

Eat That Frog!

Based on the book by **Brian Tracy** · the full text of our ten-minute episode, to read, highlight and keep.

Independent summary of the book's key ideas, in our own words. Not affiliated with the author or publisher. Nothing replaces reading the book.

At Harvard, a political scientist named Edward Banfield spent years on one stubborn question. Why do some people move up in life, financially and socially, while others with the same start stay where they are? He expected the answer to be family, or schooling, or connections, or raw intelligence. Those mattered less than he thought. What he found was one habit of mind, and it had nothing to do with where you came from. Brian Tracy puts this finding near the center of his book. Hold that thought. We will come back to Banfield at the end, because his answer explains why one small morning rule works so well. And you'll leave with one thing to do before tomorrow morning.

This is an independent summary of the main ideas in *Eat That Frog!* by Brian Tracy, in our own words. We're not affiliated with the author or publisher, and nothing replaces reading the book.

Here's how this works. One book, about ten minutes. At the end you get a short summary and one thing to do today. That's how the ideas stay with you.

The title comes from an old saying, often credited to Mark Twain, although nobody has found it in his writing. If the first thing you do each morning is eat a live frog, you can go through the rest of the day knowing the worst is behind you. In Tracy's book, your frog is your biggest, most important task. The one you are most likely to put off. The one that would make the biggest difference if you got it done. The saying comes with two rules. Here is the first. If you have to eat two frogs, eat the ugliest one first. In other words, when you have two important jobs, start with the harder, more important one. The second rule I'll save for the end.

Tracy's first point is that you can't eat the right frog if you don't know what it is. He calls this setting the table. Decide exactly what you want. Write it down, because a goal that only lives in your head stays vague. Give it a deadline. Make a list of everything you'd need to do to get there, and put that list in order. Then do something toward it right away, and do something toward it every single day. He also argues that planning pays you back many times over. His rule of thumb is that every minute you spend planning saves you about ten minutes of doing. So he asks you to make your list for tomorrow the night before, and to work from a list every day.

Next comes the old eighty twenty rule. In most lists, a small share of the items produces most of the value. Give yourself a list of ten tasks, says Tracy, and two of them will be worth more than the other eight put together. The trap is that the valuable tasks are usually the hard ones, and the easy ones feel productive. So people clear their inbox, tidy the desk, and answer small questions, and at the end of the day the big thing is still sitting there. How do you tell which task matters most? Look at the consequences. An important task is one whose results, good or bad, will still be felt months or years from now. A task with no real consequences can wait, or can disappear.

To put this into practice, Tracy gives a simple sorting method. Before you start, mark each item on your list with a letter. A is something you must do, with serious consequences if you don't. B is something you should do, with mild consequences. C is nice to do, with no consequences at all. D is anything you can hand to someone else. E is anything you can drop completely. Then the rule: never do a B task while an A task is still waiting. If you have several A tasks, number them. Your A one is your frog. Tracy adds a related idea he calls creative procrastination. You will never do everything, so you will always be putting something off. The question is whether you choose what to postpone, or let it happen to you.

Another way to find the frog is to look at the few areas your job really depends on. Tracy calls them key result areas. A salesperson has to find prospects, present well, and close. A manager has to plan, hire, and develop people. In each area, ask how good you are, because your weakest key skill tends to limit everything else. And he offers a question worth repeating every day. What can I, and only I, do that, if done well, will make a real difference? Usually the answer is something that nobody else can do for you. If you don't do it, it won't get done.

Tracy also gives you a way to find the frog when everything feels urgent. He calls it the law of forced efficiency. There is never enough time to do everything, but there is always enough time for the most important thing. To use it, imagine you just learned that you have to leave town tomorrow for a whole month. Before you go, you can finish only one or two things. Which ones would you make sure to get done? Whatever you name, that's your frog, and you can start on it today. He also suggests acting as if you had that deadline even when nobody gave you one. Most people wait for pressure from outside. The people who get the most done put that pressure on themselves.

Once you know your frog, the book is clear about how to eat it. Start first thing, before email and messages pull you in. Tracy is blunt about technology here. It's a wonderful servant and a terrible master. Turn off the alerts, and keep blocks of time with no interruptions. Then work on that one task without stopping until it's done. He calls this single handling. Every time you put a task down and pick it back up, you pay a cost to get going again. If the frog is too big to eat in one sitting, slice it. Commit to one thin piece, like one slice of salami, and finish that piece. Finishing a small piece gives you momentum, and you often keep going.

Before you start, Tracy says, get everything ready. Clear your desk, gather what you'll need, and sit down as if you mean it, because a cluttered start is an easy excuse to stop. Then, once you begin, notice how finishing feels. Completing an important task gives you a real lift, a sense of energy and confidence. Tracy argues that you can get hooked on that feeling, in a good way. Every frog you finish makes the next one easier to start, until starting with the hardest thing is simply how you work. He also asks you to manage the voice in your head. Talk to yourself like a coach, not a critic. Instead of telling yourself it's too much, say, I can do this, and pick up the first slice.

Now, back to Banfield at Harvard. After all those years, the factor he found was what he called time perspective. How far into the future do you think when you decide what to do today? People who moved up tended to make today's choices with the next five, ten, or twenty years in mind. They would accept a little discomfort now for a much bigger payoff later. People who stayed stuck tended to choose whatever felt best right now. That's the frog. Doing the hard, important task first is long term thinking practiced one morning at a time.

And here is the second rule of the frog. If you have to eat a live frog, it doesn't pay to sit and look at it for very long. Thinking about the task, dreading it, and planning to start later only makes it bigger.

So why does Road MBA start with this book? Because everything in the next thirty days depends on one habit: doing the most important thing first. Negotiation, persuasion, leadership, money. None of it helps if the important work keeps getting pushed to later. Every other book in this series gives you a skill. This one decides whether you actually use it. That's why it comes first.

So from today, listening to these ten minutes is your first frog of the day. Every day, for the next thirty days, you eat it first. And today, you already did.

Three things to keep. Your frog is the task with the biggest long term consequences, usually the one you most want to put off. Mark your list A to E, and never do a B while an A is waiting. And eat it first thing, without stopping, one slice at a time.

Your one thing for today. Tonight, write tomorrow's list, mark each item A to E, and circle your frog. Tomorrow, eat it before you open email.

See you tomorrow.

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