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Smarter, Better, Faster – Increasing Our Productivity

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For Christmas last year, I was given a subscription to Audible – the digital audio book service. I am a purist when it comes to my reading habits – I like the feel of paper in my hands – so I was skeptical. In the months since, I have discovered it is a great way to maximize my abundance of windshield time. Early on, I realized I was a danger to myself and others if I listened to novels while driving (get a little too into the story and forget where I'm going!), so I've restricted the habit to non-fiction, a genre I have never been into in the past. I just finished a book by New York Times journalist Charles Duhigg called *Smarter, Better, Faster: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business*. Balancing being a vet and a mom to two small boys always has me looking for ways to prioritize and organize my time. As I listened to the techniques described in the book, I realized many of them could be used by our hardworking clients who are always trying to juggle more demands than there are hours in a day. I like Duhigg's definition of productivity - "Productivity put simply, is the name we give our attempts to figure out the best uses of our energy, intellect, and time as we try to seize the most meaningful rewards with the least wasted effort." Doesn't it feel sometimes that we just spin our wheels jumping from task to task without ever accomplishing anything? How can you use your talents to maximize the most for your farm? How can you inspire your employees to do the same? What follows are just a few highlights from the book that might help increase your productivity on the farm, in your staff and at home.

When struggling with the motivation to act, create an "internal locus of control". We see the world as a combination of things that happen *to* us (an external locus of control) and things that happen *because of* us (an internal locus of control). For example, a student does terribly on a test and thinks, well the room was noisy so I couldn't focus (external locus of control) OR I probably could have studied a little harder (internal locus of control). The terrible milk prices are a good example of an external locus of control – they are an external factor that we are nearly powerless to change. To create an internal locus of control would be to increase milk production on your farm, find a new niche market to increase value or look for cost saving measures. Focusing your attention on the parts of the puzzle that you can control will improve your motivation to keep moving forward. The same philosophy can help inspire us to tackle unpleasant tasks. Duhigg describes when trying to find the motivation to act, "Find a choice, almost any choice, that allows you to exert control." I personally use this technique with my five year old – every Saturday he gets to choose one of three chores to do first. Being able to choose makes him feel in control which motivates him to act of his own will.

"Reactive thinking" can help us achieve tasks, until it stops us from seeing problems. Duhigg describes it this way; "Reactive thinking is how we build habits, and it's why to-do lists and calendar alerts are so helpful: Rather than needing to decide what to do next, we can take advantage of our



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reactive instincts and automatically proceed.” I see this at work in parlors all the time. Employees are on autopilot, performing the same routines over and over to the point where they can be done without thought. This routine practice is great for cows – providing them the consistency they crave. It’s why veterinarians create milking routines in the first place! But reactive thinking may make our actions so automatic that they stop our ability to see problems when they arise. For example, milkers know to start cows as part of the procedure, but fail to notice the watery milk that comes from the quarter. It’s not necessarily because they don’t care, but that the action has become so automatic it fails to trigger a red flag. We can help workers avoid these “tunnels” of thought by frequent retraining or by having an outsider observe the process from time to time to help you identify these missed opportunities.

Use both stretch and SMART goals to envision a future for yourself/your business. Dr.

Wadsworth has written in past newsletters about “SMART” goals – goals that use these catchy criteria to help us be successful: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. So instead of “I want to get back in shape” (for a hypothetical example ☺), it’s “I’m going to train for a half marathon in September (specific and timely) by running 15 miles a week (measurable) starting with three miles, five days a week (achievable), which will improve my fitness (relevant)”. Now maybe that example doesn’t meet any of your own personal SMART criteria and you think I’m nuts, but clearly I’m much more likely to succeed at my vague goal of improving my health by making it a SMART goal that gives me details to keep me on track. Using these tools can help break down an overwhelming task into more manageable components. In fact, Duhigg describes how the SMART goal setting technique can help us take a “stretch” goal, something you never thought possible, and make it a reality. What have you always wanted for your farm business? Sometimes, when things get tough and the world exerts its external locus of control, we stop dreaming. Take that big dream you have and see if you can carve it into SMART components that you can control. You might be surprised what you find.

I hope these few tidbits provide a little bit of inspiration and I highly recommend trying out Audible or another audio book service to make the most of your tractor windshield time!

Website Reboot

Northwest Veterinary Associates is undergoing a website renovation this month! Soon you will be able to scroll through previous newsletter topics by subject and have better access to other excellent resources through our website. For example, I was considering writing a newsletter this month on Pink Eye and its management, when I realized Dr. Maslack wrote an excellent piece on this last spring. Access all this information and more soon at nwvetvt.com!

Duhigg, Charles. *Smarter, Better, Faster: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business.* , 2016. Print.