

## Getting Organised

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For me, my conservation career is a vocation. Its far more than your standard 9-5. I have wanted to be a conservationist for as long as I can remember and, it's what I believe I'm here to do. Admittedly, the pay isn't great (that's an understatement) but I feel lucky to have a job that I genuinely love, and that I feel is worthwhile. When I look at some of my friends who earn three or four times as much as me, but dread Monday mornings, I know I've made the right decision.

The problem with having a vocational career like conservation is that at times, it can become completely all-consuming. Just ask my wife, Louise. Even when I'm not working, I often find it difficult to switch off – my mind buzzing with thoughts of a current or future project, or maybe the latest movements of a satellite-tagged Osprey or White-tailed Eagle. I can't leave the office at 5pm on a Friday and forget about work until 9am on Monday. It just doesn't work. And I would argue that, if you really want to succeed at conservation, if you genuinely want to make a difference, then it has to be a way of life. I think the successes I have had in my career so far are because I have always been prepared to go the extra mile – not because I was trying to impress anyone, but because there is a feeling deep within me that I want to make a difference and that I truly believe in what I am doing.

But there is a problem with all this. This past summer has been one of the most memorable, but also most stressful, of my career so far. Earlier this year the Roy Dennis Wildlife Foundation – the conservation charity I work with as an ornithologist – was issued a licence to begin a reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles to southern England. In one sense it was the culmination of months of hard work behind the scenes, but in another way, it was just the beginning. Having been issued a licence in early April, we had only a couple of months before we would need to collect the first young eagles in Scotland to translocate to the Isle of Wight, while also working with a range of local stakeholders – from supportive to antagonistic – to ensure they felt fully involved in what we were doing. This was on top of a number of other projects, including the third year of the Poole Harbour Osprey Project – which, like the eagles, would involve collecting young Ospreys from nests in Scotland and then releasing them on the South Coast – a White Stork reintroduction in Sussex, and, of course, my work with the Osprey Leadership Foundation. It was all incredibly exciting, but also a little overwhelming.

In this week's blog Barry discusses the importance of personal effectiveness in becoming a good leader. How can we lead anyone, if we can't lead ourselves? Like many other people, one element of personal effectiveness I have always struggled with, is time management. Since meeting Barry and exploring leadership material with him, I have definitely improved and become more organised, but I am certainly nowhere near the finished article. It was clear to me at the start of the summer, however, that unless I managed my time well and was disciplined, I was going to be in trouble.

One of the first things I decided to do, was to start saying no. In the past I have often felt compelled to say yes to requests simply because I felt I ought to. In reality this often meant I was relieving other people of problems, while adding to my own. It was undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that people knew I was prepared to go the extra mile – and, whether consciously or not, they would take advantage of my goodwill. So, I decided that saying no should be high up on my list of things I needed to get better at. I also decided that if I was going to say yes, that I would ask the person when they actually needed the work to be completed. Quite often when people ask you to do something, they make it sound like the most urgent thing in the world, and yet this is often not the case. In today's world of instant communications, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by an inbox full of unanswered emails. To counteract this, if I get a request that is going to involve a bit of work, I try

and send a holding email to check exactly when the person needs a response. It's amazing how often a seemingly urgent request is actually not that urgent at all!

The other important habit I have tried to maintain, is to plan each week in advance. With so many plates to spin this summer, it was essential I planned my days carefully to ensure that I allocated sufficient time to each task. The problem with conservation, though, is that quite often things don't go as expected. There have been many times in recent months when the best laid plans have gone awry. I mean, who can predict when a White-tailed Eagle is suddenly going to go off on a flight over central London, or a young satellite-tagged Osprey is going to be lost in Morocco? OK, so perhaps these are extreme examples, but hopefully you get my point. When you're dealing with nature, unexpected things often crop up at the last moment, but that shouldn't stop you trying to be as organised as possible the rest of the time.

So how I have I done? Well, for one thing, we successfully translocated and released all of the young White-tailed Eagles, Ospreys and White Storks this summer. There were times when I felt on top of everything and others when I was definitely not. To be honest it has probably been the most stressful few months of my career, partly because of the high-profile nature of the eagle project, but also because of the sheer volume of work and the unpredictable nature of the different projects. I still haven't been as good as I should have been about saying no, and being more disciplined with my time, but as Barry points out this week, it's not about being perfect – it's about trying make small improvements each week. And that's something I am still trying to do.

When I look back over the summer – particularly the fact that there are now young White-tailed Eagles flying over southern England after an absence of over 200 years – I know that it was all worth it. But I could still do with getting better at managing my time.