will also be demonstrating the limits of the pre frontal cortex in everybody's brain)



- a) Ask everybody to rub their belly and pat their head at the same time
- b) Now ask everybody to rub their belly, pat their head and do a simple addition sum (5+3)

Probably this was no problem for most people, with a bit of focused attention they can do this. Children have been trying to rub their bellies and pat their heads simultaneously since time began.

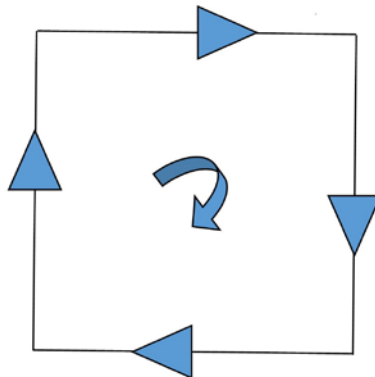
Chances are this action is largely 'hardwired' to most people. The only thing they have to really 'think' about – 'use their 4% prefrontal cortex' is when they do the simple sum. Make the maths harder and they may start to slow down or be less accurate with the belly rubbing and head patting.



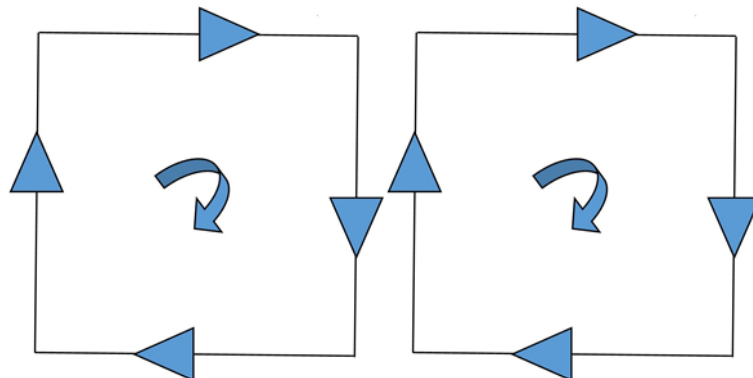
Here's another exercise -

(turn this into a day to remember and get yourself 4 indoor sparklers per person)

- a) All of the participants must now move into pairs. Ask each pair to allocate one person as a 'counter' and one person as a 'doer'.
- b) Access an online metronome here <http://a.bestmetronome.com>. Set it running at 100 beats per minute.
- c) Set the metronome to beat for a minute. To the beat of the metronome the 'doer' must trace out the shape of a square in the air with one hand while the 'counter' counts the number of squares traced out. The 'doer' must trace one side of the square for every beat. So a minute of tracing at 100 beats per minute will give a count of 25 squares. Fill in the table below (section f).

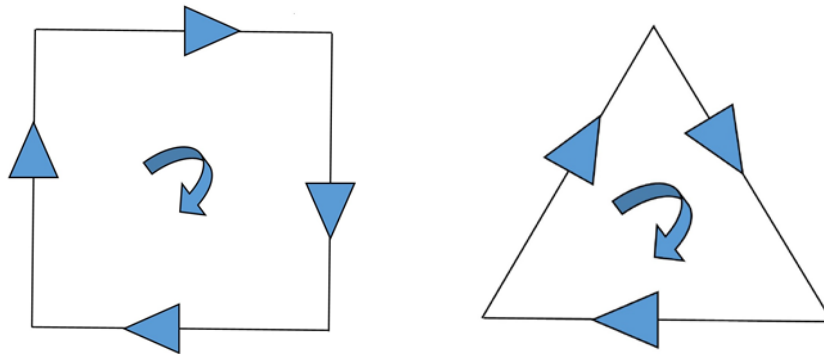


- d) Repeat the same exercise, this time the 'doer' must trace out squares with both hands at the same time. Fill in the table below (section f).





- e) Now try this: ask the 'doer' to trace out a triangle with one hand, and a square with the other. Two different thinking tasks at the same time. Multi-tasking. Fill in the table below (section f).



**NB: Each side of each shape is drawn to a single beat – so a triangle is completed in three beats and a square is completed in four.**

Set the metronome going and ask the 'counters' to count out how many correct squares are traced out by the 'doers' while the triangles are also being traced out. Collect the results after a single minute.

- f) Results table:

Shapes Traced (in 100 beats)	Number of complete shapes
One square with one hand	
Two squares with two hands	
One square with one hand, one triangle with the other hand	

What does this tell you about how effectively your brain performs when being forced to think or focus on more than one thing at a time?



### 4. Better Business Brain Checklist – or how to be a better stage director

- Prioritise your priorities as your very first job of the day

Prioritising involves making decisions – decisions are better and more easily made when your brain is fresh. Make the prioritising decision, then get everything else ‘off your mental stage’.

- Check emails **after** you have done your ‘most important work’ – your priority work of the day.

Email is an enormous energy sink – save them for later after you’ve got your priority work done first (see section 1).

- Plan your work to conserve decision making energy.

Make the best use of your time. If you know you feel fresher after a lunchtime walk and some food – plan your work accordingly. If you are always at a low ebb at 3pm - plan your undemanding, more routine and mundane activities for then.

- Find and protect your quality thinking time – your best time of the day for focused work.

What is your best thinking time of the day? Early in the morning at home before anyone else is up? After you’ve done some exercise? When you’ve had a few days break over the weekend? Prioritise your workday activities to optimise that time.

- Choose your meeting times to fall into your ‘low focus’ time – or you will run your battery down before you get to your ‘most important work’.

Set up a plan so that you avoid meetings at times that are usually your ‘best time of day’ for thinking.

- Do one conscious mental task at a time – if accuracy is important, don’t divide your attention.

Multi-tasking is good if you are doing a number of routine ‘automatic tasks’ –often physical at the same time. If you are working on more than one **mental task** at the same time it will take your longer overall to complete them. You will not carry them out as accurately as if you do them individually, one after the other. It has been scientifically proven – see David Rock’s book in the book review.



### 5. Better Business Brain Stories

#### Deep Sea Discovery

Andy Green is a no nonsense, plain speaking Scot. Apart from the fact that Andy is a world renowned Oceanographic Scientist he is also renowned for getting things done.

Andy spends up to 8 weeks at a time (several times every year) at sea in research vessels surveying the world's oceans. During any research cruise he can be challenged every day by rough seas, sea sickness, freezing temperatures, extreme heat, equipment problems and of course spending time away from his friends and family.



On returning from an 8 week trip away Andy walks into the office on a Monday morning. He switches his computer on. He leaves his computer to download the emails while he goes and makes a coffee. With a coffee in his hand he is ready to face the day and opens his emails and hits **'delete all'**.

By 9.30 on his first day back after 8 weeks away from the office Andy is working on the data that was collected on his trip. He is doing his 'most important work'.

Andy is confident that if he has deleted anything that needs his attention immediately he will hear about it. He knows that he can harness the energy and inspiration from the cruise while it is fresh in his mind and do his best work in the few days after the trip.

By Wednesday of that week the rest of the team that were on that same 8 week cruise have just about cleared their inboxes.

**Do you spend Monday morning 'clearing the backlog' or doing your 'most important work'?**





### The Sterile Cockpit Rule

On the morning of September 11, 1974, while conducting an instrument approach in dense ground fog into Charlotte/Douglas International Airport, North Carolina, Eastern Air Lines flight 212 carrying 78 passengers and 4 crew crashed just short of the runway, killing 72 on board.



Investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) into this and a number of other accidents around that time revealed the probable cause of the accident was distraction due to idle chatter among the flight crew during the approach phase of the flight.

The pilot had in fact landed on a different runway because he had missed the detail of the runway number from the air traffic controller. The runway was shorter than the DC-9 required to land safely and it overshot.

### But why did this accident and other accidents like it happen?

In the early days of aviation, pilots had little chance to engage in non-essential activities. Flying demanded constant attention, and the wind and engine noise in an open cockpit all but drowned out normal conversations.

In the early years of instrument flying, the effort involved in navigating through the traditional headsets to a scratchy audio stream of "dits and dahs" **forced** pilots to **concentrate** 100% on flying duties during instrument meteorological conditions.

By the 1960s comfort and sound levels gradually became more office-like and hence more conducive to distractions. Multi-person flight and cabin crews, autopilots, in-flight meals, newspaper service and other comforts further increased the levels of non-flight related activities for flight crews during flight time.

In the case of Eastern Airlines Flight 212 investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) revealed the probable cause of the accident was distraction due to idle chatter among the flight crew during the approach phase of the flight.

As a result of this the FAA (Federation Aviation Administration) introduced the 'Sterile Cockpit Rule' summarised here:

- a. No flight crewmember may engage in, nor may any pilot in command permit, any activity during a critical phase of flight which could distract any flight crewmember from the performance of his or her duties or which could interfere in any way with the proper conduct of those duties. Activities such as eating meals, engaging in non-essential



conversations within the cockpit and non-essential communications between the cabin and cockpit crews, and reading publications not related to the proper conduct of the flight are not required for the safe operation of the aircraft.

- b. Critical phases of flight includes all ground operations involving taxi, takeoff and landing, and all other flight operations conducted below 10,000 feet, except cruise flight.

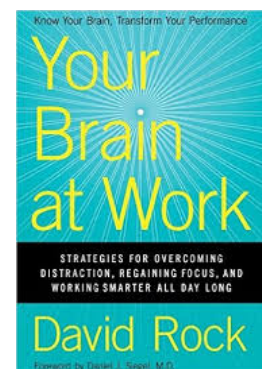
The everyday equivalent of the 'Sterile Cockpit Rule' can be heard the length and breadth of the country in cars outside schools every single day  
"Be quiet kids! I'm trying to get into this parking space"

- What would be the 'Sterile Cockpit Rule' you could implement in your workday, with your team, throughout your organisation?
- What would the 'Sterile Cockpit Rule' be that would ensure the protection of your 'most important work'?

## 6. THE BOOK: Your Brain at Work – David Rock

We cannot recommend this brilliant book 'Your Brain at Work' by David Rock highly enough.

30 leading neuroscientists, more than 300 research papers and more than a thousand brain and psychological studies have been brilliantly captured by David. He cuts through the technical jargon, and using his main characters Paul and Emily shows how with an increased awareness of how your brain works ... at work it's possible not only to survive in today's overwhelming work environment, but also to succeed in it – and still feel energised at the end of the day.



## 7. References

### Ten Tips For A Better Business Brain

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/laurashin/2014/01/15/how-to-perform-at-your-peak-every-day-10-tips-for-working-smarter-in-2014/3/>