How to reduce the chances of 'slippage'

The 80-20 rule was first discussed by Wilfredo Paredo, an 18th Century Italian economist who realised that 80% of the wealth of Italy was being generated by just 20% of the workforce. His take-away from this was to concentrate efforts on the vital 20% and ignore the trivial 80%. However, when it comes to behaviour, it appears that the actions we take 80% of the time are what determine our overarching achievements, and that, if kept to that level, the remaining 20% may be an irrelevant diversion.

20%

Bestselling author and health guru Jason Vale, who also happens to be a good friend, tells a true story of a friend who when he came to visit had a rather large chocolate cake on the table with a few hefty slices missing. Knowing that his friend supposedly committed to shedding weight he feared the worse, and couldn't stop himself from gazing at the cake that was just sat there begging to be eaten. As if reading his thoughts the friend piped up, "Don't worry about the cake!" Confused, his look was enough to beg the question, how could he not be worried, but his friend continued, "I weighed myself this morning, then I ate the cake, so I weighed myself again and hadn't put on any weight!" The story may be amusing but it has a more serious implication, in that even the most intelligent of us can find excuses to suggest that our damaging behaviour is an unimportant element in the big scheme of things, even when it isn't.

"Slippage happens when damaging actions make up more than 20% of all of your behaviours. Typically people start off well but then add new and more damaging 'stuff' to their daily routine. Before long, 20% has become 25, then 30, and so on. The only way to keep yourself from slipping is to know what you are doing."

Calibrating your behaviour

There's no substitute for measuring actual behaviour rather than pretending you can estimate what you 'might' do. You already behave in ways that are sometimes in support of your aims, and in other ways that don't. All you need do to measure those behaviours is set up a spread sheet to help you analyse the past ten days. If they happen to be an 'odd' ten days, like you were on holiday, or there was a birthday, wedding or something else, then don't use that particular ten day stretch. Find ten days that are a fair representation of your usual behaviour and then estimate the time you regularly wake up and go to bed. For all the time in between, divide it into half-hour slots. Then allocate each slot to determine if it falls into behaviour that supports you, or that doesn't. When you're done, add them up and calculate each total as a percentage of the whole. You'll soon see if you are achieving 80% or not.

By the way, there's no point in cheating!

Martin Goodyer