

# 22

## THE EIGHTH QUALITY ACTION STICK A FORK IN IT

### **F**INISH THINGS.

I once brought in a friend to help me get organized because I was feeling overwhelmed by how much I had to do. The first thing he did was have me go through my In and Pending boxes, piece of paper by piece of paper, and finish each one. If something couldn't be finished right then because information hadn't arrived, he made me make sure the information was on its way, or made me go get it. By the end of the day, my boxes had only a couple of things left in them, and I no longer felt overwhelmed.

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more of your energy – and time – than  
you can possibly imagine.*

A surprising number of people are what I call “95%ers.” They ALMOST finish things. They get a report ready to send, but don't make the needed copies until the last minute. They rake *most* of the leaves from the yard, but leave a few under that awkward bush. They paint the whole office, and miss a couple of spots. It is almost as if they have some compulsion to leave things undone. Maybe it's their subconscious way of making sure there will be a future. Whatever the reason, if you suspect you might be one of these people, I say to you Finish Something. Decide to finish reading this chapter, and do it. Prove to yourself that you CAN finish things. Then make a game of it: after every action, ask yourself, “Have I finished?” Only stop when you can say yes.

This action does not say Finish Everything. It doesn't even say

Finish What You Start, which is one of the silliest pieces of advice ever given. People start far more things than they can ever finish, so to say Finish What You Start is to ask the impossible, and any advice to do the impossible is very silly advice. It is not unusual to start something, and later decide it is not something you want to do, or at least, not as important as other things you want to do.

Unfinished tasks (the ones that you want to do or have to do) absorb an enormous amount of attention, attention you could use on making things better. If you have started writing a book, but haven't finished, a lot of your attention will be on that book. Not every minute, but many minutes and hours scattered over days and weeks. The same goes for any unfinished task that you still intend to finish, both small and large.

As a business owner, you constantly have ideas of new approaches to marketing, analyses you want to make, systems you want to set up. You are faced with frequent interruptions and fires to put out. How can you get anything done?

By Finishing Things. Please, please, PLEASE take advantage of this Action. Finishing Things will free up more of your energy – and time – than you can possibly imagine. Look around for any task that you have been putting off or that you have left incomplete, and finish it. So what if it is not your favorite thing to do? It's not going to go away. Get it done!

Part of the Action of Finishing Things, a related Action, you might say, is putting things away when you are done with them. I know, now I sound like your parents, but truth is truth. When you need a screwdriver, and it is not where it is supposed to be, it is because someone – maybe you – didn't put it away when they were done using it. The next time you are looking for something and it is not where it should be, think of this Action.

One more related note. One of the reasons businesses fail is because they don't promote enough. And one of the reasons they don't promote enough is because promotion usually involves a

series of steps, each of which has to be finished. It is not really that hard to send out 100 letters. It is only hard to finish each of the many steps that go into sending out 100 letters. And when you get right down to it, even that isn't all that hard. It is just a matter of finishing one thing, then finishing the next thing. Sooner than you expect, it is done.

How would you like it if, as the boss, you told your Promotion Director to send out a notice to all your customers that a sale was coming up, and two weeks later, found out that the mailing hadn't happened yet? It got hung up on some step along the way, which never got finished. As an owner or manager, you also have to get others to Finish Things. That means keeping track of what you have told them to do, and checking up on them occasionally.

What a joy it is to have an employee who, when you ask or tell him to do something, you feel confident will do it, so you don't need to check up on him. These are the exceptions, unfortunately. You would do well to keep a notepad on your desk just for orders given and requests made, with the dates, and review it daily. That will save your having to remember everything, which will free up your attention; it will make sure important actions don't fall through the cracks; it will quickly and accurately show you which of your employees need more supervision (and training) than others; and it will enable you to keep in touch with all aspects of the business without having to micro-manage.

Finally, you will find it much more pleasant, and much more productive, to work in an area that is not full of undone work. Piles of unfiled papers, unreturned folders, unsubmitted receipts, unsorted mail, and un-put-away tools, will create an atmosphere of desperation and despair. Their very existence will sap energy from you, and make you feel physically tired. You will end the day not with satisfaction glowing about how much you did today, but drained and dragging because of how much is obviously undone.

What does all this have to do with Quality? Besides all the obvious answers relating to your freed-up attention and brighter outlook on

life, Finishing Things means that those things will be done sooner than they would otherwise, which means that the overall delivery of your products will be faster, and errors and problems will be discovered and handled sooner, and everyone will be happier. Happier staff members do better work, and happier customers bring in more work to be done.

Try it. Set aside ten or fifteen minutes a day to straighten out your work space, whether it is an office or a warehouse, concentrating on the oldest undone areas first. Handle the heck out of them, so the unstraightened areas are gone, not to return. It won't take many days to find that you are working in a much nicer place.