

The Elephant Technique

The "elephant technique" is an original TMI concept. The elephant technique is useful when you are faced with very large tasks, i.e. *elephant tasks*.

What are elephant tasks?

- *Overwhelming* tasks demanding prolonged effort
- Tasks in which *little progress* can be seen after each stage
- Tasks often *put off or reduced in priority* in the short term.

Examples:

- Developing a new product
- Learning a language
- Learning to use a computer
- Losing weight and getting fit
- Writing a book.

In TMI terminology these tasks are all "elephants". On the one hand, we are full of good intentions to "devour" them, but on the other, they seem almost impossible to "swallow."

Many people reason like this about their elephant tasks: "The elephant is too big for my mouth. I had better put off eating it until my mouth has grown large enough".

But it never does ... so ... no elephants are eaten either today or any other day.

In principle, the only way to eat large elephants with a small mouth is by making the elephant smaller. There are two different ways to do this:

1. You can distance yourself from them. View them on the horizon so at least they look smaller.
2. You can divide them into "bite-size" pieces.

Alternative 1: You can distance yourself from them

This method is often chosen. Take the well known example of *New Year's Eve*. We make resolutions for the coming year and gather herds of elephants on the horizon. From a distance, they seem very small and it is easy to feel confident about taking them all on. They are easily translated into New Year resolutions: "Next year, I really will spend more time with the children, lose weight, learn two languages, write my book, develop a whole new product range, and learn to play the violin."

Alternative 2: You can divide them into "bite-size" pieces

This method is the only one that can lead to results - to "eating" an elephant.



TMI's Elephant Technique

- Divide the elephant into "bite-size" pieces.
- Schedule regular "bites" of the elephant as "task of the day", "task of the week", etc.
- Make sure you "eat" a bite every day in addition to completing your other routine tasks.
- Make sure you finish the elephant.
- Concentrate on no more than 1 or 2 elephant tasks at a time.

The Elephant Technique is incorporated in the individual elements of the diary section: the elephant tasks of the day, the week, the month and the year.

Practical application of the Elephant Technique – Become a “development” person

Example: Learning French

Many people would like to learn a language, e.g. French.

When facing the challenge, they tend to think, "Mastering the French language is an enormous task. I only have a limited time in which to learn and anyway I am usually tired in the evenings when I do have time to study. What I can learn is so little that it is hardly worth bothering about, so I had better wait until I find an evening long enough to learn French!"

But such an evening never exists. "So, I do not learn French, but feel frustrated and inadequate as a result. I do not feel OK."

If you want to learn French, it is important that you do not take on the entire project (the whole elephant) at once. Instead make sure that you eat a small French elephant steak every day.

In other words, *we are not in the "learning French next year business" but in the "learning ten French words a day business."* If you can do this every day, and there is a good chance that you can, you will have learned 3,650 new words in a year.

Keep the words you intend to learn each day in your Time Manager and go over them whenever you get a spare moment. As you build up your vocabulary, you will gradually get closer to mastering the whole language.

Use the Elephant Technique - become a "development" person

In terms of the use of the elephant technique, there are two kinds of person: the "maintenance" person who works to maintain the status quo and the "development" person who applies the elephant technique to achieve development and change.

The "maintenance" person

- Uses all his/her time just to get by.
- Has no time for development projects or projects where the results cannot be seen immediately.
- Works simply to maintain the status quo, avoid problems and criticism and find short-term solutions.
- Is controlled by external influences: the telephone, the mail, interruptions and sudden whims.

To this person, things look pretty much the same at the end of the year as they did at the beginning. The person has not learned any new skills, nor has he/she been able to improve the status quo. This person's desire for improvement and development are never translated into action.

The "development" person

- Manages current tasks.
- Saves some time for developmental projects.
- Completes a small part of an elephant task every day.
- Is guided by the goals he/she has set for the future.

At the end of the year, this person has learned new skills and is more capable than at the beginning of the year. This person has grown. Conditions have improved in the areas this person is responsible for. Desires are translated into action.