



Puff.

Inhale. Exhale. Again.

Troy Forrest

"Yes but" nothing.

Sounds so gentle. "Puff". Cream. The Magic Dragon. Powder. Pastry.

Puff is the noise you make when you've got the engine in the red zone, chasing the hare with intent and effort and slobber rivulets migrating down your chin.

It's what the serious plan to be out of when they've had a genuine crack, when they put in and finally pause at an interim finish line of their choosing.

Puff is what you do on embers to reignite the flame. It's what steam engines do.

Puff burns fat.

Puff is a hit of Ventolin to open up sticky alveoli in your lungs that gets you back in the game and contributing. It's a CPR Oxygen gift for the almost cactus.

Puff is a blast of frigid morning air in your face that wakes you up and reminds you you're alive, you have opportunities millions would kill for, and that while your legs and ticker can still pump, you better not waste the chance.

Puff inflates. It expands. It's motion.

Puff is inhaling, exhaling, again and again.

This new e-series will be all about puff - stories, practices, examples, spurs, reminders and ideas to trigger more of them in professionals gunning for more.

Puff is the antithesis of "yes, but....".

Like their cigarette namesake, butts inhibit puff. They're cancerous to amazing results and growth. Puff is restorative and preventative. It's growth fuel. It's but antivenom.

Want to be great? You need puff. Disciplined puff.

Yes but nothing. Go get puffed.

Public, private & puff victories.

Consider three types of wins.

The public victory, where you make your intentions loud and clear and use the collective weight of fear-of-failure and the morbidly curious eyes of onlookers... and you nail it. The "look at me, I did it!" victory. The lavishing affections of admirers and ticker tape parades and doubters silenced.

The private victory, where, in the dark of night with no-one watching, you get to tread the high moral ground with the little voice and smile quietly. The secret you kept, the knowing you slayed an inner demon. A personal growth goal with a big tick through it.

Then there's the puff victories. The times you've put in, hurt, persisted, and irrespective of win, lose or draw, and irrespective of who was cheering for you or how much it meant to you personally, it had an impact. It altered a process. It raised a bar. Evolved a culture. It got seen by the next generation, 20 years after you did it, and was the catalyst for something bigger, someone else's better effort. A legacy victory. A change-the-way-we-think-and-move win.

These overlapping victory rings were inspired by my Sunday morning paper reading about a Greek migrant symbolic of thousands of determined battlers. Who arrived with pocket change and just wanted a better life for him and those that followed. Who tolerated hardship, made sacrifices, worked like a stock horse and built, little by little, to make his world better. Who maybe never gave one thought to who he might inspire down the track, in walks of life he never contemplated. But he did.

If you don't like failing in front of others, then use the public goal declaration to your discipline-application advantage.

If your toughest conversations are with the critics in your head when the lights go out, state your rationale and desired result, make a deal with it, write it down, and reflect on it (just you and the invisible one) each day to track progress.

And if you feel like it's hurting and the results aren't coming (but you know the endeavour itself is something to behold?) Push on.

You might just change a generation.

Making up time in the air.

Sitting in a workshop yesterday, the agenda blew out. The big boss got onto some important topics, the run sheet took a hit, and because the offsite leadership team summit was firmly ensconced in a finite capsule of time, something's gotta give.

The challenge now for this final of 2 days is to make up some time in the air. Fit 8 hours worth of remaining important stuff into 6. The razor awaits.

Whether it's a customer meeting that strays off agenda because you tapped into their pet topic or because you look at your watch and realise it's 4pm when you're only up to 12:30pm's worth of day tasks completed, making up time in the air is a critical discipline for goal achievement, personal satisfaction and leadership.

The challenge is;

- a. **Pull back to the goals** - what more than anything needs to be achieved (what first things must go first)? Reframe the agenda around the priority pillars, the bits they came for, that which'll have maximum impact.
- b. **More framework, less filler** - that doesn't always mean cull the small talk (depending on your goals, sometimes the small stuff is the most important), but on balance, which of the 2 elements you've got to cover in the next 15 minutes can be deferred, redirected, downsized or deleted?
- c. **Make it feel full** - it doesn't set an engaging tone when you hear "*oh, cr*p, we're running super-late, so here's the twitter version of this very important topic....*". Keep it tight, but do what you can to keep it light and positive and expectant and that, anticipatory of human timekeeping foibles as you are, this version is how you designed it... (just marginally more focused...)
- d. **Get a wriggle on.** You can rest when you're done. Now, move.
- e. **Use the power of great questions** - rather than run through the 42 tips list, can you pose a single thought-provoking question that will get an impactful result? "*What's 1 thing we could do....?*" If your solo time-make-up strategy needs to focus on using the last hour of the day for the 3 hours of work still on your plate, ask yourself the question - "*what more than anything else can I do to get one step closer to my goals now?*"

Time-in-the-air reclaiming is about focus, flexibility and foot-to-the-floor.

Clock's on.

The 4 P's of discipline support.

So you've got your goals (nod). Your plans are evolving (nod again). You've even defined a distinct list of next-action-steps that will trigger a momentum roll. Hey, the ninjas amongst you might have even diarised and time-homed the most important next things you can do to achieve the goals.

Top work!

It's not enough.

Discipline's the lotion that lubricates the forward motion. But it's tough for most. But it works. But it's tough.

4 P's to factor into your day today;

1. **People** - someone with your best interests at heart that's willing to ask you the questions, inquire about your progress, help retrain your eyes onto the prize, each and every day. Ask your boss, a colleague, a counterpart - recruit a reminder.
2. **Process** - Lay down a routine you follow each day, an agenda, a run sheet, a checklist, that aids the incorporation of the important into first position at the expense of the urgent.
3. **Products** - Use the technology, the diary, the pinging alarm reminder, the CRM, the rubber band you snap against your wrist if you like... something that prods you back to the proven.
4. **Posters** - draw them, type them up, stick 'em up on a wall, in front of your desk, on your screensaver, emblazoned on the foreheads on your kids in the picture that adorns your iphone. Constant visual reminders of what you know you've got to do today.

Discipline's nearly always the missing bit and it takes puff.

Help yourself apply it with helpers.

Bum glue.

When author Steven King is asked about the secret to writing a book, he simply says "bum glue".

The ability to stay in your seat longer. To persist and proof and polish when your body just wants to take you outside for air or coffee or chatter. Ploughing on even when you're staring at a blank screen or the numbers are blurring together or the laughter from the next room sounds so attractive. Not waiting for the muse - clunking on anyway. Prolific artist Chuck Close says "inspiration is for amateurs. The rest of us just show up and get to work." Think expense forms and budgeting processes and CRM updates and business plan creation.

Bum glue does its best work at a puff moment. That split second when, tiring, you lean back in your chair, stretch and let out an audible puff. In that very moment the distraction floodgates open in your mind. What else could I be doing right now? What are the opportunity costs I've been paying to do this important work that I'd really like to not pay anymore? I need chocolate! Birdsong! A fresh perspective - yes, that'll do it! I'm sure it'll re-sticky my bum glue?

Like Araldite, bum glue's a 2 part system. One part 'want' - having a damn good reason to want to stick at it, and one part 'will' - the ability to do just the next little bit, and then the next, and then the next...

Like Araldite, the longer you let it set, the more powerful it is.

It's why planes are great professional development forums. Just say no to the headphones and the meal (two words, "no thanks", said twice) and you've got a stuck-in-your-seat, distraction-free zone for devouring the knowledge-expanding book that's been sitting on your pile awhile.

It's why car trips are great for re-motivating yourself via seminar CD's or pod-casts.

It's why locked-door 2-day forums with your crew, challenging as they can be, harsh though the technology-free policy sounds (be firm), are powerful decision making platforms. No, you can't go outside. You can't take the calls. You can't let the reactive have its tanty and overshadow the good behaviour of the proactive. We're here to do the work.

Day by day, bum glue is your choice. Next time you're sitting at your desk and you hear that little puff come out of your mouth (do it right now - breathe in, purse your lips, then blow... that's the sound), imagine what a little bum glue might help you achieve.

Stick at it longer.

Running the court.

Last night, my basketball team farewelled its captain, who officially retired after 40 consecutive years playing the game. I've played with him for the past ten. A gentleman and a journeyman. I've tried to role model my on-court behaviour on his. Not always so successful, but he's been my unwitting disposition mentor.

Like all our motley crew, Peter's skill set was never going to get him a Chicago Bulls singlet. But his enthusiasm for the game is raw, usurped only by mounting injury and soreness tolls that with time become too expensive.

For the ten years he led our fluidly structured team, Peter submitted the paperwork, made the fill-in phone calls each week, paid and collected the subs, ran the bench, gave ra ra talks while we caught our breath and the dozens of other little bits that go into leading a team. His wife even washed our 'away' tops a few times a season - no-one would wish that on you. All without complaint.

The palaver of handling logistics, pumping up the tyres of others, managing your own soreness and negotiating the finite capsule of time we all get that feels ever-fuller, all just to get you running up and down a court for 40 fast minutes a week...

... you've got to really love it.

Steve Jobs said "you've got to love what you do, or you'll quit. You'll fail."

I hope you find yourself in a moment today, certainly this coming week, where you smile and think just for a split second, "you know, this is cool. I'm having fun. I like what I do. No, I love it." In the 8 hours you'll give your employer today, I hope there's one element of one item on the long to-do list you can identify that's so brilliant that it spurs you to battle through the bracken of the rest, the price of your platform.

I hope you find a love bit. If you're going to be willing to puff, I think you better.

We gave Peter a trophy last night that said "(semi) retired in 2012". We know his love of ball carrying will bring him back as an occasional pinch-hitter when we're short staffed. And we wanted to give him a constant visual reminder of what he loves.

Love your work...

Labour.

The Labour Day public holiday celebrates the achievements of workers.

Puffers.

What better way to celebrate than to do just a little today?

For your health.

For your family.

For your financial future.

For your professional development.

For your worldly wisdom.

For your career prospects.

For your sense of personal satisfaction.

For the aesthetic of your lawn and the value of your home.

For your penance after overindulging on Grand Final day.

For the sweat.

For your advantage.

Worthwhile, meaningful, make-a-difference work.

Don't be idle on Labour Day. Enjoy the work and what it's doing.

What they need you to be.

I've been reacquainting myself with Andrew Zuckerman's brilliant *Wisdom* book, in which he interviews Polish orchestra conductor Kurt Masur. The former director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra explains that when he was a happy, smiley young conductor, an experienced musician came to him and said "*Dear friend, as a conductor, you behave very badly. If we are not playing good enough, you cannot smile.*" Masur said he learned what musicians expect and need from a conductor - honesty. Not diplomacy - the truth.

Is your posture with the individual you're trying to help reflecting what *they* need, or what *you're* most comfortable delivering.

As a help facilitator, it's not about you.

What's most valuable for this person, in this situation, right now?

A velvet glove?

A forehead poke?

A plainly spoken truth?

A question to have them derive their own perspective-laced truth?

A story or analogy or metaphor that resonates so they get the message while saving face?

A smiling friend?

Or a poker faced reality clarifier?

In customer-touching or team-leading roles, the balance between wanting to be liked and needing to be valuable needs constant recalibration.

What does the next person you'll sit before need you to be for them?

Puff out and be it.

Quiet background puffs.

Successful hospitality and experience providers puff quietly in the background so you can breathe deeply, easily.

My crew stayed at the Renmark Big 4 Caravan Park this past long weekend. Immaculate and efficient. Bustling with holiday makers, sausage and bacon smells filled the air, but every communal bbq was shiny clean all the time. I spied a cleaner each morning in a quiet moment scrubbing what was already suitable to eat off. When one guest shipped out of a cabin, a cleaner was in there refreshing the space within 10 minutes. Swimming pools and playgrounds full of kids were sparkling and welcoming. Of an evening, when you might expect the noise police to make their patrols known, we didn't even know they were there. And it was quiet.

Sitting on the riverbank feeling like Tom Sawyer (even caught a catfish), I reflected on what made the place just that bit special.

Location's ripping, but lots of parks and resorts have top locations and don't draw rave reviews.

Facilities were schmick for a caravan park, but again,...

They charge like wounded bulls, but the line-up of people waiting to check in was huge.

I think quiet background puffs have something to do with it.

The little efforts to make it easy - bits that punters don't fundamentally need and wouldn't necessarily be super-impressed if they saw you making a song and dance about, but they value. The cleanliness. The speed. The systems. The clothes airer in the cabins. The 2 types of milk in your fridge. The maps, the welcome, the goodbye. Just doing what you're there as an experience facilitator to do, but then doing it really really well, in the background, to let your guests get on with the business of doing not much of anything at all.

You might be super-proud of your little touches, the bits you think make you better. You might want to advertise them. ("Free Tim Tam's in every cabin!")

Or you could let payers discover them all for themselves, in their own time, and be their own sales reps for your special kind of wonderful.

Puff, but do it where we can't hear you. Puff hard enough quietly enough, and it gets seen.

Focus.

Try being top hat in all things for everyone. It's invariably a deck-dropping car crash, a boggy muck you find yourself cutting never-ending donuts in, or you go a little mental.

Puff that produces needs focus.

If you're the A1 ring-a-ding-ding relationship developer in the crew, make it your focused platform to take your help results and beneficiary numbers and smiles to a new level. It's what you're great at, so apply it, internally, externally, continually.

If it's words you do well, write, lots, frequently. Speak them, put daily effort into developing vehicles of value that help many, frequently.

If your gift is ideas, look at a day-by-day channelled application for them - a means to put the problem-solving, trap-improving innate cleverness you've built up because you love it and you're good at it.... and font them out to help the chosen few.

If it's a chosen few that are your future, then stop looking at the shiny prospect objects over there.

To do what you do well by being diligent and focused on your strengths each day is critical....

...and it's also really hard. Impractical. Constrained. You can't just be a one trick pony, can you?

Organisations let you play to your strengths by creating other departments and roles to offset your Achilles heels and distractions. But you've still got to be multi-faceted.

The other bits can't be avoided, and probably shouldn't be.

But if you know what your *best* trick is?

I think you better have it on your daily disciplines checklist to ride that pony every day, even just a little.

Awe-inspiring tricks are hard to develop. You've got them. Figure out what they are and please help others with them.

Seven Salbutamol squirts.

Aside from general fitness and self-imposed mental hurdles that impact my sporadic exercise habits, I'm challenged by asthma, a sticky lung condition which limits fuel intake.

Salbutamol (Ventolin) is an inhaler designed to alleviate the breathlessness and up your puff.

Here's seven squirts you might consider to up yours today;

1. **Goals** (Objectives, Desires, Dreams, Visions, Wants, Outcomes, Happy Future Places) - whatever you call them, acquaint yourself briefly and clearly with what it is you're needing to put in puff to achieve. Does it *really* mean something important to you, as deep down as you can search? Review your inner belly fire-starter - take 5 and concentrate on visualising the goals.
2. **Disciplines** - the bit-by-bits that aren't hard, aren't complex, but just need doing, every day, to get you there. Are they on one simple list? Write one. Got it already? What's the next discipline on the list that can make a difference? Do one, straight away. Take one step forward.
3. **Phone a friend** - when it's hard to pump your own tyres, call a friend and pump theirs. Don't worry if they don't reciprocate - that's not the point. Be nice, be positive and encouraging, and the feedback loop inside your own head will work its magic.
4. **Make something** - take ten minutes to improve a tool, a form, a process, a cheat sheet, a sign. Create. Endorphins and freshness will power you through the more prosaic you'll return to.
5. **Realistic role-models** - look over at a colleague who's head-down, bum-up right now. If there's none there, pick one in your head you know would soldier on in this circumstance. Be like Mike.
6. **Bite-size it** - forget super-sizing. Make the next task as small as you can, down to a sentence, a word, a 30 second burst. Do nothing but that. Nailed it? Well done! Go to the next bit. Tiny forward steps done well build confidence and keep you keeping on.
7. **Self-gift a moment** - No-one's around to pat you on the back, and there's no trophy for the completion of the expense form you're battling. Appoint yourself Grand Poobah of the Troy awards committee, and reward yourself with a gift of time in the next 48 hours (a longer lunch or early mark or just 5 minutes indulging in water-cooler banter you're normally too disciplined to engage in). Time's the only thing truly finite. Give yourself some as reward for puff.

Salbutamol squirts aren't one-off cures. But they can help you progress to the next round of puffs.

Endpoint visibility.

Puff is easier when you can see where you're working to be.

The clearly prioritised top 3 tasks on today's to-do list, that, come hell or high water, you'll make it your business to nail before bedtime.

The number of required swimming pool laps written on the whiteboard at the start of your lesson.

The 12-month calendar of contact and support you've negotiated & committed to with your best clients.

The incoming cash target you're being measured on, that you can review progress towards each morning.

The finite size of the lawn you'll mow.

The kilo's you've decided you'll lose.

The time you'll run in.

The sworn-to values you'll uphold in each interaction you choose to partake.

Blurry targets - not being able to see exactly what needs to be done or where you'll stretch to - works against puff.

Clear and consistent leadership messages inspire puff. They let us operate confidently, safe because we know just what'll make the boss happy (rather than flying blindly and hoping).

Structured and prioritised days (calendars, task lists, call runs) support puffers. Breaking the day into units, even ones that carry flexibility for the reactive, lends to more sustained effort than a blank time canvas, which is overwhelming and fills itself with gasps and hyperventilation and sighs.

A pre-call plan - a business and partnership and mutual profit plan, complete with desired conversation outcomes - is a puff gyroscope, pulling you back to the right hard work when the conversation eddies or the client frustrates or time starts bleeding out.

It's hard to sustain effort if you don't know where the fences are, where the home fire is burning and the boiling kettle awaits. Don't deplete your soul because you don't know where the end is.

Set yourself some clear endpoints for your endeavours today, then put in the puff to get there.

People.

I've developed the opinion that the most powerful precipitator of extra puff isn't a burning desire to improve a process or a deadline you have to meet or even because it'll put some bonus folding in your skyrocket.

It's people. People inspire more puff.

Because you want to please them.

Emulate them.

Impress them.

Be the contrary opposite to the behaviours they showpony that irk you.

Inspire them to follow your lead or take up your offer or pat your back.

Because you like them. Despise them.

Care about them. Want to help them.

Because you want to spend more time with them (so will bust your foofer valve to put in and get the job done and get home to them).

Because you want to show them what can be done.

Because you don't want to let them down.

(Because "you" are people too.)

So it seems to me to make sense to make people the focus of your daily discipline reminders wherever possible.

Identify an individual whose life you'll make a thumbprint indentation on today and how.

Pick a performing person you'll actively copy - "How would they do it today?"

Decide to improve on the imperfect legacy of your predecessor in one simple way.

Choose a mentee that you'll gift a higher moral ground demonstration to.

Commit to three people whose shoes you'll remove and tip the stones out of to make their lives easier.

The process / deadline / reward stuff is just strategy to help you puff in a focused way for your select people.

Who's on your puff-for list today?

Hard as.

As you approach the first of many mental, physical or emotional hurdles your professional world will place before you today, how hard will you choose to be?

Hard as nails.

Hard as a tablespoon of cement.

Hard as getting out of bed an hour earlier in daylight savings.

Hard as whatever your default setting from the last task was.

Hard as updating the CRM after every call, every time.

Meh, hard as your mood is telling you it feels right now.

Hard as sticking to the plan in the midst of omnipresent change.

Oh, I can't be... hard as the bare minimum will allow.

Hard as taking critical feedback without sulking or dismissing it.

Hard as telling the truth without fail.

Hard as role-playing in front of your peers.

Hard as... whatever....

Hard as a child having chemo has to work to get out of bed.

Hard as the best in your space is readying themselves to be once more.

Hard as simplifying your cleverness into a short list of fundamental disciplines.

Hard as pre-call planning religiously.

Hard as saying no to the wasteful.

Hard as swallowing the cod liver oil.

Hard as puffing when you're almost out of puff (and you're never really out, just 'almost out').

Hard as it takes to get the job done. To take one step closer to the goal.

Your goal, ol' mate.

You know how to do the what.

You get to choose the how.

How hard as?

Planning candles one year out.

12 months ago today, I was hopping on a plane for my first real holiday since starting the business. I'd set the out-of-office autoreply, penned 10 of these daily notes ready to go in advance and shot off a few emails to key clients about projects I'd hit the ground running with when I got home. Today, I can reflect with a smile that it was a watershed day for my professional and family health, and I know the advance planning nailed on that day with 2 clients in particular paid big dividends for them (and subsequently me) this past year and beyond. I know this because I checked this date in last year's diary and 'sent emails' folder.

If I had a cake right now (and it wasn't 5am), I'd puff on the candles. To recognise some stuff worth celebrating.

All you need to do to get a birthday cake is stay alive another year.

A "Thanks for your service" certificate or plaque invariably comes if you just stick around a while.

Retrospective celebrations for tenure and effort over a period gone. Just because stuff happened.

But what if you actively planned to do something today worthy of celebrating exactly a year from today? If you chose to create an anniversary of a milestone moment, something worthy of puffing on some candles?

Is there someone whose world you're in a position to improve markedly and permanently in the next 10 hours?

What's one important-not-urgent initiative you could actually start, really start, that will change the way the client or the staff or the market things forever?

What's on the to-do list that, if done with a level of diligence and vision not previously contemplated, could etch itself in your memory in the same way you recall precisely where you were when someone died or some buildings collapsed or your family expanded or you took the job?

You don't have to, of course. This day could just be implemented per the plan, then blend into insignificance, just like twenty or thirty thousand other days in your life.

It certainly doesn't have to.

Go on, be a Devil. Mark your electronic diary 12 months from today with the words "Can I puff out some candles today?"

Hope you choose to make it so. Invite me for cake if you do?

The speed service conundrum.

We need to get you in and out quickly. We're about building a magnet, drawing you in, negotiating the conversation, understanding your drivers, fixing your woes, ticking some of your goal progress boxes, charging you appropriately, then getting you to moving aside or out or identifying new needs and problems we can fix and tick and charge you for. Fast.

But we need you to know we love you. We're invested in your result. We want you to like us, trust us, build the relationship. We are service on a stick.

But to do that sustainably, we've got to pay for the whole shebang, to develop and deliver services and products that are ever-better and more valuable to you, that fix things quicker, more efficiently. That'll make us more magnetic.

But to do that, we need more cash - either more of yours or more of someone else's.

And to do that, we need to take our eyes off your current service needs and put them on growth places. And that means compromise and processes that prop up the service model while our finite people and time resources go to work on the better mouse traps.

And while we're automating to keep *nearly* close to you while we trailblaze, we're maybe not talking to you so much, not giving you the time and ears and headspace you're used to... we stop measuring how much of the love you're feeling. And...

And the wheel spins and spins.

I don't have the answer, but this step-through exercise highlights a couple of puff principles;

1. Existing customers that enjoy your eyes and thoughts and time and (to sustain it) can-we-have-more-cash questions trained squarely on them is perhaps more focused and efficient than the over-the-horizon radar scanning that is new client prospecting. And if the current payers are out of coin or you've run out of ways to help them more? They still pay again by letting you study them so you can learn more about yourself and where you should go next.
2. You'll never get it perfect. Just better. Aim just to sharpen your PB. Your bias at any given time will always be either living in the past (servicing cash already collected) or looking down the way (innovating to solve other issues). But wherever you think your efforts are better focused today, you better put a little puff into it to make up for the opportunity cost you're paying.
3. The wheel is spinning faster. Speed means friction means something gets rubbed off, corners rounded and crashes more spectacular. If you're going to serve fast for all that brings, be ok with the fact you'll lose passengers and previously engaged onlookers and loosely attached opportunities. You might also hurt yourself. And if you're not OK with that?

Slow down a mo.

Puff means remembering to breathe.

Puffosynthesis.

You breathe in Oxygen. You breathe out CO2. Plants convert CO2 back into Oxygen.

Consider whether your exhaled puff efforts can be converted into inspiration fuel for others today.

... write a top 10 list of wisdom your client-serving endeavours has repaid you with and forward it to the crew...

... take on honorary minute taker status and summarise the key points of the client meeting with next steps, then email it to those involved...

... take the complaints that others rewarded you with and turn it into a cheat sheet or dummies guide and share...

... when you've read the book, write the précis and post it...

... audit the result and derive the lesson no-one else seems to have time to, and point to it at this morning's sales meeting...

... the happy client thanks-so-much you received on behalf of a team's efforts? Pay it on...

... don't hide your thinking or experience in a bushel and assume others will get the benefits of it by osmosis. Broadcast the effort and learnings and processes you're traversing (with humility and purpose) and be a role-model to fill the void or displace the pretenders...

Be the effort exhaler and then the tree. You'll rule the world today.

A history of puff.

Felix Baumgartner didn't start jumping out of very high balloons just last week.

JK Rowling didn't pen the Potter heptalibrary in a comfy chair on some drizzly weekend.

Geraldine Cox didn't receive honorary Cambodian citizenship for starting the Sunrise Children's Village because she gave up just a few hours one afternoon instead of sightseeing.

Max Fatchen didn't get an OAM for a year or two's worth of columns in *The Advertiser*.

Les Burdett didn't just mow the lawn a few times to create the world famous deck.

Branson and Gates and Buffett and Gillard and Beckham and Van Dyke and

The sustained successful in sport, business, service, grass-cutting, put in puff for sustained periods. When no-one took any notice of them. When there was no-one yelling at them to do it. When the short-term pain of monotony and grind bit and the mirage of being 'world famous' was blurry, infinitely distant. When the temptation to 'expand their horizons' and turn left rather than use bum glue was as strong as you or I have probably ever felt it.

These people, and millions of others who got there, decided what they wanted to do each day. What would sustain them. What would add up over time.

Then they did it, and then they kept doing it, and in the process they got better at it, and they got somewhere better.

The outcomes, the plaudits, the reputation and nice stuff they enjoy we'd all love? Just retrospective markers of what their self-driven puffing efforts built.

The choice bit, the day-by-day-making-it-consistent - that's the only difference between you and them.

It doesn't have to be a difference. You can start the lawnmower one more time this morning.

Lessons from the resume discards.

I'm sure your CV is impressive (it's on LinkedIn, right?)

What about the learnings you inhaled from the bits you didn't think worthy of the printed portfolio? What else did you do for a quid when you were just a wee roadie, long before becoming the professional rock star you now are?

I washed the same cars in a car yard 3 times a week, where I learnt that if you cut corners (and side mirrors), it gets noticed and you lose the performance bonus (bottle of coke).

I stacked pasta sauce on supermarket shelves, where I learnt that the balance between speed and accuracy - getting it on the shelf quickly without smashing them on the floor in haste - is a holy grail and needs your continual diligence.

I got paid by pickled blokes at country football matches to fetch them a chop with sauce from the BBQ, where I learnt the power of finding a niche and asking for business and aiming for tips.

I mowed lawns for the busy, the lazy, the generous (who could've done it but saw the merit of encouraging entrepreneurial hard work in youth), where I learnt that if you sweat enough while others watch you from the shade, someone will eventually bring you a milkshake and a paycheque.

I've cleaned air conditioner filters from industrial machines where I learnt to look after your own (lung) safety first, and I've put TV cabinets together in a furniture store where I learnt the time management benefit of following written instructions, and I've sold timeshare holidays on the phone where I learnt that if you don't put your best efforts into the first few seconds, you're dead.

This and more you pick up from the resume discards - some of the most vital puff lessons still apt.

Two things - did you do similar things in your younger days that forged learnings that are still relevant today (that maybe you could reapply to the next conversation, the next day you'll tackle?) And the big jobs that do make pages 2 and 2 of your resume? The higher-paying, more glorious experiences? Are you actively considering *those* more expensive lessons as you pre-plan the next conversation?

Audit the little, almost forgotten lessons experience gifted you. It can count today.

The courage and cancerous cascade of canceling.

Canceling appointments, with yourself or others, can be one of two things.

If it's done with your goals in mind, and you can look your reflection in the eye and say "I need to say no to this one in order to do another one that, on balance, is exponentially more important and congruent and impactful (even taking into account the ripple effect of the cancel)", then brave up and cut it. And provoke yourself to do better in vetting pre-scheduling next time.

If it's done because you just can't be fagged or you're scared or you don't think it's going to be all Gangnam style fun and lasso dancing...

... it will metastasise.

It will positively reinforce weakness of will, and because it temporarily alleviated a boo-boo, you'll find you silently grant yourself one more little pink permission slip to do it again when things get overwhelming (which they will, forever).

And you'll eat the lone marshmallow again.

And you'll prioritise urgent pain avoidance behaviours over important goal attainment disciplines.

And you'll hate yourself for it. Until the memory eroding sandy winds of time blow your guilt away once more through forgetting. And you do it again. In ever-shrinking time increments.

And you don't get to help more people, or achieve the goals, or inspire a generation to build on what they see as the norm.

Don't cancel if doing so is not in the conscious, absolute service of your well considered goal achievement. Puff and keep it.

Make it a daily discipline to remind yourself to only write appointment cheques your goal-focused butt's should be trying to cash. Say "I will not cancel just because it's convenient."

Convenience is a hopeless store if it doesn't serve your goals.

Which vanilla?

The next item on your to-do list requiring some puff... which vanilla version will you choose?

Vanilla beans? Where you deliver pure, raw, unfiltered effort, feedback or output? Where beneficiaries will get the unadulterated version of your talents - the truth (even if it's a little gritty?)

Vanilla extract? The concentrated, considered, steeped thinking that comes from long periods of immersion? Your best measured guidance that others can take and blend and use to improve what they're cooking up?

Vanilla essence? A cheaper, thinner version of your outputs, still with the general taste profile others are after from you? Much faster to produce, cheaper to dispense, OK for many (but some will wince and expect more)?

Or vanilla ice-cream? An end-product, ready for immediate consumption or passing on by others? That take the fingers of others to co-develop - a collaborative effort of building, collating, packaging and maybe offering warranty on?

Which vanilla for you? No, forget you a minute - what's your V.I.P(erson/rocess/roblem) looking for? Raw and pure? Aged and concentrated? Fast and 'good enough'? Or collated, branded, ready to eat and trust in because it was many-minded?

"Honestly,....". "Let me think about it...". "Here's the usual answer I give...". "Here's what we've come up with for you...".

Match the flavour form to the task recipe you're charged with adding to.

(And would the tiniest handful of chocolate sprinkles up the appeal?)

Planning the continuum.

Too much stop-start-ness exhausts and elastically deforms puff muscles (when the puff stops, they shrink back and you're back to square one).

We see this in diets.... start; persist; get smug; stop; get depressed; lose tone; start again (hard, puff).

We see it in customer conversation processes... do the spadework; make the appointment; build the relationship; find the need; fix the issue & do the deal; chink champagne glasses; touch base a while; progressively lose touch; sales fizzle; pull the crew together and strategise about how you'll reinvigorate things (really hard, puff).

We see it in time management and organising efforts... get a bee in your bonnet over how outta control the desk or inbox or to-do list is; review the training you once did (sure) or pay for another course / book; put the system into play; remember how good this is when you do it; smug champagne glass thing again; aaaaannd relax.... doh! Puff, puff, puff.

What can you do to perpetuate the continuum today and save yourself a whole lotta inertia-overcoming puff later on?

At the end of the meeting, take a moment to rebook and define key agenda points for the next one?

Send a diary entry request asking a colleague to follow up and ask you what your inbox is looking like today (outsource your guilt)?

Arrange automatic bank transfers for the monthly gym fees to maximise hip pocket nerve pain motivation?

Pre-plan one extra question you'll ask in the transactional conversation that might, just might, create a wedged-door opportunity worth exploring in a next catchup?

It's hard starting things. Easy stopping them. Consider an act that lives between these two effort levels - a continuum-progressing act. What can you do to keep the ball rolling?

Momentum is a powerful force. Find a way to bring it into play today. Plastically - permanently -develop your puff capacity with a "next step defined".

Fast forgiveness.

So they stood you up.
Disagreed with you.
Put your nose out of joint by poo-poo'ing your idea.
Wasted your time.
Put their own needs and perspectives in front of yours.
Didn't thank you or live up to their end of the bargain.
Didn't inspire you the way you think a leader should.
Didn't support you the way you believe a manager ought.
Didn't tow the company line.
Used another template.
Left you out of the loop.
Took others credit and deflected the blame.
Weren't as disciplined as you.
Lied to you.
Dropped the ball and didn't apologise. Walked away even.

Can you change it?
Prevent it happening again?
Do you still need them in your corner?
Can you help them (even though your ego is bruised and sensibilities offended?)

If you forgave them, could you move forward and achieve better outcomes longer-term than if you were to sulk and stew and bit#h and cull them from the Christmas card list?

Go back to your goals a moment.... could cutting them a break help you get further down this track, faster?

It's not a natural reaction to proactively forgive (we usually wait for time to do it for us).

It takes puff and discipline and clear goal focus.

Is it worth it today? Who will you let win? Churlish payback child that lives on your left shoulder? Or goal-focused puff superhero with the power of forgiveness on your right?

Long term success and happiness is right.

The trifle of goals.

Here's what I've learned about goals.

They live in a big ol' trifle bowl - an eye-watering cacophony of colours, sizes, shapes, textures and flavours.

Everyone has a personal preference for their serving size and form (even if they haven't figured it out yet).

A one-size-fits-all template doesn't. It really doesn't.

They can be worn on your sleeve publicly to harness the energy of guilt and support and endorphins.

They can be kept in a shoebox that no-one else sees or even knows you own to let you enjoy private victories and perceived safe defeats.

They can be SMART. Or dreamy. Or outcome-defining. Or process-complying.

They can be about role modelling or trail blazing.

They can be long, long ways away or set for a conversation you're about to have in the next 2 minutes.

You can use them as a decision master - the magic 8-ball - or you can trot them out once a year like old family photos to look at through the rear-view and nostalgically reflect on how you did.

They can be about an amazing end that justifies the means, or they can be repetitively values-applying.

They're always evolving. Except for those people whose goals don't.

They can be about growth, or stagnation, or stripping back and simplifying. Or flying. Or giving up.

They can have lots of names. Like, uhh, goals. Objectives. KPI's. Targets. Bonus criteria. Creeds. Charters. Missions.

Visions. (Oh, don't be so pedantic - deep down, you know they really all serve the same purpose...)

You can proactively set them and use them every hour of every day. Or reactively dig your heels in and refuse to write them down because that's what you think w#nky tryhard wannabe's do. Or inactively let others drive your agenda with theirs. Or go to Dr Zeuss's most useless waiting place to do laps of the goal-free yard all by yourself because others can't use people that don't have a purpose.

You can try selling the merits of yours door-to-door, ear-bashing any who pause a moment.

Or you can just get on with achieving them, creating a magnetic north for onlooker eyeballs and support gifters.

They can be pleasure-seeking or pain-avoiding.

You can make them all about you.

Or you can make them bigger. BHAG. Ground breaking.

Every stance I've ever read or taken or spruiked about goals... has been wrong for someone else.

So here's my new goal, for me and anyone else that wants to spread it on their toast.

Stop worrying about what the goal should look like or jamming it into a prescribed rubric.

Help people figure out what theirs are and if you can help them achieve it.

Then do so.

Come close of this week, just 42 working days left in the year.

Go yourself a 42 day goal. Take a mo to imagine, if this was going to be the *very last 42 days* of 2012 you'd ever have, what would you like to try and do?

Wait a second....

(Footnote - At first, I didn't want to write this - a day where I was just sick of getting up early and tapping away. Then I thought about the impact of persisting with my daily goal of word delivery, not just for you, but for my own sense of worth. So discipline took a medicinal shot of goals in its taut buttocks and the words package above is one I'm proud to put my name on. Go figure.)

Sports day.

My youngest had school sports day yesterday. 5 puff powering practices I saw employed by your future replacements;

1. The time-tested encouragement of parents was "*have a go, try your best and have fun!*" We know that's the way to get the best from people, small or big. We forget that.

2. When we wear colours and sit in teams and create war cries and collectively hoot for the brave ones wearing our flag and running down the straight, everyone gets lost in the moment and the pain of effort simply goes away.

3. Not everyone's a sprinter. Not everyone's a shotputter. Not everyone's a tunnel ball champion. But if the focus is on PB's rather than BP's (Beating People), all can leave having contributed and feeling like they want to go again.

4. If you're not having fun, your fragility ramps up, you don't roll with the punches as fluidly and injury and quitting isn't far away.

5. Relays have pinch points that are less about puff and more about focus. Get the changeovers and interfaces right. All the speed and Oxygen in the world isn't much good if you drop the baton and the now-useless recipient stands there looking at you like you ate their lunch.

Help people take pride in their wins. It's a puff positive feedback loop all win from.

(Onya Lucy!)

Your thing.

What if you had a thing today?

A peer-group-best, make-you-locally-famous, others-wish-they-could-do-it thing?

Something that's proven to make a difference. That, should you regrettably expire mid-sip of your evening cup of tea tonight, they could put on your stone...

"Here lies Troy - they had this thing they did or said or applied, and it made things better. It was magnetic. It helped and it challenged and it was remarkable and it must've taken a whole lot of time and effort to perfect ('cause we couldn't do it half as well as they could.) Man, if more people had or did that thing...."

What's your thing? What do you do exceptionally well, your big game play?

What if you took that one thing, and, just for today, applied it like a professional possessed. Had a thing-on-EPO day? What if you took your natural application of the thing that normally requires no great stretch on your part (I mean, you do it so well and so often it's just second nature), and you multiplied it by 2, 3 or 10? What if you gave it to a few more situations, more people (even 1 more) than normal?

What if you put in some bottom-of-the-ninth, scores-tied, bases-loaded-with-3-balls-and-2-strikes thing-pitcher's-focus?

Don't be coy - there's no doubting you've got that thing, or you would've been fired or given up long ago. There's lots of other things you might be working on building, and sure, they're great too. But that one thing? You've got it right now.

Let it passively percolate through your day?

Or thing-up and commit to hitting 5pm exhausted and puffing and saying "I maxed the life out of my thing today"?

What's your one amazing thing?

Who gets it first today?

Positive feedback loops.

Last week I facilitated a workshop for a group of professionals that donate time and expertise and cash to help aspiring Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games athletes.

In looking at how they bolster their membership numbers & raise more money, a fundraising truism was discussed. That when people can clearly see and feel just where their support goes and precisely what it achieves, they're inspired to give more. Tell me exactly who the athlete was that got my cash, what it went towards, how that freed them up to focus like a laser on being world-best, let me hear their stories and track their progress from as close-up as possible, and then keep me informed in real time about their wins and losses and where they're trying to get to next... and I'll put my hand back in my pocket.

Constant communication and transparency and closeness feeds positive feedback loops. You invest in something and it pays dividends for you and others and so you do more of it and more good stuff comes and so you do more...

Positive feedback loops are like solar power and wind and waves. They're don't have to run out. They power things. And they're right in front of your nose. So why not look for opportunities to create and leverage some of these virtuous cycles in your goal pursuit plans?

Find a small but important goal you can knock over in 15 minutes today, inspiring you to go one more.

Cull the least important item off today's to-do list (they all have one), then marvel at how the world didn't stop spinning and you got more important stuff done as a result, and then do it again.

Praise 3 people's efforts, take a moment to reflect on how good it felt and how a little came back your way, and then....

Take that damn 10 minute appointment with your goals and plan this morning, and make it a victory. Then think about how clear your focus is and how good that feels. And....

There are so many opportunities for you to reinforce world-changing behaviours in yourself and others today via positive feedback loops.

You just have to start 1 little thing to get them circling.

All you have to do is start.

(Citius. Fortius. Altius. Puff.)

Until you're sick of it.

You can't reach the pinnacle of performance unless you train and practice and apply the proven process to something so much, so many times, so very many times, that you become sick of it.

When you've run the route long enough and often enough that you can't stand the thought of another block lap.

When you've role-played the presentation so many times that the idea of going again makes you groan.

When the 7 process steps are so ingrained through application, the checklist so well embedded in your head, that the prospect of reviewing them again is repulsive.

Then you're getting somewhere. You're not necessarily there, but you're getting there.

Muscle memory can start working for you.

The increased aerobic capacity your labours afforded will sustain you on game day.

Habits and disciplines are up-to-date with what they need to do to help you.

And the creative, freewheeling, situation-calibrating talents you possess are free to command the bulk of your effort fuel in the next important interaction because the fundamentals are solid like concrete.

You grow beyond 'being sick of it'.

And if you're not sick of it yet? Not so routinised with the important stuff that you could roll it off your tongue like the Periodic Table mnemonic you learnt in high school or the scales you had drummed into you on the piano or the bike-riding ability you forged via sore legs and butt?

Then go again. Repeat the fundamentals again. It's not sexy. It doesn't have to be. It empowers the sexy and makes it pay. It works.

Trying to be WOW! without deeply ingrained fundamentals underpinning it is like trying to tapdance on the roof of a house of cards.

Get a bit more sick of the important stuff.

Your Sandy.

As you watch the US cope with big winds and waves, consider the mini hurricanes that could hit your agenda today.

Have you seen professional storm fronts before? Might they appear again? Are you ready?

A team member resigning.

A fat walletted client dropping out.

A client dropping shrill consonant bombs in displeasure over your dropped balls.

A last-minute request for a 5-hour-to-write report that bumps the beautifully laid out plan you'd built.

A cancelled appointment.

A big bill.

A competitor trump card.

A family crisis.

One of the Emergency Services coordinators in Maryland said on the news last night "We're constantly in readiness mode; we've now moved into response mode, and if necessary, we'll go into recovery mode."

Readiness. Response. Recovery.

Can the trifecta get 5 minutes of your advance consideration today, even just for the most likely storm your goal-focused day might confront?

The winds of change puff sporadically but eternally, scouts. You're a mug if you haven't at least got the barest bones of a Sandy plan. Take 10 minutes to be prepared today.

Recalibrating work.

The company that runs the e-delivery service I use to get these daily notes to you had to shut down their Massachusetts offices yesterday as Sandy beat up their seaboard. Their customer service agents all worked from home instead. There was no interruption to service I could perceive.

I type these notes and coach clients and prepare workshops from the comfort of a coffee shop or in my car or in a home office in my PJ's at whatever hour I choose. My kids work an hour a week in the business, on the laptop with me, finding cool images and YouTube clips for PowerPoint presentations. They're sub-13.

Walking into a coffee shop for a coaching session yesterday, I happened to spy 3 past and present clients, all from different industries in different roles, each sitting with *their* clients conducting business over brews.

The fourth client, who I was actually there to meet, is a superstar performer with more right to expect job security as a result of their results and disciplines and attitudes. And they'd just been made redundant from their successful organisation. They sat with me and considered a future outside of the career conveyor belt their professional life had to this point prepared them for.

Do you think we'll go back to the factory model and geographical constraints and jobs for life and security in bureaucracy?

Or do you think that the ways we contribute our skills to make a living by helping others is recalibrating to suit individuals and teams willing to be nimble, lithe, willing & able to transplant their cleverness and evolve processes and smack "the way we did things around here" in the guts?

I know what I saw yesterday.

I'm pretty sure it's gully breezes just getting stronger.

Can you evolve and recalibrate your contribution methodology before it gets yanked from under your feet? Can *you* drive some positive change before it's delivered to your table?

Yesterday's note was about preparedness.

Today's puff is front-footedness. Breathe deep. Here you go.

Exoskeletons and crumple zones.

Exoskeletons are hard external coverings protecting soft vulnerable insides. Beetles and crabs. Hard coats to break, but once cracked, it's all over for Humpty Dumpty.

Crumple zones by contrast are designed to give in the face of trauma, protecting what's inside by shock absorption rather than Newtonian repulsion. They sustain damage more easily than the bus sporting the bull bar, but they buffer the precious internal cargo with a soft touch.

Can you use both armoury sets to protect your puff efforts today?

Start with exoskeletal disciplines. How about using distinct diarised time homes, turn the egg timer over, close the office door, turn the iphone off and tell Ms Money Penny to hold all calls until you're done? Stick the golden rules and values you must obey if you've any hope of achieving your goals up on the wall? Develop a policy and rules and a plan set that multiple folks sign off on that you hold yourselves accountable to? Make it a KPI with financial incentive? Pay the non-refundable money upfront for the training? Have your boss check in with you weekly on the project?

Hard things that hold off forces trying to break your will or plan.

What then about crumple zones? Leave an hours buffer zone in the day to acknowledge the likelihood of reactive non-delegatable stuff showing its face at the door? Pre-planning questions rather than egg-sucking statements of fact for your next call to preserve engagement (even if it means the call goal sometimes gets delayed?) Bringing in collaborators to help you do something you think you could probably do by yourself, making the output different (but risk-mitigated)? Creating regular pow-wows that encourage, incentivise, normalise open and critical feedback (that prevent later festering and explosions)?

Soft things that allow for imperfections and still let you get the important outcomes achieved.

Exoskeletons are digital protection. They do their job or they don't. You apply them or you don't. On or off, 1 or 0. Crumple zones have degrees. Flexibility, deformative potential, shaped by minor forces while still protecting the gold.

Both can work for you.

The hard and the soft. The beetle and the Volvo.

Try a new one to protect your puff today.

Touch night school.

Proprioception is your body's awareness of where it is in space. It's what keeps you upright even when your eyes are closed and stops you from poking your eyes out or tapping so hard on the keyboard you break a digit.

This sense of touch and knowing where you are and how you should move next is a nice free feature you get when you take delivery of your body. But you can school up on your professional proprioceptivity.

Role-playing is a great way of improving touch. Practicing reading situations, common uh-oh and ah-ha moments; rehearsing the sensation of when it's about to go pear-shaped, when the statement falls on deaf ears or your posture was too bold or timid for the moment. The more lifelike the roleplay, the sharper your balance and touch can become.

Going beyond your comfort limits is another way to test whether your touch receptors are giving you accurate stop-pushing feedback, or if you're being too conservative and could push harder without harm. Asking a tougher question than you normally might; going a bit louder in your tone; putting an adjective in there you think is maybe over the top. Find out.

The one thing that makes proprioception inaccurate is too much noise. I saw an experiment in a cellular physiology lecture years ago at Uni, where a guy was blindfolded, had to curl his bicep, then very slowly straighten his arm while the lecturer held a vibrating massager on it. He was asked to stop when he thought his arm was almost straight. He did, when in fact his arm was still at 45 degrees. The lecturer then told him to keep straightening his arm. He freaked out and said it felt like he was bending his arm backwards.

The noise and vibrations that affects your professional proprioception is non-goal-focused, non-business-planned hyperbole. Ranting and raving and rushed requests that, if you let it, eats 8+ hours every day and kills your sense of perspective.

You can actively improve your balance and touch today by practicing, pushing boundaries, and putting disciplines in place to limit the impact of noise vibrations.

Today, you can stand up straight and puff.

Walk like a man.

3 experiences watching inspiring puffers on the weekend.

The first, my daughter's school's concert - a 90-minute stage show, *Mulan*. All singing, all dancing, outstandingly choreographed teens who'd rehearsed for 6 months. The synchronicity that shines through when you put in the unseen hours of readying translates to beaming customer delight. The cake-icing, concentrated reward for the puffers was a house-shaking burst of applause, the belly-pit sensation that can only be experienced by putting it out there for public judgement, the knowledge you took charge of your destiny and the platform they built themselves for bigger and better.

The second, a quiz night with a quizmaster that copped a spray for making last year's a bit too highbrow for parents in fancy dress out for a good time and a couple of sherberts. Rather than take his bat and ball and go home, he took the feedback on board, built it better and more in tune with the client requests, and, through smooth well-rehearsed delivery, earned high praise and facilitated a great night for his punters. Using critical feedback as puff fuel rather than getting p*ssy about it.

The third, my wife and I saw the *Jersey Boys* stage show. Unbelievable. I could puff on about what can be achieved with vision and hard work and platinum-level practice, or how when you choose to get amazing at something, no-one even hears you breathing heavy, or how working with colleagues putting in as much as you is the ultimate puff fuel additive.

The clincher though was the guy who played Frankie Valli, his surreal voice and his transition between big numbers. We were raving about him after the show, when we noticed his wasn't the picture in the promotional material. Turns out he's one of 3 guys that regularly play the sixties falsetto'd idol. The other two get similar reviews.

The number one player, amazing but interchangeable.

Making what you do bigger than you. Creating something where individual talents and songs can soar, but aren't relied on absolutely. Training understudies. Developing plan B's. Diversifying risk.

Can you help someone sing better today, to one day allow you to step into the wings and let it fly without you?

Puff like a man in empowering and developing others. It lets you go and develop new musicals.

What puff is.

After "who does your tailoring?" and "how do you get abs that chiselled?", the question I most get asked is "how do you come up with a new email every day?" OK, the first two maybe not, but let me take you behind the sheer curtain of a daily discipline. Maybe it'll help.

Puff is a recycling facility.

It takes stuff that worked somewhere, for someone else, puts it in with the carrot peelings and apple cores, tumbles it, runs it through a finer, sniffs its own product to make sure it's going to be OK for most gardens, and then bags it up into 60 second lots for you to fertilise your day.

It's a mirror on practices observed, tried and imagined, reflecting them through a different coloured cellophane each day to catch the eye and maybe appeal to the shiny object seekers in all of us.

It's a sandpit for quirky metaphors, ocker colloquialisms, diverse stories and previously unconsidered connections between things you know about and things you're striving for. It's a bit of play for those in need of playtime and all that humour, vibrancy and a minute of right-brained-ism can do for busy stressed professionals.

It's a guilt trip, motivational shot, keep-em-guessin' attempt at inspiring whatever better you need to feel better about regarding what you've done and how you've done it come 5pm.

It's my rudimentary hand-painted macaroni-necklace gift to anyone willing to give me their head for one out of the fixed 1,440 minutes you get a day.

And it's free. For your consumption, sharing or file-for-later. To prop up your own convictions when you agree with it. To galvanise your polar opposite view when you think your way is better. To provoke you to think about the difference. Even if you read just one sentence or turn of phrase or word that you incorporate in your day. Even if it just makes you smile or frown and that has an impact on how you brave up once more.

The stories and samplers are the product of a natural proclivity to observe and interpret. The neuronal pathways that give you this snack are undoubtedly weird. And the 1,300-odd flavours that have come out of this discipline ritual of mine won't always suit your palate. Tomorrow's you might hate. Heck, *today's*....

But I'll try engaging you anyway.

Because Puff means 'again'.

Choose your own puff.

Fill in the blanks, connect the dots or just wipe the prompts and write (mentally or physically) your own perspiration inspirations....

The number one mucho importante workpiece worth my prioritised puff today is ...

(because ...)

The short-term impact of putting in puff on this versus piking out to chase shiny cars is ...

A little ways down the track, the harvest I'm sure will sprout because I puffed today is ...

The puffingest truth I know for sure to be certain and with absolute unequivocation is ...

(...no prompt here, just freestyle some puff talk that does it for you; play with your syntax a mo...)

A puffed VIP that could use a bushel of my passionate, role-modelling, Pirelli-pumping puffsperation support today is ...

(and I'll do it by)

(and I'll make sure it sticks by ...)

(and I'll take that same thinking and go puff-lus one in my own endeavours and)

Congratulations and welcome to ra-ra writers inc. Now take the words and inhale 'em. I wish you every luck that disciplined implementation attracts.

How to get up.

You and I have never had a professional defeat within a hundred miles of the magnitude of Mitt Romney's.

The world's biggest & most public career goal, the most money thrown at it, a work schedule that makes yours and mine look like a long weekend, and a 'nothing in the tank' mindset that culminated in an all or nothing, yes or no, Air Force One or American Airlines outcome decided by just a few more stakeholders than sit on most tender panels.

Romney said he'd left nothing in the tank. I can only imagine - not really - how much the result must hurt.

And yet, inconsequential of your thoughts about him or his politics, he gets up and publicly and warmly congratulates the returned chief. If you believe him, and nearly 1/2 of all Americans do, that's ouch. Then he goes one step further and entertains the idea of going to work with and for the man who just crushed his life dreams. In under 48 hours.

Why? How?

- Politics at play - knowing how the game works and what you'll have to do should you lose (and there's at least a 50:50 chance you will).
- Wanting a genuinely better outcome longer term for his VIP's, and being willing to shift gears quickly to do whatever it takes to create it.
- Ego - big, big ego, channelled - and bigger goals. To fuel puff like a Trans-American freight train.
- Loving the process. The job's not much of a prize if you're not hyperactively excited about the days the campaigning and the office will give you.
- Surrounding yourself with a pit crew to suck dry the well of self pity before you can wallow in it and to shield you from the knockers.
- Applying the self discipline to keep your eyes just a little farther ahead when the little sulk inside all our heads is telling you to spit the chewie.
- Keeping any chewie spitting to a minimum and behind closed doors, because no-one you want to inspire down the track will benefit from seeing it.

Imagine going through what those two guys (and their families and entourages) have been through, the feeling when it all comes to an end. For Obama, no doubt exhausted, knowing the new job starts immediately and the stakeholder expectations are "we're sick of the choice process, we made it, now get to it". Worse for Romney - "We don't really care what you do now, figure it out yourself."

Puts your own self-generating puff challenges into perspective, huh?

If Romney can get up today, can you?

Friction is good.

There's plenty of lumps, bumps and grit waiting to slow you down today.

Cheesegrater tasks that'll take some bark off your enthusiasm make you yelp and pause.

Bitumen roads uncomfortable to navigate in bare feet, that reduce you to a pussyfooting walk rather than the gallop you'd planned.

Friction can be painful and rate-limiting.

But it's a good thing.

When you come up against the sandpapery objection of a client that bites into your sensibilities, you get to pause, dig deeper, work through with them and come out the other side, finer and clearer in how to proceed and how to approach the next one.

When the bumpy flat b%stard file of a standard operating procedure forces you brake and cross undulations of check boxes and alignment markers and sync with the missionvisiongoals, the measure of certainty you deliver goes up and the opportunities for process evolution are once more spotlighted.

And when the frigid wind of resistance to change buffets your nose as you lead the charge, you're forced to question how deeply you want it. And if you do, and you believe in it, then you get to look through the wind at the goal bobbing out on the breakers, you get to feel alive, and you get to promote your intestinal fortitude to group captain. And you suck in a big puff. And you go.

And if you don't, now you know. And you get to go find a different friction pad you're willing to donate epidermis to in order to get better, to do better for more.

Friction allows traction. It enables progress with learnings. It scrapes off barnacles. It sorts wheat from chaff. It rub off detritus and smooths and sharpens and polishes. It is its own longer term lubricant. Want to be slick? Friction up frequently 'til you're a mirror.

There's a friction-filled task on your to-do list, right there.

Avoid?

No. Grab a band-aid. Go in.

Large Hadron, Small Particles, Bazinga!

OK, so you know in Switzerland at CERN, there's this really big machine, the Large Hadron Supercollider, and it's shooting protons in opposite directions around a 27km long circular track, so they can watch them go POW! into each other. And the particle physicists are super excited about the prospect of the fallout from this proton train crash including a never-before-seen element of matter as small as anything that's ever been discovered - the proposed "Higgs Boson Particle", right?

Anyway, the guts of it (as best I can follow) is they want to break down matter and the mysterious forces that hold it together to the smallest possible units in order to gain a fundamental understanding of..... well, of everything. Why stuff holds together. Why everything has mass. Why the universe doesn't just implode. (Sheldon, where are you, I need you to explain this...)

Forget the physics (phew). They want to break things down like a lego castle into individual blocks. Because when you understand how something works, you can start building your knowledge of what goes wrong and why. Because then you can figure out how to fix things. How to improve. How to replicate. How to co-exist and synergise and join forces and shed dead weight.

Building blocks and the bits that hold them together.

Imagine your 10-minute morning appointment with yourself was a supercollider. A tool for breaking down your wholistic mysterious day into elemental understandable units. The calls. The pre-call plan before the calls. The pre-call checklist of fundamental disciplines you otherwise run through on autopilot that's part of your pre-call plan. The reason for the application for the fundamental disciplines. The fuel for said discipline. The source of the fuel. The next step you need to take to get you some of that dang discipline fuel. The act you'll physically have to undertake to start that step to the fuel source the moment you stop reading.

Elements. Things you can't break down any further. Get yourself there, and then build back up again. Leave breadcrumbs to find your way back to the whole - the goal - by writing yourself a cascading checklist ("Goals", "Strategy", "Plan", "Today", "Action", "Next step (when)" is the white-belt version, but a great start).

Getting to elements changes the way you operate permanently. It smashes your assumptions and burns the blinkers. It's scary. It's confronting the science that makes up your art. And so it's not for wusses.

Puffers aren't wusses. Break it down today.

Singing on the treadmill.

From particle physics to the X-Factor... teaching one of her charges how to deliver a killer performance with strong vocals while jumping & strutting, Scary Spice Mel B recommended the daily discipline of singing on the treadmill.

Learning how to give your best effort while you're getting breathless; practicing ways to come across fluent while you're sucking in the big ones.

Rehearsing harder than you'll have to go on the night.

Using 2 sets of muscles at once.... balancing breath in and breath out.

It's one thing to run. It's one thing to sing.

But rubbing your tummy while you pat your head?

To make it look flawless, you've got to practice them in harmony.

Try it today. Grab a colleague and rehearse grace under fire as you answer technical questions with a smile while the mock agitated client gives you gyp. Ask to present at your team meeting and focus on hold the collective attention while your worded-up audience demonstrate the broad array of rudeness presenters often face. No team around? Get yourself in front of some lower-impact customers that will test your gum-chewing-while-walking talents, honing your blade for the important ones.

Sing on the treadmill. Try puffing silently as you smile.

Turning your back on the pig choir.

They say you shouldn't try to teach pigs to sing. It just frustrates you and annoys the pig.

One way to crisp up the odds of producing pitch-perfect porcines might be to build a pig choir that you attempt to conduct. Surely there's one in there? Why not put forward a general missive to the disgruntled litter and see if a potential Porky Pavarotti breaks ranks to follow your lead?

Generalised puff efforts to inspire a group that really doesn't share your passion for achieving certain outcomes or singing from your brand of hymn book (no matter how good you think the choir could sound) might unearth one or two converts in a large crowd.

Pretty inefficient and soul-decaying, I think.

What about ignoring the disinterested choir you thought you wanted to be part of, and turning your daily energies to seeking out & serving kindred thinkers & doers & learners? Preserving and packaging puff for those that love the cut of your solutions and service practices?

We spend an awfully large part of our professional existence trying to please folk that don't really want our flavour of pleasing.

You have the choice and ability to find a race meet where your stride and puff and betterment efforts fit better. Where it'll be recognised and supported by a crowd (smaller and less snappily dressed though they may be) who are interested. Where smiling isn't so hard and puffing harder gets easier. And where you might get cheers on the line.

Today, the smorgasbord of choirs available to your 24 hours is infinite and accessible. Pick your clients, your boss, your culture, your mentors, your thought fodder, your saleable solutions, your swagger, your daily disciplines, your mental images of success, your opportunity costs and your worklifewellbeing balance with care, and refresh your thinking on it regularly.

Save your puff for the right pigs.

The line and the lunge.

Breathe in really deeply, deep as you can. Yep, right now.

Now blow it out fully, empty your lungs, drain the tank.

Done?

Now quick! Puff just a tiny bit more out before taking air in.

You could, yes?

Because there's always residual. Always a little more you can give.

Puffing is designed for a trek. It's a recycling transfer process that rhythmically loads you up on the good stuff, blows off the waste, then loads you up again for the continuing journey. Puffing is cadence chocolate.

And when the long run's almost done, when you reach a line, if you've put in, the horses are exhausting and puff is going Gangnam in the red zone. The vision of the goal - the reward you've long craved - is doing its best to replenish fuel for your quickening inhalations. But in that last 5 metres, in the lunge to the tape, where the black is closing in and your muscles are spent and nothing's going through your head but the tape itself.... it's coming down to residual gasps.

That's the beauty. There's always a little more you can do. Always a little more puff up your sleeve. And your accessing it depends only - only - on how bad you want to hit the tape.

This is Puff #41. Puff 42 - where the magic happens - lives with you, by yourself.

Consider it a recuperative breath. Momentary rest. Reviewing & reflecting. Staring at your growth chart on the doorframe and considering the carnies rides this growth spurt now opens up to you and realising you're now just a little better equipped to make a dent.

Then putting a smear of discipline on your professional toast and planning to. And starting.

Take the 42nd puff yourself. Use it to load up for the next gradient.

(And never forget, there's always a little residual in your tank to help.)

oooooooooooo *Exhale* ooooooooooooo

Thank you for reading Puff - I hope you've enjoyed it and chosen to benefit from it.

(Like to receive the successor to *Puff* every morning in your inbox?

Just email troy@42mighty.com.au with a "Yes please!" – it's free.)