

# FORGET TIME MANAGEMENT

*Energy and attention  
is where it's at*

BY ROB LAMBERT

A FIELD GUIDE FOR THE MODERN  
MANAGER ON HOW TO BUILD GREAT  
TEAMS, LIVE IN THE NOW AND GUARD  
ENERGY AND ATTENTION

# **Forget time management. Energy and attention is where it's at.**

A field guide for the modern manager  
on how to build great teams, live in the  
now and guard energy and attention.

Rob Lambert

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*Dedicated to my wife and three sons.*

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# Forget time management

Screw time management. Energy and attention is where it's at.

Have you ever tried to manage time?

How did it go?

Did time stop for you? Did it bow to your requests for more time?  
Did it give you more than 24 hours a day?

Or did it just keep flowing?

I tried to manage time for a while. It didn't go well.

Time has a habit of flowing - constantly passing. It doesn't bow to my requests; it pays no attention to my demands and it doesn't care what plans I have.

It doesn't care how I feel, or how close I am to a goal, or what's going on in my life.

It just keeps going. It never stops, no matter how much I wish it would.

It never gives me more than anyone else. Nor less.

It never stops so I can get more done.

Time doesn't respond well to being managed.

I discovered the more I tried to manage time, the more I would struggle to live my life in the moment. The more I determined to get more done, the more frustrated I would be at obstacles life put in front of me.

The same was true for my team. Obstacles would scupper plans, roadmaps and timelines. And no amount of detailed planning stopped time from flowing by.

As a manager, this resulted in me missing the joy of living in the moment. It prevented me from appreciating the good I had done. I would spend my day focusing on the future and planning, instead of living in the moment and moving with the now.

The now is all there ever is. The essence of this book is how to enjoy the now.

Even if, as a team, we hit our goals and targets at work, we would be left wondering “what next?”.

There are always more targets, more goals, more demands, more problems, more people who didn’t get it, more to get done. And these demands would never fit into the time I was trying to manage.

Was this it? To spend our lives on a treadmill - chasing destination after destination?

That was until I learned to ignore time and the concept of a destination.

I started to focus on energy and attention instead, and directing it towards the now.

I still set goals for the team but used them to steer habits and routines to get work done, but we didn’t become wedded to outcomes that we couldn’t control.

I set a painted picture of the people we wanted to become, so we could build a culture and team that we all wanted to work in. An ideal that we knew we would never obtain, but we would try anyway. An ideal that helped inform our decisions on how to behave in the now. After all, life unfolds in the now.

By focusing on who we wanted to become as people, we also didn’t fall foul of shortcuts, hacks, growth at all cost and other nonsense being espoused in the mainstream media. We didn’t put our results down to positive thinking, nor did we skirt around the hard work.

Some people have more energy than others - I realised this quickly. Some people know how to cultivate energy. Some people burn

energy on the wrong things.

Some people give their attention to social media, the opinions of others and the whims of the world. Some people pander to irrational bosses. Some people are distracted by silly side projects for years. Some managers cause these distractions.

Some people avoid hard work and take the path of least resistance. Some managers let them do this. But the path of least resistance rarely teaches us anything of value.

I discovered that true effectiveness and happiness comes from living in the moment. It comes from controlling where I (and my team) focus energy and attention, not on time management.

On a personal level I used the same approach. I painted a picture of who I wanted to become, what I wanted to bring to the world and who I wanted to help.

I set goals in order to build routines and habits that kept me from being distracted; from burning my energy and attention on the wrong things. I did the same for the team.

I started to focus on the here and now, not on a destination that I had little control over reaching. I encouraged my team to do the same.

I dealt with obstacles then looked up and kept heading towards the painted picture of who I was trying to become. As a team, we did this too, always aware of who we were trying to become and using that to deal with the present day realities of messy work.

I focused on energy and attention. Our team did too.

More importantly, I focused on the present. The now. Because it's really all we ever have.

This book is about being in the moment and living life as a manager in the now.

The past has happened, the future is unfolding every second and the now is where life is lived.

It is a hard thing to do. We are conditioned at work to strive for the next thing, but most of this is outside of our control.

Behaving in positive ways and focusing our limited energy and attention on the right things is not outside of our control, nor that of our team.

In this short book I will share some of this thinking, plus ideas on where I believe managers could focus their energy and attention. It is not about time management. It is a call for you to work out how much energy and attention you have, and to spend it wisely whilst you have it.

Just because we can schedule 7 hours of work into a day, doesn't mean we will have the energy to do something constructive for those 7 hours. Every activity in our calendars will use energy and attention. Some activities drain energy, some give us energy. Time management is not the key, energy and attention is.

Only you will know how much energy and attention you have. We will all have differing amounts of both. Only you will know which activities deplete energy and which ones give you more. Only you will know which activities use more energy than others. Only you will know how much energy to divert to what activities.

Throughout this book I offer suggestions on where to focus your energy and attention. I will also focus on booking "time" to get certain activities done. But time and energy are two different things. Our energy and attention is what is important. I will talk about using time wisely, but only you will know whether you have the energy and attention for everything you have allocated to your time.

It's not about time management, it's about where to focus your own personal energy and attention. And please also consider that not everyone in our teams will have the same energy and attention levels that we do. In my case, they often have more!

As much as this book is for managers, I can't help but feel that a lot

of it is useful for anyone wanting to do great work and live a good life in the present moment.

I would like to say how grateful I am that you are giving me some of your most valuable resource; energy and attention. For that I am thankful, and I will try not to waste it.

I've tried hard to keep this book short, to the point and valuable. I share ideas that work for me personally, and from my experience as a manager. That's all I can do; learn what works for me and share it with others with the hope it will work for them. I'm still becoming who I want to become. I'm still learning. I'm still trying to be the ideal person. I will never achieve it, but that's the point. It is an ideal, something to encourage me everyday to be the best person I can be. After all, I may not get a tomorrow.

This book contains concrete examples of where to spend your energy and attention, but for any of this to make sense I must first briefly introduce the philosophy of management that underpins these activities. Not a philosophy in terms of theory and rhetoric, but a philosophy to be lived. Like all good ideas, it needs implementing.

I wanted to create a book of action, but to do so, we must first go through a few chapters of the underlying principles. You may not agree with these, you may be intrigued by what I shared, but this is the philosophy that has worked tremendously for me.

It's about three main things; where to focus your energy and attention, how to live in the moment and how to become the best person you can.

I hope you find this book helpful and useful.

And in the spirit of not using up your valuable energy and attention, let's crack on.

Rob. Winchester. October 2020.

# The sand timer

Picture a sand timer.

You know, a sand timer with two circular parts filled with sand. You tip it upside down and the sand drops through from one part to the other - measuring time. These timers come in many different time measures.

Some can be used for timing the perfect boiled egg. Others can be for 10 minutes. Some longer.

Now imagine your own special sand timer. A timer for your life.

Sand is dropping through from the top to the bottom. That is time ebbing away. It's always flowing. Even now it is passing by.

Imagine the top half of the sand timer, the part that tells you how long is left, is covered up. You cannot see how much time is left. It may be a week, a month, a year, three decades.

Sounds sombre, but that's life. We have no idea how long we have left.

All we can see is our time flowing in the now. Constantly going past, moving smoothly and consistently.

We can also see how much time we have had. The bottom half is filling with sand - sand that represents the life we have already lived. The things we have done, the activities we have invested in and the people we have spent time with.

But it's in the past, it has gone, there is nothing we can do about that.

This past does not influence the future. We may feel it does, but it doesn't. We can choose to do something different, or continue as we were before. The choice is ours right now.

Despite what many would have us believe, we cannot force the future to be as we want. We cannot make our dreams come true by wishing, nor bend the world to meet our needs. We cannot hustle and get everything we want. We cannot “never have a day off” and not expect some consequences.

However, we can paint a picture of who we want to become, set goals and build routines to get work done. That is all in our control. We can then direct our energy and attention to this ideal. We can do the same for our teams and company too.

If we do the hard work in the now, we can let go of the results - they will be what they are - assuming we have done the right things in the now. If we put in the hard work, our results (that are outside of our control), will arrive. They may not be what we expected, nor as grand as we hoped, but we have done the best we can. And more importantly, if we get this right, we will be the best person we can be each day.

We cannot leave everything to fate though, but we must appreciate we cannot control everything. This is true in life and work.

What we can do though, is control where we focus our energy and attention. We can choose our behaviours, what to spend our energy and attention on, what obstacles to overcome, what compassion to show, how to interact with others and who to spend time with.

Focussing on the now is all we can do. To focus on anything else is to dwell on what has gone, that cannot be changed, and what is to come, that cannot be forced. And let's be honest, we have no idea what is coming for us, or how long we have left.

It sounds defeatist, to not have a solid concrete destination. But how many destinations do people aim for in life and work, that never come to fruition? How many plans do we create at work that are ruined the second they are put into action? How many people plan a life and end up with something different? The target is important, the results are out of our control.

But to have no clear target of what we'd like in life is equally defeatist.

Instead, I will encourage you to paint a picture of who you want to become (behaviours), set goals around what you'd like to achieve (your value) and build routines that help you do the best you can to deliver this value (habits).

I will encourage you to do the same for your team.

More importantly, I will encourage you to focus entirely on your own behaviours as a manager. To grow to be the manager you want to be, not a product of circumstances and other people's demands.

We can only do this if we live in the now and focus on only what is in our control - our energy and attention.

Energy and attention are what to manage. Time will go by whatever you choose to do.

Today, are you living in the moment and making full use of the resource that is most valuable to you; your energy and attention?

Or are you hoping there is plenty of sand left in the sand timer, dwelling on the sand in the bottom half and ignoring the sand that is moving?

# The Pillars of Life

In a particularly boring company meeting, whilst the CEO was yapping on about the company pillars (finance, marketing, sales etc), I was struck with a remarkable idea.

If a company needed strong foundations and pillars to support it, then don't I need these things too?

It was an idea that consumed me for days. It was an idea that needed exploring. It was an idea that was so obvious, I couldn't understand why I'd not discovered it before. I knew I needed balance in life, but I had never considered defining the very foundational pillars that made me who I was.

In fact, that was the hard part: working out what my pillars of life were.

After some contemplation and a lot of self-reflection, I uncovered the pillars in my life. Of course, yours may be different. We are all in different seasons of life with different needs, drivers and motivations, but what I present here seems to cover many bases.

I present this here in this book because a painted picture of who we are trying to become that doesn't include the foundational pillars that underpin who we are, could lead us astray. Remember too, that when you are a manager, you have people under your supervision - and they have pillars in their lives too. When designing plans, workplaces and systems of work it pays to pay attention to these pillars at the start.

Work and personal wellbeing requires this tension between pillars to be actively managed.

Many managers and leaders design systems of work that don't cater for these pillars, that only focus on destinations, goals and

outcomes. When people burn out, disengage or leave, managers and leaders try to bolt on wellbeing initiatives to a broken system of work. Wellbeing Wednesdays (2 hour lunch on Wednesday), yoga classes, free fruit and chill out zones appear, in a vain attempt to address the growing uneasiness and burnout of staff. These are well received. After all, who wouldn't want to have two hours for lunch? But the burnout, disengagement and resentment continues. Without changing the system of work (or designing it well in the first place), these initiatives won't work. The pillars of life are a good place to start when designing a system of work. You have them. Your people do too.

When I was painting a picture for my team a few years back, I wove in these pillars to that picture as best I could. We set forth to build a system of work that allowed people to manage their own personal tension and not have the demands of work encroach on their personal lives. We built in flexible working before it was trendy, slack in the work load to cater for unforeseen problems (of which there are usually many) and regular learning and development initiatives. We saw no burn out and no need to call on the bolted-on HR wellbeing offerings.

As people, we aren't all about work. We aren't all about family. We aren't all about productivity. We aren't all about money and early retirement. We are managing a tension between all of these things, and more. It is entirely possible to want to be a good parent, have a good job, be healthy, have hobbies and gain financial freedom all at the same time. One area of our lives should not rule the others - at least not for sustained periods of time, as we'll cover in a minute.

As such, when painting a picture of who you want to become (and who your team want to become), it pays to paint it with the pillars in mind.

We can't always be about business. For years, leaders and managers have demanded everything from their staff and the toll on human capital has been enormous. Equally, as managers we cannot design

a system of work that panders to people's desire for fun and their preferences for happiness.

Work needs to get done so we can keep doing what the business is there to do. But people need a system of work that allows them to manage their own tensions between their pillars.

As an individual, if you choose to paint your own personal painted picture (which I would encourage you to do), you will need to paint it with your own pillars in mind.

Only you will know how much energy and attention you need to give to any one pillar. However, I will say, that when the focus is leaning too far towards some pillars and not others, peculiar things can happen in your life.

For many years I focused on learning and personal development, but that affected my health greatly. As I moved into parenthood I focused on family and business, and that affected my health even more. As my health suffered, I focused on it (better late than never) and it upset my ability to give back to the community I was part of.

I was swinging left, right and centre. Shifting focus and upsetting the harmony of life.

I was trying to manage time rather than realising that my energy and attention is more limited than time.

I soon realised that there is no balance between the pillars of life, only tension. As the tension pulls one way, it pulls on everything else. There can be no balance in our lives, only a tension to be actively managed. Our focus shifts as our lives do. Our energy and attention can only go so far. It needs directing to what is important to us.

It's why a painted picture that caters to the tension is so important. So, we can focus our energy and attention of what makes us who we are, not just our wealth or productivity goals.

There are times when we must focus more on one pillar over the others. At these times, we should be aware that we are creating

instability - and that needs addressing at some point in the future. Leave it too long and it becomes harder to address.

As we'll cover later - it pays to focus energy and attention on each pillar every day or week, but the choice is yours. It always is.

I encourage you to discover your own pillars of life or steal the ones I use. We are all different and as such, our focus will be different. But I know from my own experience that when we let some pillars of our life crumble, we'll make it hard to be a well-rounded and supportive person for others.

The Pillars I focus on are:

### 1. Health

If we don't have our health we may as well not focus on anything else.

When we are not well, our world view shifts and we will struggle to help anyone else, let alone become the person we're trying to become. What health means to you will be different to me. I can speak from experience though that the poor choices I made in pursuit of greater productivity at work, took years to show and gradually my health depleted. It's hard to correct that - and in correcting the mistakes I have made, I am diverting energy and attention from other pillars.

### 2. Family

When the sand runs out in the timer of life, who will we want to remember us? A random person on LinkedIn, a demanding boss or our family? What memories do we want them to have of us? Who do we want to celebrate our successes with? Who do we want to connect with?

### 3. Education and Personal Development.

Our ability to navigate life and the challenges it presents to us requires strength of character. If we are to achieve our painted picture, we must develop the habits, routines and behaviours that

help us get there. If we are to become the best manager we can, we must learn how to do this. If we believe we are complete, we will never open our mind to new ways of working, new ideas and the lessons passed down from those who have walked before us.

#### 4. Finances and Money

Money does not buy happiness, but it certainly helps to create security and freedom. With a decent wage and money in the bank, we can focus on the task at hand. We can do good work without worrying whether we're going to meet next week's bills. How much money you need is personal to you and your season of life. Money is not the end goal in life, but it certainly can make life easier. At least to some degree.

#### 5. Impact on society

We are hard wired as humans to help each other. It's how communities flourish and our businesses excel. Helping other people is good for us, it is in our nature and in some respect, it is our duty to do this in our lives.

Society is clearly the town, village, city or country you live in. Your duty could be to do no harm, or it could be to volunteer and supports those around you. Society is also about the company you work in. Your peers, colleagues and customers are part of that society. Do we want to do good and help? Or extract what we can?

Our society could also be the industry we work in, the hobby groups we are part of or our support for a charity we deeply believe in. Society matters and how we give to that society is a true reflection of our character. How much energy and attention should you commit to impacting positively on society?

#### 6. Productivity and Effectiveness

You're reading this book because you want to get more done as a leader or manager (I suspect).

We all have things we want to do in our lives and work. Being

productive is a sign we are busy bringing something of value to others. But are they the right thing?

Prioritising how we spend our energy and attention means working out what we want to achieve. And that's why we'll move on to the painted picture in the next chapter.

Before we do though, remember that your direct reports will have pillars similar to these too, and your job as a manager is to help your people manage their tension too. It's not your job to do it for them, nor your responsibility where they focus their energy and attention outside of work. But in the workplace, if we're serious about creating a workplace with wellbeing at the centre of it, it's part of your job to design a system of work that helps them manage this tension. A workplace that doesn't constantly demand long hours. A workplace that doesn't have so much red tape and a long list of pointless rules, that people cannot get anything done. A workplace that doesn't tolerate toxic behaviours. A workplace where it is clear where people need to spend their energy and attention. And a workplace where people can get meaningful work done.

# Where to focus energy and attention

If we only have so much energy and attention, then where to focus it?

I believe there are three main areas of focus if we're to use our energy and attention wisely.

The first area is behaviours. Consider this your character as a person (or team) which is entirely in your control. Every minute of every day we can choose how to behave. This is the painted picture, which we'll get to in a minute.

The second is to focus on goals. Consider these the value you are trying to bring to the world, things to get done at work and in life. You may not achieve the outcomes you desire, as these will be outside of your control, but you can control how much energy and attention you give these activities. The important aspect around goals is not to treat them as a destination or an end point, but instead, use them to inform the third part of this system.

The third part is all about routines and habits. This is how great things are done, by following the processes and routines to develop positive habits. Habits that we can follow whether we feel like it or not. Habits that lead to goals.

By having three levels of focus we can avoid focusing just on outcomes and results, which is where many managers and leaders focus. Results at all cost.

We can avoid taking short cuts, behaving in ways that are unpleasant and being personally unhappy because these desired outcomes are actually outside of our control. It is why there is a painted picture of who we are trying to become, so that we can hold in our

mind an ideal of how we want to behave every day. This is the same for our company too - if we focus on how people behave, rather than achieving the goals at all cost, we can guard against creating a toxic work culture. Routines and processes help to develop positive habits, which lead us to our goals.

There is a lot to unpack here. The next two chapters are dedicated to these ideas.

The first is all about setting our behaviour bar high and trying to live to this each day. If we can do this as a manager, we can be a great example to others. We can hold the bar high and strive everyday to exhibit the behaviours we would like others to demonstrate too. How many times do we see leaders and managers asking people to behave in ways that they themselves are not demonstrating?

The second is about using goals to give us a target. A target we can try our hardest to hit, but ultimately the outcomes are outside of our control. What we can control is the energy and attention we apply to each goal. The best way to try and hit a goal is to build routines and habits that hold us to account.

Underpinning all of this though, is who we want to be, and the balance of the tension across our pillars. After all, what is the point in achieving a goal if we become a worse person for it? Or our health suffers? Or our loved ones drift away?

# **Behaviours - a painted picture of who we wish to be**

The painted picture is all about behaviours. It is about creating an ideal image of who you are trying to become (or already are).

This applies to your own personal life as well as work.

You can write a painted picture of who you, as an individual, wish to become. I would encourage you to do this first, as it will inform the kind of behaviours you would like in your team. Your team will always be an extension of yourself, so it makes sense to start with who you are trying to become.

You can then write a painted picture for your team. A picture about who you are trying to become as a team.

## **Why focus on behaviours?**

The culture of your team and organisation is the sum of everyone's behaviours. It's what they do, how they interact and how they come together to create value.

There is an underlying assumption here that you are a manager who would like to build a great team or company to work in. Hence, it's important to start with behaviours.

The news is full of stories of companies with toxic work cultures. Successful, well-known companies that are terrible to work within.

Why? Because the company is focused on destinations, goals, domination and visions of being number one. In the drive to get results, anything goes, including poor behaviours. People who work in these environments get sucked into the dream of big bonuses, unicorn exits and shares to live off for the rest of their lives. I've been there, and will never go back.

People start to fixate on results rather than living in the moment. Shortcuts are taken, games are played, people are treated badly, doing the right thing is second to hitting the results. Toxicity reigns and it becomes harder and harder for people to challenge the norms.

When people talk about culture in the workplace, they are talking about behaviours. The culture of an organisation is nothing more than the sum of the behaviours of everyone who works there.

I see it everyday. Sane, rational, nice people becoming a terrible version of themselves. Managers and leaders setting grand visions of domination, systems of work that unsettle people's pillars, competing with other managers and tolerating poor behaviours so long as the results come in.

If we are to build professional, fun, engaged teams where wellbeing is embraced and living in the moment is our measure of success, then we must focus on behaviours. Ideal behaviours we can strive to exhibit. Positive behaviours we would be happy to leave the earth having demonstrated. Behaviours we will fall short of, but in doing so, we will still be good people. Behaviours we can try to demonstrate in the now.

We will fall short, but without a high standard to live up to, anything goes. And when anything goes, we may become someone even we wouldn't want to hang out with. We will tolerate rude, abusive, immoral behaviours so long as we're meeting our results.

Good managers hold themselves to a high standard. And they make it clear to all what that standard is.

This is what a painted picture of your ideal self (and team) is. It's a

standard. A standard we may never meet, but a standard that stops us taking the shortcut, treating people badly and losing site of who we are in the moment.

## **The role of a painted picture**

Benjamin Franklin had his virtues that he tried to cultivate in his daily life. Did he achieve his perfect virtuous self? No. But he did proclaim that it made him a better person.

The Stoics have this idea of a Stoic Sage; a perfect stoic person who doesn't let anything outside of their control worry them. This Sage is at peace with the world and leads a tranquil life in the moment. Do Stoic practitioners ever achieve this ideal in real life? No. But they try every day to do their best.

When we bring this sort of thinking into our work, we can start to understand then that behaviours really matter.

As a manager it's worth considering the sand timer.

If today was your last day alive, how would you want to be remembered? As someone who lived in the moment, held high standards of behaviour and treated people like people? Or as someone who strove for success, lived in the future and behaved in ways many would frown upon?

The painted picture is an ideal though. We are human, so we will often fail to meet this ideal, but that should not stop us trying.

When I create a painted picture in the workplace it is always about behaviours. It is about who we are striving to be, not what we are striving to achieve.

We have no control over our results. The market may crash, a pandemic may destroy our industry, our health may suffer, but we can always choose who to be in the moment.

There is another powerful reason to focus on behaviours in the painted picture. It allows us to pivot and change our work. We have not codified results or products or services in the painted picture. We have not said that we are specialists at delivering X widget. What happens when X widget is no longer needed - who are we then?

When we have a painted picture that is all about “being” people, we will always have a purpose and something to strive for in the moment.

By focusing our painted picture on behaviours we can avoid the shortcuts, the hacks, the delivery at all costs, the focusing on the future and the toxic behaviours that seem so rampant in our news feeds.

If we don’t focus on behaviours, we will be putting our hope in events external to us, things we cannot control. Leaders and managers I work with place a lot of hope on things outside of their control. They pin their hopes on things that are external to them. They think positive thoughts and hope the world bows to their demands. The problem is that when we “hope” things will happen for our business, we will also “worry” that they may not.

There is a better way. Focus on behaviours, set goals but don’t be wedded to them, install routines that give you the greatest chance of influencing the attainment of the goal. But ultimately, try to live in the moment. The now is all there is.

## **Creating the painted picture**

Here I will share a little about myself. In that, I will share my own personal painted picture of who I strive to be every day.

I will also share an example of a painted picture I used for my own team.

I hope it helps to bring this idea to life.

It is not easy to create a painted picture. It should weave in your pillars and what you value as a person. It will be different to mine.

Creating one for your team is even harder. We are conditioned to think of results (external to us) and goals (also outside of our control).

When you are creating your painted picture think about what sort of team you want to be. What behaviours align with your values? What kind of team you would enjoy working in? What kind of people would make a great team? What positive, ideal behaviours would you be happy living every day?

## **Writing the painted picture**

I write the painted picture in the present tense. I try to make it compelling and interesting. I make it rich in detail around behaviours, but light in detail about outcomes.

Here is my ideal self. My Stoic Sage. My virtuous life. Do I live it every day? Heck no. But I try. As you read the following please consider that it took me a long time to settle on this. This is used for my personal life and my work life. I am striving to be a consistent “me” inside and outside of work.

Please consider your own ideal self, read more about Stoicism, steal these, or mash lots of things together. It is not easy to do this exercise. It requires a deep focus on who you want to be. And please consider, it is not a way to bash your current self. We are who we are. But we can always strive to be better every day.

## **My personal painted picture.**

“I am a responsible father, husband, manager and leader who focuses on doing the right thing by my family, for my company and

for my clients, even if doing the right thing is the hard thing. I write often. I create content. I learn.

I stand tall, exude presence through my communication style and take whatever comes at me with grace, thanks and as an opportunity to develop myself. I move, work out and am active with my kids. We get up and do things, not sit around. I am relaxed and calm but laser focused on acting in a way to bring about my goals. But I am not wedded to the outcome. I cannot control that.

I am clean, dress well and am tidy in my workplace. I show the world what I can create rather than tell them. I create more than I consume. I work hard to provide value to others, and expect nothing back in return. I am a positive and kind person that seeks no validation from others whom I do not know well, trust and care about deeply.

I am complimentary about everyone and do not gossip. I have high standards of myself, am forgiving to others and encourage high behaviours from all I work with. I control my own behaviour.

I take responsibility for everything in my life and my results are merely a reflection of my behaviours and where I focus my energy and attention.

I provide for my family, spend less than I earn and set up financial savings to provide for my kids in the future. I try everyday to be a wonderful asset for others.

I do what is in front of me. I do the work. I treat everyday as though it could be my last. I let my kid's bedtime routine be as long as it needs.

I do not complain to others and try not to complain to myself.”

As you can see, this is pretty personal to me. But with this painted picture of who I am trying to be everyday, I can make decisions on how to behave and where to focus my energy and attention.

Now, here's a painted picture for my team.

## Team Painted Picture

“We are a highly responsive team capable of dealing with the variety of demands that come from our customers and stakeholders. We are positive with each other, treat each other well and cooperate around shared objectives. We have robust professional conversations and come together to solve tricky problems. We often disagree with plans and goals, but we do this professionally. If a decision goes against our plan or idea, we commit to it fully.

We focus on the task at hand before moving on and starting new work. We are confident, assertive and robust when dealing with new demands from senior management, but we are positive about bringing value to our customers.

Our processes are as slick and effective as they can be, due to a constant improvement of them. We study and understand our flow of work, looking for ways to optimise our working practices. We are expert communicators, kind to others, yet hold our own standards high. It is hard to get a job in our team and we don’t tolerate people bringing down the team. Learning is essential and we regularly improve ourselves and our working practices to keep delivering value.

Fun is important, even when dealing with hard work. If we’re not having fun, we have to wonder whether we are doing the right things. We don’t shy away from doing what needs to be done, as we strive to maintain our own high standards. We deliver value to our customers and are not afraid to change direction if needed.

We have slack in the system to create flow. This flow allows us to focus our own personal leisure time on ourselves, without the constant demands of work. Exceptions will happen and work will encroach our personal time, but that is an exception not a rule. If this tension moves in the wrong direction, our working practices need reviewing.”

As you can see there are no codified outcomes, numerical targets or

measures. There are no mentions of the current product or service. There are only details relating to the system of work and behaviours. If you built a team that could operate in this way, you would have a team that delivers value in any industry.

It is a painted picture of who we are trying to “be”, not what we will have “done”. It is about behaviours, not about outcomes. It is a field guide for steering behaviours in the now. It is also a guide for where to focus energy and attention - on the systems of work, learning and improving delivery to customers.

But how do we know what to focus our actual day-to-day work on? Well, this is where goals come in.

# Goals and routines

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# **Ideas on what to do as a manager**

Now we have covered the underlying philosophy, we can jump in to the main areas of focus as a manager.

The following ideas are from my experience of what great management looks like. I share areas to focus, ideas to contemplate and attention to give. Underneath all of the following though is still that theme:

1. Focus on what you can control
2. Live in the now - as it's all you have
3. Strive to be your ideal self
4. Use goals to set routines and habits

Enjoy.

# **There is always too much to do**

One of the most enlightening insights I gained from years of growing a startup team, was that I could never get through all of the work that needed to be done. There was always more work to do. There were always more problems than I, and the team, could solve.

At first this ground me down. I would pull epic hours to get more stuff done.

I tried to take the work and problems on. I tried to take them home with me. I thought about these problems and the work all night. I got up early to take them on. I burned myself out trying to fit this work into the time I had available. I filled every available waking hour with work and problems, and ran out of energy and attention quickly.

I tried to battle them to see who won. They won.

The problems kept coming (a sign the business is learning) and the work kept mounting up (a sign there is demand for what you do).

No amount of thinking, out of hours work, nor growing the team ever got rid of the mounting backlog of work and problems.

Then one evening, as I laid on the sofa unable to focus, as the overwhelm took control and I simply didn't know what to do next, I had a realisation.

I realised I'd got it all wrong. I'd been trying to drain the ocean. I'd been trying to manage time.

Instead, if I told myself the problems and work would wait and that I would never get through it all, I could switch off and tackle them tomorrow. Even some of the most seemingly urgent work could

wait. I had a life to live, pillars to balance, kids to say goodnight to. Work was getting in the way of life.

Work will do that if you let it. And it will do it to your people too.

Instead, appreciate that problems and work don't go away. There is always more to do.

Do what you must today. Work on those tasks and get things done. Then leave work and the many problems that come up, at work.

It will still be where you left it tomorrow morning - and you may just approach it with a renewed level of energy and attention.

# **Put every day in order**

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# **Make all work visible**

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# **Containers and rules**

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## **Containers**

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## **Rules**

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# **Calendars for the win**

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## **Colour Coding and recurring events**

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## **Run the week**

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## **Theme Days**

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## **Block large chunks of time**

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# **The pain of email (and chat)**

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## **Check Three Time a Day**

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# People

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# **Succession planning**

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## **It is about the succession of the role**

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## **It is not just for Leadership roles**

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## **It is retention**

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## **It mitigates Single Points of Failure**

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## **Who's ready for their next steps?**

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# **One-to-Ones**

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# **Coaching plans**

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# **Delegation is useful**

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# **Learning**

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## **What is a Personal Knowledge Management System (PKMS)?**

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## **Capture**

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## **Curate**

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## **Crunch**

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## **Contribute**

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## **Refactor**

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## **Full of Dross**

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## **It is incomplete**

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## **Iterate**

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# Knowledge sharing

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# **Performance management**

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## **Performance is an ongoing activity**

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## **Annual performance reviews are not the problem**

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## **Keep performance notes all year**

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## **Keep it about behaviours**

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## **It is about improving performance**

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# Recruitment

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# **Workplace efficiency**

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# **What problem are we trying to solve?**

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# **Don't waste other people's energy and attention**

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# **Avoid gossip**

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# We don't operate at 100%

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# **Schedule leisure time**

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# **Schedule Tinker and Thinker time**

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# **Move fast**

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# **One thing at a time**

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# **Set deadlines**

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# **Trade your values wisely**

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# Show them what a good manager does

To round out this mini book I would like to encourage you to show everyone what a great manager is.

Writing a painted picture and setting goals is very powerful, but showing people your routines, discipline and high standards of behaviours is more powerful.

Behave in ways you would like others to behave. Do the work you would like others to do. Work the routine you would like others to do. Our teams always become a reflection of us in some way, shape or form. If we want high levels of behaviours, role model them.

The single best way to build a culture of kindness, wellbeing and positivity is to demonstrate it everyday through your behaviours.

Be positive, challenge poor behaviours, treat people with kindness, take breaks, schedule your energy and attention and deliver value.

Try not to ask your people to behave in ways you yourself are not prepared to.

We cannot control the outcomes of our energy and attention, we have no idea how much time we have in our sand timer and we have no idea what is going to happen next week or the week after that.

The now is where life is lived. It pays then, to live in the moment and show the world what great management is.

I do hope this book has been helpful and inspiring.

Paint a picture of who you are striving to become based on behaviours.

Set goals around the value you'd like to bring to the world.

Use those goals to set routines and processes.

Follow the routines and processes to create habits.

Let go of results outside of your control.

And go forth and live in the now - it's all there ever is.

Enjoy the good life.

Rob..