

Eat the frog first

Start your day with the most unpleasant task

We all have them – those particularly unpleasant tasks on the to-do list that we're careful to avoid and that we tend to leave for another day. Such dreaded tasks can become big obstacles on our way, keeping us from tackling other things. Even though we're careful to avoid these "ugly" tasks at all cost, they're always on our mind, sapping the energy we'd need for other work.

The method we're looking at here was popularized by Brian Tracy. It consists in tackling the most daunting and unpleasant of your tasks first when you're starting your day. It's inspired by a quote attributed to Mark Twain: *"Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."*

Background

After breakfast, our blood sugar levels are optimal and we're usually well rested, motivated, and full of energy after a good night's sleep. You can take advantage of the focus and willpower you have available in the mornings to tackle the most important, most urgent, or most unpleasant task on your agenda.

Once you've completed this daunting task, this success achieved early in the day will boost your productivity for the rest of the day because you know that the worst is already behind you. You've mastered the biggest obstacle of the day and can be proud of what you've achieved.

How to do it:

- As a first step, it can be useful to get an overview of your tasks and your agenda, using your preferred task-management method.
- Once you've prepared this overview, it's time to identify the frog or frogs on your agenda. The following question can help you to pinpoint your frog, if you answer it honestly:

Which of my tasks would I like to postpone and do something else instead?

It's important that your frog task should be defined in concrete terms and that the workload involved is manageable. Usually, frog tasks aren't the easy, minor items on the agenda that are usually the main source of distraction during a workday. Instead, frog tasks are typically very demanding items that require a lot of thinking.

- If you're not the type that tends to postpone unpleasant tasks, you can still use the "Eat the frog first" method to complete the priorities you have set based on classic task management criteria one after the other. The method will benefit your productivity if you follow this approach.
- If you have more than one frog on your menu for the day, you can follow another piece of advice from Mark Twain: *"And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the biggest one first."*

Practical tips:

- Even though this method is very straightforward, you may have a hard time deciding on a frog to swallow in the morning. It can therefore be useful to make that decision on the evening before. This way, you won't have to second-guess your frog decision in the morning and get to work straight away without further ado.
- The discipline needed to gulp down your frogs is something that requires determination and practice. Your willpower is the decisive factor here. It will be easier if you create a work environment where you can focus on your task without distractions.
- Once you've eaten your frog, it's time to celebrate and reward yourself! You can also use the empowering momentum of your success to get rid of the next smaller frog right away. In comparison, it probably won't appear just as slimy anymore.
- This method can be very useful for people who have a tendency to postpone unpleasant tasks and help them get down to work. Students often find it very helpful in the process of writing a thesis or a large paper.
- There are people who just can't swallow a frog on an empty stomach in the morning, no matter how hard they try. If you are one of them, you can try starting your workday with an easy or pleasant task – or at least with a good breakfast – to get the energy and motivation you need to move on to the frog.

Sources:

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