



## **Blown Off Course**

**by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

Each of us has a vision of how our day will go if things occur "as expected," but then life happens: There is an accident, illness, phone call, weather related issue, burned food, delivery, robbery, injury, the boss walks in, and on and on. We are forced to react to these changes and try to juggle the interruption as best we can to still try to accomplish the objectives for our day. On most days, most professionals have this kind of planning chaos occur. We can mourn the confusion, but it is better to just realize that these interruptions or distractions are what give life its spice.

One idea is to try waking up each morning with excited anticipation. The feeling should be, "OK I have a plan and objectives for my day, yet I know there will be large and small 'adventures' that take me off track. Some of these may actually be fun, but many of them will be things I would rather not do. I look forward to stepping up to the challenge of accomplishing my goals while dealing with the distractions as they come up."

Give yourself permission to get a bit testy if the interruptions become extreme. It is OK to put barbed wire and flares around your desk when a critical task has to be completed and you cannot be disturbed. You just need to establish a priority for each task and work your way through the interruptions until you are back on course.

One technique I find helpful is to get up earlier and earlier until I get caught up with the backlog. The hours between 1 am and 7 am are delightfully free from interruptions, so my work time is more productive. Of course, I need to go to bed earlier and earlier to get enough rest, but the habit really does help me from getting buried for long periods of time. Of course, some people are night people and others prefer the morning.

If you are habitually overloaded such that you never really get caught up, that is a stress problem that may be impacting your health. Depending on your tolerance for work, you may need to readjust your activities to make more time and reduce the amount of activities you are trying to juggle.

Another helpful technique is to use the word "no" more often. If you refuse to be blown off course every day, then you will be able to manage the remaining activities in the time you have. That is often easier said than done, because sometimes the interruptions

cannot be denied. If your child has fallen and has a broken arm, you cannot say, "Well, sorry, I have this report that is due out by tomorrow; we will take care of your needs after I get it done."

Another technique is to identify how much time you are actually wasting. Sure, we all need to rejuvenate, but often we get involved in some TV program or in reading a book and just spend too much time doing the things we want to do, thus leaving not enough time for the things we have to do. Each of us has to find the right balance.

Ironically there is a practice that takes time away from work that is a real trap for some people. That is the habit of complaining about not enough time to do the work we have. I once knew a man at work who spent nearly half his time walking around the office complaining to other people how there were simply not enough hours in the day to get his work done. That activity was not only blowing him off course, but it also tied up the person who was listening to his rant. The idea is to ask yourself seriously if you are truly applying yourself fully to the work. Sometimes you may be actually procrastinating, yet you feel overloaded.

My experience has been that when I truly apply myself, I can get more done than I would have thought possible on most days. What happens when I let the distractions lure me away from what needs to be done is that I fall short of my inherent capacity. It's not that I couldn't get everything done; it's that I didn't get everything done. There is a huge difference between those two statements.

To be fair, we all need a down day every once in a while where we just choose to goof off. The problem is that some people tend to have a percentage of goofing off as part of each day. That means when they get blown off course, there is no reserve time to flex to the situation. That creates frustration.

If you compartmentalize your tasks and keep pursuing your original list of things to do with excellent application, you can usually survive the winds that would blow you off course for the day.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at** [www.Leadergrow.com](http://www.Leadergrow.com), [bwhipple@leadergrow.com](mailto:bwhipple@leadergrow.com) or 585.392.7763

