

Take immediate action

In the final part of this series, Jane Lelean explains why getting unpleasant tasks off your plate quickly can make them easier to stomach

You can't cross the sea by merely staring into the water.

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In my previous articles I have discussed tools that will enable you to focus on the most profitable aspects of clinical dentistry and the most important areas of your life. Now I would like to turn our attention to how we can get to grips with a 'to do' list that seems never ending.

When I was a child, I really did not like broad beans and my sister did not like Brussels sprouts. There was a rule at our family meal table – we had to eat only one of what we didn't like. My sister and I developed many strategies to deal with the solitary broad bean or sprout. Mine allowed me to finish my meal and enjoy myself but those my sister chose left her sat at the table for what often seemed like many hours after everyone else had finished.

There are often times when there are things on our agenda that we don't enjoy but that are good for us and the health of the business, much like my broad beans. In this article, I will give you some tips that

have helped my clients get things done.

Over and done with

When applied to activities, the Parito rule indicates that 20% of your activity will account for 80% of your results and the remaining 80% of your activity will account for only 20% of your results.

My sister used to chop her sprouts into tiny pieces, taking a lot of time and spreading green stuff around

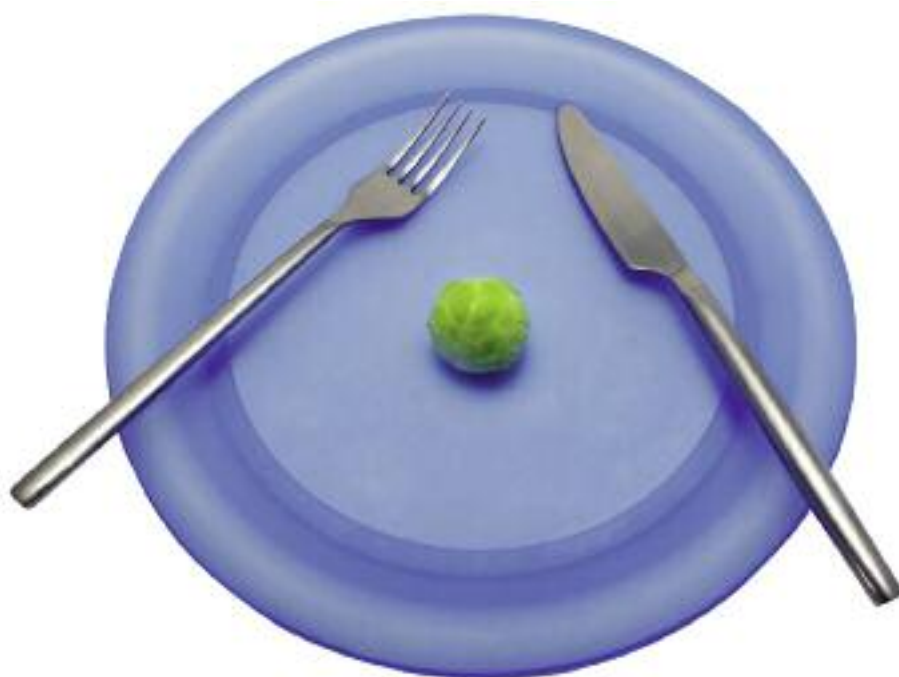
her plate contaminating the other food, which, in turn, made it more unpleasant. However, I used to eat my broad bean in one swift mouthful, over and done with.

What are the things on your 'to do' list that you are spending a lot of time and attention on and having little effect? How can you approach this task and complete it with less time and effort? Do you spend a lot of time in

unnecessary preparation, rather than just getting on with the job at hand? What difference would it make if you spent less time having greater impact?

Consider what else you want to do

As I have mentioned, my sister would often avoid her one sprout and was frequently left sitting alone at the table, staring at a solitary sprout, while the rest of the family



had finished and were having fun doing other things. I used to confront my bean and deal with it quickly so I could move on to do things that I enjoyed.

What is on your list that you stare at and avoid dealing with? What would you rather be doing? What is that thing that you delay from week to week, which distresses you because it is always there? How can you deal with your 'sprout' so you can move on and do the things that you enjoy instead?

'Fake' is a short-lived triumph

There is an occasion that is one of the oft-repeated tales about my sister and how she dealt with Brussels sprouts. She put the offending green orb in her mouth and announced she felt sick, running off to the toilet and spitting out the sprout. My parents were not fooled by that ruse and rules are rules, so one had to be eaten. My sister returned confident that she had victory and she had avoided eating her sprout, only to find another one on her plate. What a lot of effort and energy for no achievement.

So, what are you pretending to deal with on your 'to do' list that will return unless you actually get on and do it?

Mitigate the problem with something you like

If I didn't eat my broad bean whole, I often used to wrap it up in a piece of juicy, succulent meat or a crispy, golden Yorkshire pudding to disguise the taste and texture of the squidgy bean inside a leathery coat. This was a strategy that worked very well for me.

If you were to use this approach to deal with those things on your list you just can't face, what can you wrap them up with? For example, if you have to sort out stacks of journals or papers and you want to spend time with your kids, how can you combine the two?

Prepare and go for it

My favourite way of dealing with having to eat one broad bean was to fill my mouth with water, squeeze the bean in and swallow it whole. It was brilliant – no chewing, no foul taste or texture. This technique did take a little preparation and practise. On the first few attempts I dribbled water, couldn't get the bean in when my mouth was full of water, and occasionally the bean got stuck. Eventually I mastered the technique and to this day I don't think there is a pill large enough to prevent me swallowing it!

So with items that linger on your list, what preparation can you do and what skills you can develop that will allow you to tackle that task so in future you can accomplish it masterfully?

At some point or other, we all have things we have to do that we would rather not, whether it be filling in a tax return, addressing inappropriate behaviour and attitude from a team member, or updating the practice protocol manual. What I have recognised in my clients is that when they are able to look at these chores differently they become manageable. 🦷

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