

Figure Out Your Key Priorities with Diamonds, Gold and Lead

Context

Nothing comes close to the heart of general productivity as doing the things you really want to do, doing them efficiently and getting desired results. However as time passes, we often accumulate activities that while not necessarily ones we can drop certainly don't seem to attract the high-level enthusiasm, commitment or drive.

In today's busy world, many people end up doing more and more work or tasks. People are often busy but also worn out, tired and dissatisfied. They might feel overcommitted, or caught in a frenzy of doing things not knowing why exactly. Some people opt for doing things that are easy when what they really want to do is something far more ambitious. This might take the form of an unfulfilling job, or relatively safe projects, or a 'good enough' relationship. Spending time on safe but not highly rewarding activities might be a good strategy during uncertainty. However, longer periods of it tend to result in lower morale, dissatisfaction and that all famous feeling of boredom! If protracted, this state can end up causing high stress, depression and generally lower one's health and sense of fulfilment.

The Diamonds, Gold and Lead exercise is good for identifying what's really important, what you are currently doing and what is and is not a good time investment. It will help you pinpoint activities that deserve more of your attention as well as raise your awareness about others that you might be outgrowing or have indeed long outgrown. Some of these tasks might still need to be done and the exercise will stimulate you to think about how to achieve them in a better way. Diamonds, Gold and Lead will provide you with greater clarity about what you're doing at the moment and what you need to change whether for career management, general work satisfaction or even arranging your daily or weekly work schedule for high level productivity by mixing up work as you would a well balanced meal. The exercise sorts all activities into five areas:

Diamonds: activities that are truly special and unique, things that help you develop and grow and which will improve your life massively.

Rough diamonds: activities that will turn into diamonds down the line and which are appearing on the horizon.

Gold: activities that are worthwhile because they contribute steadily to your resources, your worth, and your stability.

False gold: activities that appear to be gold but end up as energy sinkers and time drainers often disappointing and causing hurt.

Lead: activities that take time but which no longer contribute positively towards your present situation or your future.

Every activity at a specific point in time, in one's career, life stage can be assigned to one of these five areas. One of the key benefits of this highly beloved activity is that once assigned, you will automatically adjust your attention and time so that you concentrate on high level activities and begin to easily prioritise work in accordance with their position. I have found this exercise hugely fruitful when working with individuals, groups and even entire organisations. In fast changing times, it is imperative that you do not waste valuable time on activities that are no longer precious and keep your competitive edge by exploring and mining your figurative diamonds.

Exercise

1. Think about all the key activities you engage with currently in work and/or your life. This may include specific projects, relationships, activities, interests, groups etc.
2. Assign each activity to one of these five areas below: current diamonds, rough diamonds, gold, false gold and lead. You may want to take each area in turn or simply outline all in one go.

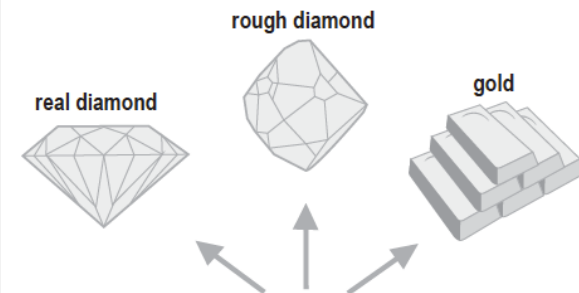


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NOTES:



Take away lessons

What people often observe when doing this exercise is that things have a way of moving around and they are not terribly aware of this. For example something that might have been gold at one point in time, may stay gold, transform into a diamond or turn into lead. Equally things that might have appeared to be lead can sometimes turn out to be rough diamonds. Imagine a network of casual contacts until one day, one of these people turns out to be the critical link or support you need, or the person becomes a very good friend. Or a product your company was developing as a sideline comes your unique selling point. Similarly a hobby can sometimes feel like false gold and turn into a lucrative business venture.

Many people spend disproportioned amount of time working up false gold and lead instead of rough diamonds not because they choose to do this, but because they have forgotten to stop and examine what they are doing. With more and more things to do it is easy to get lost in the activities and end up losing focus on the most valuable activities. The same holds true for teams and organisations. While very simple, this exercise can help you pinpoint key information in a short amount of time with high precision.

Reflective questions to help you develop your thinking and action:

Q1. What is your diamond or diamonds at this time?

Q2. What do you generally notice about where your effort and time goes at the moment? Where do you focus most of your attention and where do you focus none of it? Is this as it should be?

Q3. Can you find activities that are currently in the process of shifting positions? And which way are they shifting?

Q4. If you kept doing what you're doing now what are the likely outcomes?

Q5. How will this picture look in a month, six months, or a year from now?

