Federico Gobbo

The Art of Giving Yourself Pause for Thought

beyond time management

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This version was published on 2015-01-05

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Also By **Federico Gobbo**

Lecture Notes on Intelligent Agents Spring 2013

to my friend Matteo Vaccari

Contents

1. Reframing our concept of time

I currently work in two countries, the Netherlands and Italy, and I live in three cities: Amsterdam, Milano (with my family), and Torino. My family is made by four members: my daughter, my son, my wife and me, everybody with their own personalities and needs.

I never had a full time job in my life, except of the period when I was a PhD candidate. Nowadays I work part-time in three Universities. But until recent times I also worked as a consultant in the ICT sector, mainly mentoring and coaching about Agile methodologies and practices. I start to "be agile" almost ten years ago.

If I were not able to manage my time, I could not reach my current status. Some people think that I work a lot, but in truth I am not a workaholic. I have time to enjoy my family, meet friend and sometimes even doing nothing special. Having done all my working duties prevously.

How I reached this dynamic, ever-changing equilibrium? Is there any magic formula? Sorry, but if it does exist, I do not know how it actually works. If you look for a set of off-the-shelf rules so to change abruptly your (working) life in 21 days or so, stop reading now. Try something else. The Art of Giving Yourself Pause For Thought (in short: ArtP4T) is not what you are looking for.

The ArtP4T is not Yet Another Time Management Miracle. This e-book is different, as it casts new light on your working time from the outside. Here, I share my experience that some friends, colleagues and clients – never had really proper customers in my life – think is valuable. I will not put trademarks in the ArtP4T nor I will release certificates of mastery or similar things. I retain the copyright, of course, but only some rights are reserved, in the spirit of the Open Access Initiative[1]. In practice, this means that you are free to experiment, cut, mix, insert, other things in the ArtP4T for your purposes. The ArtP4T can work for you totally, only in part, or not at all. In the last case, please accept my sincere apologies. On the other hand, if you want to share success stories of using the advices written in this e-book, I will be glad to put them in the companion web site of this e-book[2] as success stories, with a link to your personal web site. If you want this to happen, just contact me via email, Twitter or Facebook, as you prefer. You can use the hashtag #ArtP4T.

Recently, a mother told me that his son is always practicing the art of pause as he is laying on his bed all the afternoon after school, doing nothing. Well, this is not I mean with 'pause' in the ArtP4T. In order to have pauses, you should do something in-between! most people I met have the opposite problem: they work a lot, and they have the feeling that they can be more productive working the same amount of time. They are the ideal readers and practitioners of the ArtP4T. But lazy people – like that teen-ager – can also try to use these techniques: the only change is that they should start from Chapter 5, and practicing those techniques instead of laying on their beds forsome days or

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[1]http://www.openaccessweek.org/
[2]http://federicogobbo.name/artp4t/

weeks. When they start to reconnect with their own body, then they will start to have again the energy to do things and therefore they will enjoy their pauses.

All other readers should read the e-book normally, that is from this Chapter until the end.

Time, from enemy to ally

We feel the pressure of time because our conception of time is linear, with a known fixed point for the start (our birth) and an unknown point for the end (our death). First, we should acknowledge the fact that this vision of time is culturally dependent: other culture saw time as a circle, for example. But, even still staying in this 'segmental' view of time we share in the Western world, there is an infinite number of points in a line segment. If we extend the two fixed points indefinitely, we obtain a line, and the infinite number of points in it is the same.

Infinity is not scarcity, it is abundance. Time does not press us, it accompanies us through all our life. It is our most precious ally, and we should respect it. When we work, our time is calculated on a monetary basis: in other words, somebody is paying our *time* to do things. Usually they want us to take track of our work, either in terms of hours or in terms of calendar deadlines for delivering results, or both. According to the OECD Better Life Index 2014[3], people spend one-tenth to one-fifth of time on unpaid work. Moreover, there is an inequality between men and women, the latter spending 2.3 hours per day on average on a global basis. A passage is worth a quotation, in particular:

> A full-time worker in the OECD works 1 765 hours a year and devotes 62% of the day on average, or close to 15 hours, to personal care (eating, sleeping, etc.) and leisure (socialising with friends and family, hobbies, games, computer and television use, etc.).

The best country in this respect is Denmark, where these non-working hours are 16. To keep it simple, let us say that 8 hours are for sleeping, while the other 8 hours are free time. Therefore, 8 hours per day only should be devoted for work. Even if there is no universal agreement on its definition, the FTE (Full-Time Equivalence) measures the full-time of a worker on a yearly basis on a formula like the following one:

8 hours/day * 5 days/week * 40 weeks/year = 1 660 hours/year

This is the optimal situation we all should reach, and of course we are talking of 0 hours of *unpaid* work. Just to be clear about this point, a caveat is needed. "Some people claim that my working environment is like a family, or that my job is a mission, and so on, in order not to pay me properly – or not at all." Sentences like this reached my ears a lot of times, and I am still wondering how can people believe in it. Are you a monk or a pastor? If so, it has perfectly sense: you do not need to earn a living, because you offered your life for a higher Cause. I mean, you cannot be fired, unless

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[3]http://oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/work-life-balance/

you do really terrible things. I deeply respect persons who made such choices. On the other hand, I presume that readers do not belong to these very special classes of workers. If I am right, you should always be paid for your work, in a way or the other.

In the sequel, I will use the expression **working time** in order to indicate the 8 hours per day you should keep an account of. The complementary expression will be **free time**, where you will indicate time for personal care and leisure (according to the quotation above) when you are still awake. This indicates both the 8 hours per day awake when you are not at work *and* the time when you are not supposed to work – 12 weeks, or 3 months, per year. Finally, **sleeping time** indicates the 8 hours you spend sleeping during the night.

In sum, the working time is *one third* of your working days, which are only *a part* of all the days in a single year. Therefore, more than 2/3 of your life is devoted to something different from your work. This fact is valid even for the most loyal Stakhanovite in the world.

Unlike any time management methodology I have encountered in my life, the ArtP4T takes into account *all your time to achieve better results*, including your sleeping time. I will not tell you how you should live your own life, far from it. I share the techniques I use profitably for myself for years with you. Nothing less, nothing more.

Acknowledgements

I could not reach the synthesis of the ArtP4T without the contact I had with many philosophies, methodologies, and practices – along with their practitioners – I met during these last ten years of my life. In particular, my gratitude goes to all people involved in the wonderful season of the European Summer School in Agile Programming (ESSAP[4]) I launched with Matteo Vaccari in our University of Insubria Varese-Como years, on behalf of the Head of the Department DICOM, full prof. Gaetano A. Lanzarone, who passed away some years ago.

Since 2005, I am practitioner of various Agile methodologies and practices – see the Agile Manifesto[5] for details. With Matteo Vaccari, I explored academically the use of the Pomodoro Technique[6] in teams for some years. Although the rest of this Chapter founds it origin on that experience, I do not considered myself anymore a Pomodoro practitioner. I made considerable changes in my time management style compared to the orthodox 'Pomodorist'. Readers who already know the Pomodoro will spot them easily, while the others simply do not care – actually, it is easier *not* to know other techniques in order to start practicing with the ArtP4T. Chapter 8 is a personal elaboration of the Agile Retrospective[7] book published by The Pragmatic Programmers, with various apport of cognitive mapping techniques, that I studied in my minor PhD dissertation[8].

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[4]http://essap.dicom.uninsubria.it/

[5]http://agilemanifesto.org/

[6]http://pomodorotechnique.com

[7]https://pragprog.com/book/diret/agile-retrospectives

[8]http://www.dicom.uninsubria.it/~federico.gobbo/en2007GobboF-wikimaps.pdf

From the pedagogical point of view, my first source of inspiration is Dr. Maria Montessori and the method she started – see the Association Montessori Internationale[9].

For a full experience of the parasympathetic system (see Chapter 2) I am in debt with the Japanese Seitai philosophy[10] and the practice of Katsugen Undo.

The source of inspiration of some exercises described in Chapter 5 is the Qi Gong of Dr. Ma Li Tang, that I learned from Dominique Ferraro and Ma Xu Zhou. They co-authored a book written in French published by Guy Tredaniel Editeur[11], which I recommend to the interested people.

At last but not at least, this e-book came out of my mind during an intense seminar of Ba Gua Zang[12] (Quan) Kung Fu lead by Zhang Dugan in the Agriturismo Ciaolatte[13] (Noceto, Parma) I attended in November 2014 – the photo in the cover was shot in Noceto. This style of kung fu is the highest oriental art I ever met in my life, and it deeply influenced my equilibrium positively.

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[9]http://ami-global.org/
[10]http://www.seitai.org/
[11]http://www.editions-tredaniel.com/
[12]http://www.baguazhang.it
[13]http://www.ciaolatte.it/