

The logo for 'The New York Enterprise Report' is a blue rectangular box. Inside, the words 'THE NEW YORK ENTERPRISE' are in a smaller, white, sans-serif font at the top. Below that, the word 'REPORT' is written in a very large, bold, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the box, the tagline 'Increase Revenue. Reduce Costs. Build Value.' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

**THE NEW YORK ENTERPRISE  
REPORT**  
Increase Revenue. Reduce Costs. Build Value.

**May 11, 2006**

As a small business owner, wouldn't you love to increase the number of days that you get through your entire To Do list? Wouldn't you love to reduce the days when you bog down in email or phone calls and never finish your work? Leverage the Premack Principle and make it happen.

Behavioral psychologist David Premack recognized that an enjoyable behavior could be used to motivate animals to perform a less-enjoyable behavior. In human terms, requiring a child to clean his room before he can watch TV, for example, is an effective way to get the room cleaned. If parents allowed a child to watch TV first, the room would never get cleaned.

Why does the Premack Principle matter to you? Unfortunately, we generally work the other way around at the office: we put off the most unpleasant tasks, preferring instead to do other, more enjoyable tasks. As a result, we don't get around to actually doing those things in a timely fashion. The phone call to the angry customer, the confrontation with our subordinate, the expense report we need to fill out – these are tasks that all too often are postponed.

More pernicious, however, is the way in which this postponement destroys our overall efficiency. In order to delay as long as possible the ugly reality of tackling those tasks, we actually slow down the pace at which we do the more pleasant jobs – subconsciously, we're stalling. We actually work more slowly so that we can avoid the unpleasant jobs, with the result that we get sucked into a seemingly endless batch of emails, or an unusually long meeting, or we end up doing other unimportant and non-essential chores. When the end of the day arrives, it's "too late" to call that customer or confront our subordinate. We're no different from the child who eats dessert first, and then pushes the Brussels sprouts around the plate for 20 minutes, hoping that her mother will excuse her from the table before she has to eat them.

The solution? Do the "worst-first." When you arrive at the office in the morning, determine the worst task you have and do it first – before email, before phone calls, before coffee. When you return from lunch, do the same thing: get the most unpleasant task out of the way first.

You'll be amazed at the difference. You'll get your work done more quickly. You'll power through your To Do list. You won't "run out of time" quite as often. And best of all, you won't feel the dread of that nasty task hanging over your head.

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