

On Purpose and Time: Lessons from *Eat That Frog!*

Virág Blazsek in Conversation with David Bearman

One reason I was particularly interested in discussing time management with David Bearman [Leeds Law alum (LLB, 1990); [Centre for Business Law and Practice Advisory Board](#) Member; Founding Partner of Firefly Capital; Managing Partner of Firefly Capital Real Estate (FCRE) -- a real estate investor across the U.K. with recent acquisitions of [7 Park Row in Leeds](#) and [Bedford Riverside](#)] is that I have long been puzzled by a contradiction. Colleagues and friends often compliment me on my “efficiency”, yet most of the time I have the opposite impression. I usually have the sense that there is substantially more room for improvement. That gap between external feedback and internal perception has fascinated me for years. How much of productivity is technique, and how much of it is psychology? And can we improve ourselves in this respect at all? The purpose of this article is to summarize the key takeaways of our conversation. **The topic is especially timely for students at this point in the academic year, as it offers practical insights into goal setting and effective time management.**

Earlier this year, David returned to the University of Leeds School of Law for the [second public conversation](#) we hosted together. Our [first discussion](#), in 2024, focused on his transition from legal practice to entrepreneurship and investment management, as well as the transferability of legal skills beyond the legal profession. This time, David suggested that we focus on a book that had been highly influential in his own life: Brian Tracy’s *Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*. The topic, and our reflections on it, seemed relevant to anyone wanting to live a meaningful life.

Both David and I have experienced significant career transitions. He left corporate law to pursue investment banking, wealth management, and ultimately entrepreneurship. I left legal practice and moved into academia. Both transitions required difficult choices about where to invest time and energy. Both required saying no to certain opportunities in order to pursue others. We agreed that prioritisation is the most important skill in life, particularly in an age when information, opportunities, and options are overwhelmingly abundant.

One of the more useful habits I have developed over the years is surprisingly simple: I regularly revisit my priorities, often several times a week. Not my to-do list, but the larger questions beneath it. What am I actually trying to achieve? Which activities move me closer to those goals? Which ones merely create the feeling of being busy?

Emails and meetings provide immediate gratification. They can usually be completed within an hour and crossed off a list. Research is different. Writing an article, conducting a long-term project, such as completing a PhD or a book manuscript requires sustained concentration over months or years. Precisely because these tasks are difficult, they are often the ones most likely to be postponed.

There is also a psychological dimension to procrastination that is frequently overlooked. During the discussion, I reflected on the fact that procrastination is not always laziness. Sometimes it is rooted in fear of failure. Equally, a person who strives for perfection but fears falling short of that standard may postpone important work indefinitely. In that sense, often, procrastination can be linked to past difficult experiences. The task itself is not necessarily

the problem; the emotions associated with it are. Understanding that distinction can be an important first step towards changing the habit.

Those reflections formed a natural starting point for our conversation about time management. First published in 2001, *Eat That Frog!* advances a simple but powerful argument: **time is our most valuable asset, and therefore self-discipline is one of the most valuable skills we can develop**. A quarter of a century after its publication, that argument seems even more relevant in a world of constant notifications, uninterrupted streams of information, and competing demands on our attention.

David's reflections on productivity emerged from personal experience. He first encountered the book in 2013, shortly after selling a financial services business that he had spent a decade building. At almost the same time, he received deeply concerning news during a medical examination. At the event, David recalled weighing approximately 118 kilograms when his doctor warned him that unless significant changes were made, the outlook was bleak. Reading Tracy's book coincided with what he described as a complete reset.

"It was the beginning of me redesigning my life," he told the audience. That phrase captures something that is often missing from discussions of productivity: the importance of focusing on direction rather than efficiency.

One chapter of Tracy's book, "Set the Table", became particularly important for David. The chapter begins with the proposition that before deciding which task deserves your attention, you must first decide what you want from life. David explained that every year he revisits the book, writes down his goals for the coming year, and carries them with him. Quite literally. The goals remain in his bag, and he reviews them repeatedly throughout the week. His explanation was strikingly simple: "You drive your own car. You are in control of your own life." Returning to your goals continuously requires self-discipline.

David treats goals less as aspirations and more as a contract with himself. I have arrived at a similar conclusion through a different route. My own approach is less annual and more frequent. I tend to revisit priorities every week or two, asking whether the activities occupying my time still align with my longer-term objectives. Both approaches reflect the underlying principle that our goals should shape our daily decisions.

The discussion inevitably returned to procrastination. One of the more counterintuitive insights in Tracy's book is that everyone procrastinates. The real question is not whether we procrastinate, but what we procrastinate on. Tracy advocates a form of **strategic or creative procrastination: consciously postponing less important tasks in order to focus on the ones that matter most**. The point is not that productive people avoid procrastination altogether. Rather, they consciously postpone low-value activities in order to create time for work that genuinely matters.

As I shared with the audience, the temptation in academic life is often to complete several small tasks and postpone the one substantial task that matters most. One answers ten emails instead of drafting an article. One reorganises research notes instead of writing. The smaller tasks provide an immediate feeling of accomplishment, while the larger task remains untouched.

David recognised exactly the same pattern from his own career. Earlier in his professional life, while running a highly regulated financial services business, he often found himself postponing difficult decisions. Compliance meetings, board meetings, risk committees, and regulatory requirements consumed his day. Important decisions could easily become tomorrow's problem. Over time, however, he deliberately reversed the habit. "I now do the most important things first," he explained. "I don't do anything else until that's done."

This is, of course, the frog, as defined by Brian Tracy. The frog is not merely the most difficult task. It is the task whose completion matters most. Tracy's advice is to deal with it first, before easier and more enjoyable alternatives crowd it out.

To tackle the frog, Tracy's "slicing and dicing" technique also came up in our discussion. David explained that complex real-estate investments involve multiple strands of work, including legal due diligence, property assessments, financing, governance, and tax structuring. Viewed as a single project, the task can appear overwhelming. Broken down into smaller components, however, it becomes manageable. Progress is achieved not by solving the entire problem at once, but by systematically completing one piece at a time.

For both David and me, protecting focus has become increasingly important. As David put it, the goal is not simply productivity but entering the right "headspace." I noted during our discussion that an organised desk often helps create an organised mind. David extended the point further. His carefully structured morning routine, which includes meditation, physical exercise, and planning, is fundamentally about clearing mental clutter and reducing the number of decisions that need to be made later in the day.

Both of us were struck by how much more difficult this has become in an era of technology-driven information overload. One of the recurring themes in Tracy's book is that technology can be either a powerful servant or a terrible master. **The challenge is not technology itself but our relationship with it.** Used intentionally, digital calendars, online resources, and communication tools can save enormous amounts of time and energy. Used carelessly, they fragment attention and create a constant state of distraction. In many respects, the modern challenge is no longer access to information but filtering it. As David's remarks about planning and creating the right mental environment suggested, **the objective is to use technology deliberately rather than allowing it to dictate how we spend our days.**

That emphasis on clarity appears throughout the book. So does another recurring theme: momentum. David spoke repeatedly about developing what he called a "bias for action." Earlier in his career, he often delayed decisions. Today, he deliberately creates urgency, pushing himself to act rather than waiting for perfect conditions.

"Time is sort of like sand running through your hands," he observed. "Either you use it or it disappears." That attitude does not imply rigidity. A member of the audience asked David how long-term goals survive unexpected events. David used the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of a period when carefully laid plans became impossible to execute exactly as intended. The lesson, he suggested, is not stubbornness but flexibility. "Long-term goals remain. Methods adapt."

Towards the end of the discussion, I asked David about rewards. His answer was refreshing: "Life should be fun." He spoke about family meals, health, exercise, and taking pleasure in achievements rather than constantly moving the goalposts. This perspective seemed

particularly appropriate given the circumstances in which he had originally discovered Tracy's book. **The purpose of managing time is not to become a machine. It is to create space for a meaningful and joyful life.**

As the event concluded, I shared a thought that has become increasingly important to me over the years: sometimes, we postpone important work because we fear not doing it perfectly. Yet growth comes far more often from mistakes than from successes. David's final reflection returned to the same theme that had run throughout the discussion. "It's your life. Sometimes we forget we're in the driving seat."

Goals matter. Habits matter. Discipline matters. But all of these are secondary to a more fundamental question: deciding where you want to go in the first place. Everything else follows from that decision.

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