

The Power of 3

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Here's a question: when people ask you how work is going, how many times do you answer, "It's really busy". I have to put my hand up here; over the years I must be one of the worst offenders. The problem is that in today's world it's almost as if we can only be regarded as successful if we appear to be really busy. But busy definitely doesn't always mean best – and that's where having clarity and simplicity for you and your team really comes in.

One of the difficult aspects – as well one of the joys – of working in conservation is that it is a vocation. This means that it is often tempting to try and take on too much. I should know, it is something I often struggle with. But the reality is that if you're overworked and tired then you won't be productive anyway. That's why I think the 'Power of 3' as Barry describes this week is so important. This requires you to focus on the three most important goals and dedicate 70% of your time each week to them. If other things have to wait, then so be it. You will find that, in the long run, you'll actually get more done if you take this approach.

One of the key things I have learnt by working on leadership material with Barry is that we can't do everything. If you have a strong work ethic then it is often difficult to say no to things, but being disciplined in how you organise your time is absolutely essential if you are going to get things done. And that is where the Power of 3 comes in.

As is so often the case with being an effective leader, it is essential that you get your own time organised before you begin to think about people in your team – whether they be staff or volunteers. Each week I try and plan my time according to my own Power of 3. This has proved a challenge over the past year in particular, with lots of different projects on the go, but it's amazing how liberating it can feel to ensure you are spending the bulk of your time – around 70% of each week – on the most important things. There are times, like this summer, when planning like this goes out of the window, but as long as that is the exception, rather than the rule, that's fine. It's also important to challenge yourself with your Power of 3. Don't simply go for the easy options. Think about a specific project or initiative that you've wanted to get off the ground but haven't had the time to do – and make time for it. Push yourself out of your comfort zone and talk to your line manager about it.

Once you begin planning your own time according to your Power of 3 then you can think about people around you. They might be staff you line manage or volunteers who work for you. The chances are that, either way, they will be helping to deliver your own Power of 3. If that is the case then it is essential that you provide clarity: what are you are trying to achieve and why? It doesn't matter what kind of project you are working on: whether it is habitat management or organising events for the public, the principles are the same. If you want your team to be really motivated it is essential that they are clear on exactly what you want them to do, and why. Without this, even the most enthusiastic people will eventually become de-motivated. And if you do line manage staff, encourage them to think about their own Power of 3 and how you can ensure they have the time and resources to deliver those goals.

Much of this may sound like common sense, but it is amazing how easy it is to get distracted in day-to-day issues and general 'busyness' and lose sight of the bigger picture. Think about how clear you are on your own Power of 3 and how much time you spend on them each week. Talk to your boss about it, and talk to your team about it. It's only when you start to focus on what is truly important that exciting things start to happen.