

How many



does it take?

My title for this piece comes from the 'Eat That Frog' publication by Brian Tracey¹. I have been very taken with the thinking behind the various chapters in his book. Basically the First Rule of Frog Eating is 'if you have to eat two frogs then eat the ugliest one first' and the Second Rule of Frog Eating is that 'if you have to eat a frog at all, it doesn't pay to sit and look at it for very long'.

Brian Tracey has written a very readable book and I would commend that this book to you. The writer attempts to put in perspective how we can better manage our time. He purports that you are never going to get totally on top of your tasks. However, what you can do is take control of your time by changing the way you think and work. You can get control of your tasks and activities by stop doing some things and spending more time on the few activities that can really make a difference.

I have fully embraced this mantra particularly with my new post as Senior Vice Principal. Since September 2016 my intake of frogs has increased exponentially in order for me to get through each day. So what does this mean in practice?

A major frog that I have had to eat recently is the 'Appraisal Frog'. Due to changes in senior leadership responsibilities I found myself in charge of appraisal. This was quite a sudden change coming as a result of the resignation of another senior colleague and at the same time a new software package had been purchased by the departing colleague. I really knew little about the school's appraisal system other than by line managing other colleague's and completing my own appraisal. Up to this point appraisals were 'on paper', even if they were typed and we communicated via email, I certainly did not know the software package 'Bluesky' at all. In addition my ASO (Admin Support Officer) had no cognisance of the appraisal system or Bluesky. We had the looming deadline of the 31st October by which all appraisal reviews for the period 2015-16 had to be completed, particularly for those wanting to secure pay progression.

How could 'Eat that Frog' help? Working with my ASO and using ideas from 'set the table' (chapter 1 of the book) we met and wrote down what 'needed to be achieved', 'created a plan', 'set ourselves deadlines' and 'started acting on the plan'. We used Tracey's method of 'slice and dice' the task (chapter 18). We knew what the task was (complete appraisals by the deadline using Bluesky), we'd laid the task out in detail and then we resolved to do just one slice of the task at a time. (E.g. launch the new methodology to all staff during a staff meeting, provide training sessions for teachers on how to input their objectives onto Bluesky, provide training for line managers as to their role using the new software, upskill ourselves

¹ Eat That Frog by Brian Tracy Hodder and Stoughton 2013

as to the potential of the new software, translate the old paper method into a digital version and so on)

The outcome? By the deadline of the 31st October we had about 70% of colleagues completing all their objectives and relevant sections that were needed in order to enable 2015-16 targets to be signed off. The setting of 2016-17 targets is far from complete. The conversion from old to new methodology has been a steep learning curve for myself, my ASO and many colleagues. It has highlighted that colleagues need to take ownership of their appraisals and ensure that they gather data along the way.

My fascination with 'Eating Frogs' has manifested itself over time in other ways as well. I have delivered inset to colleagues and supported assemblies on this very topic. The assemblies were rewarding as I was able to work with our lovely 6th Form intern, Holly Mallows. One of Holly's frogs was that she wanted successfully to overcome her lack of confidence in presentation skills and develop her ability to stand in front of large audiences. Hence her frog was eaten by preparing and taking these assemblies. Holly had 'set the table'. She had 'clarified' what her frog was, she had 'looked into herself about what was holding her back' and by reading Brian's book, she set about creating her assembly. We co-chaired the assemblies and the students were sensitive and responsive to her interpretation of 'Eat that Frog'. It was great to see the school population hear how an individual not much older than themselves tackled all those frogs!

However, from my own personal perspective 'The frog eating craze' has become mandatory at the start of a number of days and sometimes during the day a refill is needed. This is a reflection on the ever changing nature of school life. Sometimes this extends to weekends in order to prepare for the week ahead. I had been practising 'Eat That Frog' over my years in education, I just didn't realise what it was called until recently!

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