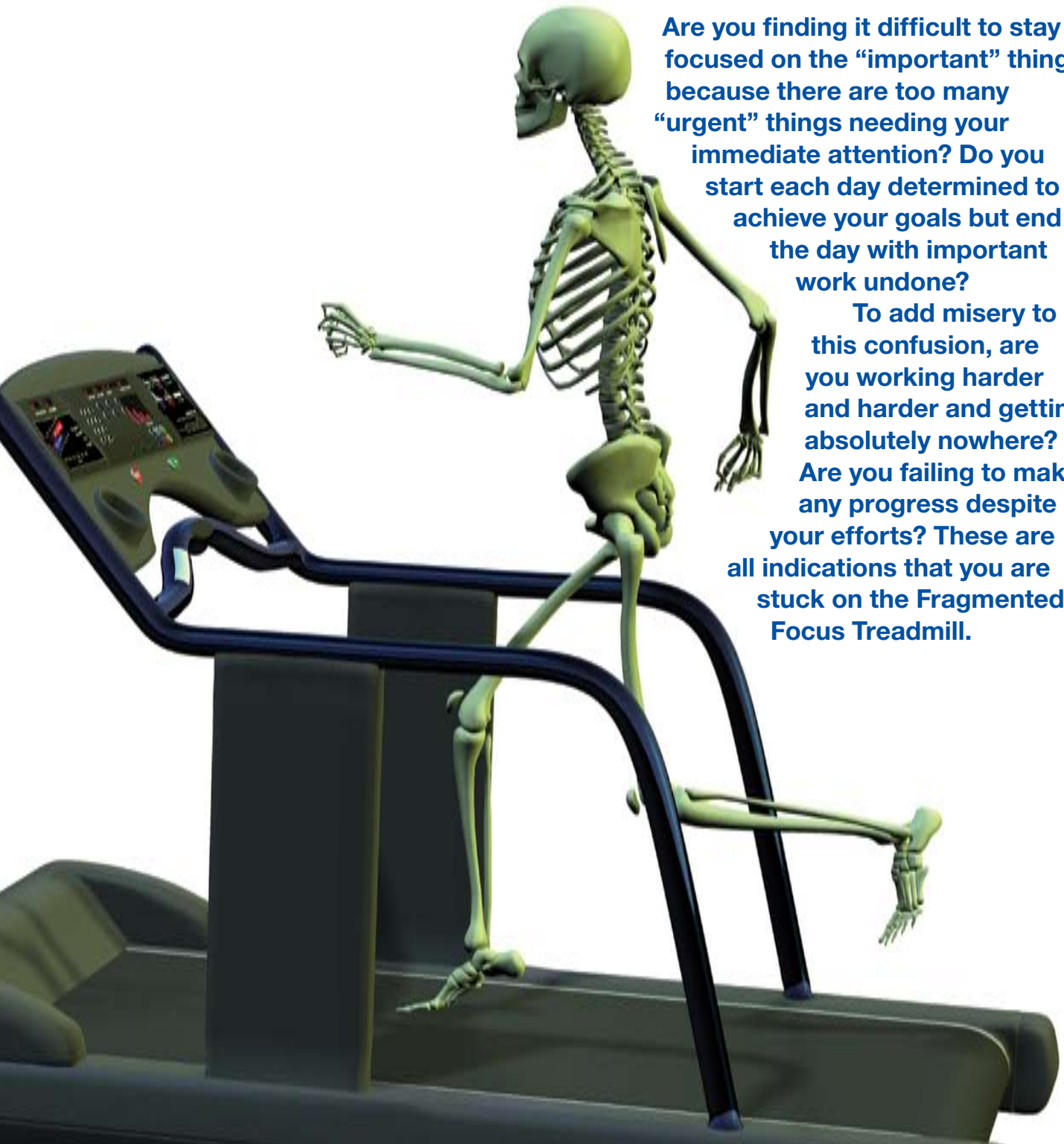


THE FRAGMENTED FOCUS TREADMILL

by Nick Hughes

Are you finding it difficult to stay focused on the “important” things because there are too many “urgent” things needing your immediate attention? Do you start each day determined to achieve your goals but end the day with important work undone?

To add misery to this confusion, are you working harder and harder and getting absolutely nowhere? Are you failing to make any progress despite your efforts? These are all indications that you are stuck on the Fragmented Focus Treadmill.



The treadmill is harmful to your health and to the health of your business. It causes great stress without much reward and it stops business growth. To grow a successful business you must get off the Fragmented Focus Treadmill. Better still, you must not get on it in the first place.

Here are some early warning signs:

- You are spending too much time on low value activities.
- You are tired, overwhelmed, and concerned about the future.
- There is no time to plan and manage the growth of the business.
- You are reacting to situations instead of being proactive.
- Your business is not growing despite your increased efforts.
- You do not have powerful objectives with a detailed road map to success.
- The original passion and purpose for your business has faded.
- You have no personal life outside of the business.
- You do not have a clear vision of your future.

If these signs are present then you may be stuck on the Fragmented Focus Treadmill. Fear not; here are three strategies to get you off the treadmill and back to growing a successful business.

Plan the future

The first step is to develop a strategic plan to map out the future of your business. This is not a sheet of paper that has a few scribbles on it about the revenue you want to generate. It is a carefully thought out plan that contains measurable three year objectives, each of which are broken down into one year strategies and detailed action plans to achieve the objectives. The criteria for an effective strategic plan are:

- It must be SMART. That is, specific, measurable, action oriented, realistic, and timed.
- It must be documented.
- It must be communicated to your team. That is, anyone who supports you or is helping you.
- It must be used on a daily basis.
- It must be flexible because we expect the unexpected!



Stay focused

A strategic plan alone will not get you off the Fragmented Focus Treadmill. You must ensure your weekly planner is reflective of your strategic plans and is focused on the critical issues. With this in mind, create a short-term planner that has the following three sections:

- The Critical Success Factors. These two or three projects are critical to the success of your business and therefore must get your attention.
- The Critical Contacts. These are people that you must contact during this next period in order to grow the business.
- The Critical Activities. This is your “to do” list but it only contains high value activities that must be done by you if you are to move your business forward. This is a good time to ask yourself: “Can someone else be doing this?”

With this tool you will stay focused on the “important” things and when you do get interrupted with an “urgent” matter you can deal with it quickly and get back to your focus. You stay off the Fragmented Focus Treadmill.

Delegate the low value activities

A strategic plan supported by an effective short-term planner will get you off the Fragmented Focus Treadmill. However, if you are still laden down by low value activities you will continue to find success an uphill battle. You must delegate low value work that can probably be done much better by other people. Delegation does not require employees. You can always outsource the work.

Before we head into some tips for good delegation recognize two things. One, delegation is not easy, and two, small business owners are particularly bad at delegation. So how do you overcome these hurdles?

Follow these simple steps:

- Identify one process you are doing that you really should delegate.
- Document the process, including deadlines.
- Determine the skills required.
- Identify the person who matches those skills.
- Teach them how to do the process.
- Give them the necessary authority and resources to do the work.
- Monitor the results.
- When everything is working ... let go!
- Go back to #1.

Now that you have a strategic plan with a road map for growth and you have a weekly planner that keeps you focused and you are working on high value activities, you will be having fun!

Moreover, your business will be growing. And you will have thrown the Fragmented Focus Treadmill into the garbage. **E**

Nick Hughes is President of Your Planning Partners. The company works with entrepreneurs who are serious about growing their business. They have a number of products ranging from half-day working sessions to their famous Strategic Focus Program™. They conduct regular seminars and publish an e-news for business owners who want to grow. For information about their programs, seminars and e-news visit their Web site at yourplanningpartners.com, or call 416 429-2415.