

Timescales



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1. Timescales

Introduction: change occurs very slowly

- It would be great if you could bring about change in a weekend
 - Unfortunately, meaningful change usually occurs much more slowly
- To bring about change, you *must* have patience and perseverance
 - To understand why, consider the scenario on the next slide...

One change is just the tip of the iceberg

■ Typical scenario:

- You see a problem that should be fixed
- You estimate that doing so will take a few weeks
- Your estimate is far too short. The work takes many months
- By this time, you realize that the problem you addressed was really just a symptom of a larger problem
- You estimate it will take several more months to fix this larger problem
- Your estimate is far too short. The work takes several years
- Then you realize this second problem was just a symptom of an even larger problem...

■ That scenario:

- Shows why patience and perseverance are so important
- Has occurred for many people throughout history

Example: Bob Geldof

- Bob Geldof wanted to raise some money to combat famine in Ethiopia:
 - He organized the Band Aid charity record; it raised millions of pounds
 - Next problem: by default, much of the money raised would be wasted on bureaucracy and expensive means of transport
 - Solution: he finds ways to significantly cut these overheads
 - Next problem: the money raised was not enough to combat famine
 - Solution: he organized Live Aid, which raised \$200million
 - Next problem: the amount of aid money is tiny compared to interest payments on the crippling amount of debt that many poor countries face
 - Solution: he organized Live 8 to pressure large nations to forgive the debt
- Timespan for the above events: more than 20 years

Other examples

- Elizabeth Kenny developed a successful treatment for polio:
 - It took her 30 years to convince the medical establishment of the validity of her theories and treatment
- Gandhi peacefully ended British rule of India:
 - It took him 30 years to achieve this goal
- James Dyson introduced the bagless vacuum cleaner:
 - It took him 15 years to bring his invention to market in England
- Martin Luther King Jr. made significant progress for black rights within the USA:
 - He worked at this for 12 years, until he was assassinated

Increasing your patience and perseverance

- If you are impatient and give up easily in small things then you are unlikely to have patience and perseverance for big things
- You can increase your patience and perseverance by...
 - Cutting down on “instant gratification” activities
Examples: television and movies, eating ready-cooked meals, writing blog entries
 - Engaging in some “delayed gratification” activities
Examples: gardening, art, do-it-yourself home improvements, regular exercise, writing long articles or books

Bringing about change can be a life-long activity

- The bible has a story about patience and perseverance:
 - Moses spent 40 years bringing his people to the promised land
 - Unfortunately, he died before they arrived
- When old, you might reflect on your life and think:
“There is still so much more to do”
- But it is not all gloom and doom:
 - You *will* experience occasional milestones of achievement
 - You *must* recognise and celebrate those to motivate yourself to continue
- In old age:
 - *Do not* think: “There is so much more to do; therefore I failed”
 - *Do* think: “There is so much more to do, but I achieved a lot, and other people can continue the work after me”

2. Obsession

Dedication or obsession?

- Bringing about change requires:
 - An enormous amount of time (as already discussed)
 - Overcoming obstacles that are difficult and sometime seem impossible
- Does persevering at such a task indicate dedication?
Or does it indicate obsession?
- There is no universal answer to that:
 - It is subjective: one person's dedication is another person's obsession
 - The proverb "All things in moderation" is not helpful:
 - Moderation prevents unhealthy obsession
 - But moderation also prevents healthy dedication

Dedication or obsession? (cont')

- Your dedication/obsession might badly impact on your life:
 - Perhaps you develop health problems due to overwork or stress
 - Perhaps your relationship with your partner deteriorates
 - Perhaps your career is put at risk
- In such cases, you need to decide if persevering is worth the trouble it causes
- Some autobiographies mention the harmful effects of dedication on their lives:
 - Nelson Mandela repeatedly struggled with weighing his duty as a activist and his duties to his family
 - Elizabeth Kenny had to choose between accepting a marriage proposal or working as a nurse; she chose the latter
 - Bob Geldof suffered from months of sleep deprivation and stress when organizing Band Aid and Live Aid

3. Unconventional rewards

Unconventional rewards of activism

- Activism can cost you a lot of time and money:
 - In this way, activism can impoverish you
- However, activism *can* enrich your life in other ways:
 - You can develop a network of close friends who share your beliefs
 - Some activists in other regions may offer you free accommodation and food when you travel on holiday
 - Bringing about positive change can provide deep meaning to your life
- Relevant quote:
 - “I could have had a normal life. I could have had a normal legal career. I’d be a partner in some big firm by now. I’d be making tons of money. I make less now than the secretary at my old law firm.

Money is a poor substitute for having an interesting life.”
— Elizabeth May, author of *How to Save the World in Your Spare Time*

Unconventional rewards of activism (cont')

- The following anecdote is from *How to Save the World in Your Spare Time* by Elizabeth May
- Some activists opposed the environmentally-destructive plans of a large business:
 - The business sued the activists, trying to bankrupt them into silence
 - The activists were depressed and stressed about this legal danger
- One day an activist's car was being repaired at a garage:
 - The mechanic saw a news story about the lawsuit
 - He said "I really envy you. I go to work every day. I fix cars. I never know if my life really means anything. You know. Your life really makes a difference."
- Result: the activist "went from feeling sorry for herself, to feeling lucky"

4. Summary

Summary

- Bringing about significant change:
 - Will take much longer than you assume. Possibly your entire life
 - You must have patience and perseverance
(you can develop these skills in “delayed gratification” activities)
- Only you can decide:
 - Is your commitment healthy dedication or unhealthy obsession?
 - Is your commitment worth the sacrifices you have to make?
- Appreciate the unconventional benefits that activism brings