

It's a truism in business that to get anywhere, hard work is essential. Occasionally, though, it helps to be a little 'lazy'. In researching my book *Superfast: Lead at Speed*, I discovered that successful leaders are skilled at 'strategic laziness'; smartly choosing to do less.

**The art of strategic laziness**

One leader who understood this was the German Chief of the Army High Command in the pre-war period. Kurt Gebhard Adolf Philipp Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equord was a successful strategist and leader who resigned his office in 1934 due to his opposition to Hitler. In assessing how to make a success of his army, he classified his officers into four simple groups.

"There are clever, diligent, stupid and lazy officers," he said. "Usually two characteristics are combined. Some are clever and diligent – their place is the general staff. The next lot are stupid and lazy – they make up 90 per cent of every army and are suited to routine duties. One must beware of anyone who is stupid and diligent – he must not be entrusted with any responsibility because he will only cause mischief.

Anyone who is both clever and lazy is qualified for the highest leadership duties, because he possesses the intellectual clarity and the composure necessary for difficult decisions."

Hammerstein's classification feels as relevant as ever to organisations of today. Laziness for Hammerstein did not mean idleness, it meant doing what was most efficient and effective – and no more. If you spend your time doing everything and thinking about everything, you will not have the cognitive clarity to focus on

**IDLE THOUGHTS**

Strategic laziness is a powerful weapon in the entrepreneurial arsenal, says **Sophie Devonshire**

those things that really matter.

Smart leaders are often natural delegators who look for simpler, easier ways to make things happen.

Tweetdeck or Hootsuite can do it as mad as choosing to wash up by hand or get the mangle out. It's your duty as a leader to find ways for your team to automate and accelerate by using smart tools.

**Do less: delegate and empower others**

One of the global leaders I interviewed for *Superfast: Lead at Speed* made his name as the eponymous third of an advertising agency and then as CEO and chair of a media company. He told me that he had two clear objectives for meetings he went to: a) he wanted to add as much value as he could in that meeting; b) to make sure he left the room without anything on his 'to do' list. Not only was this empowering for those around him but it allowed him to focus on the things others couldn't do or didn't want to do.

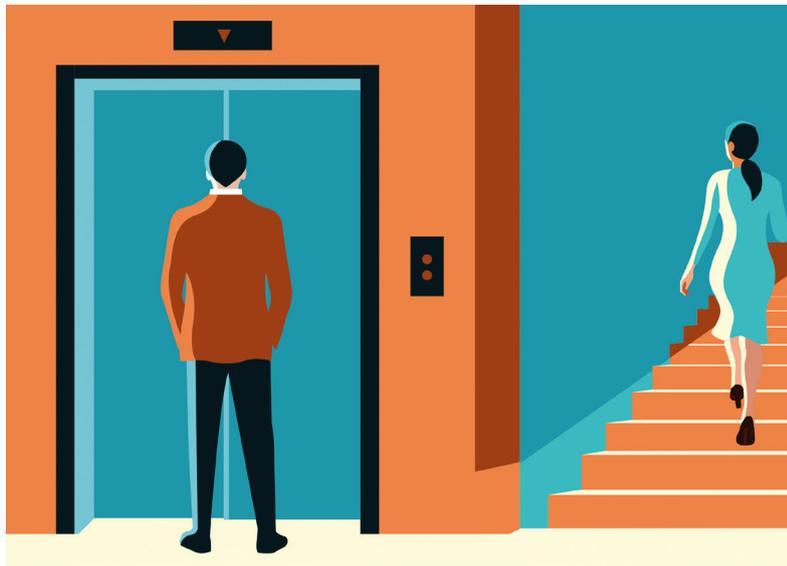
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**Ask yourself: 'Do I have to do this?'**

Then only do it if you are the only person who can do it. Laziness is an excellent leadership trait. If it doesn't come naturally, nurture it. There are so many opportunities out there for those of us in business at the moment: the exponential growth in technological options, the international potential of markets, more flexible career options. There are

choices you can make every day to shape your career and your organisation in different ways. If you focus on what really matters and put your attention and energy there, that means doing less elsewhere. Save your time for what really matters. ■

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**Automate it: make it easy**

Bill Gates is alleged to have said, "If I want a job done, I give it to someone lazy. They'll work out the fastest and easiest way to do it." A 'consciously lazy' mindset helps you to think about how to scale things, about how to make them easy so you can do more, more often. In 1930, John Maynard Keynes stated that by 2030 there was likely to be a system of 'technological unemployment', with people working 15 hours or fewer. You may not be ready for that, but it's definitely true that wasting time tweeting again and again when

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65 %

of people check their work emails at some point while on holiday



46%

of new hires are deemed failures within the first 18 months by the person who hired them



28%

of entrepreneurs say they get fewer than six hours of sleep each night

SOURCE: THE INSTITUTE OF LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT, ENTREPRENEUR MAGAZINE, LEADERSHIP IQ

BETH GOODY