Time Management and Effectiveness in Grad School



Prof. Yashar Ganjali

University of Toronto

Research Skills Seminar, November 2012

yganjali@cs.toronto.edu

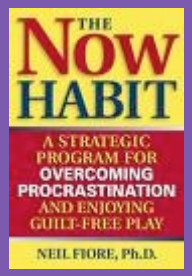
http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~yganjali

Effectiveness and Time Management

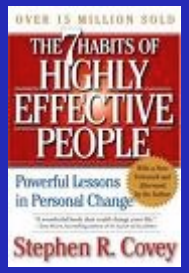
- Why time management matters in *grad school*
  - Many directions for research
  - Many distractions
  - High flexibility in managing your time

- Problems with time
  - I have time but don't use it right
    - Procrastination, confusion, lack/loss of motivation
  - I have too much work and feel like drowning
    - Too many deadlines, lack of focus, stress and anxiety

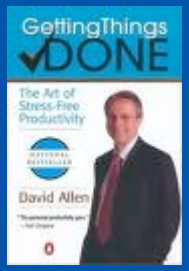
Ideas from …



- The Now Habit
- Neil Fiore



- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
- Stephen R. Covey

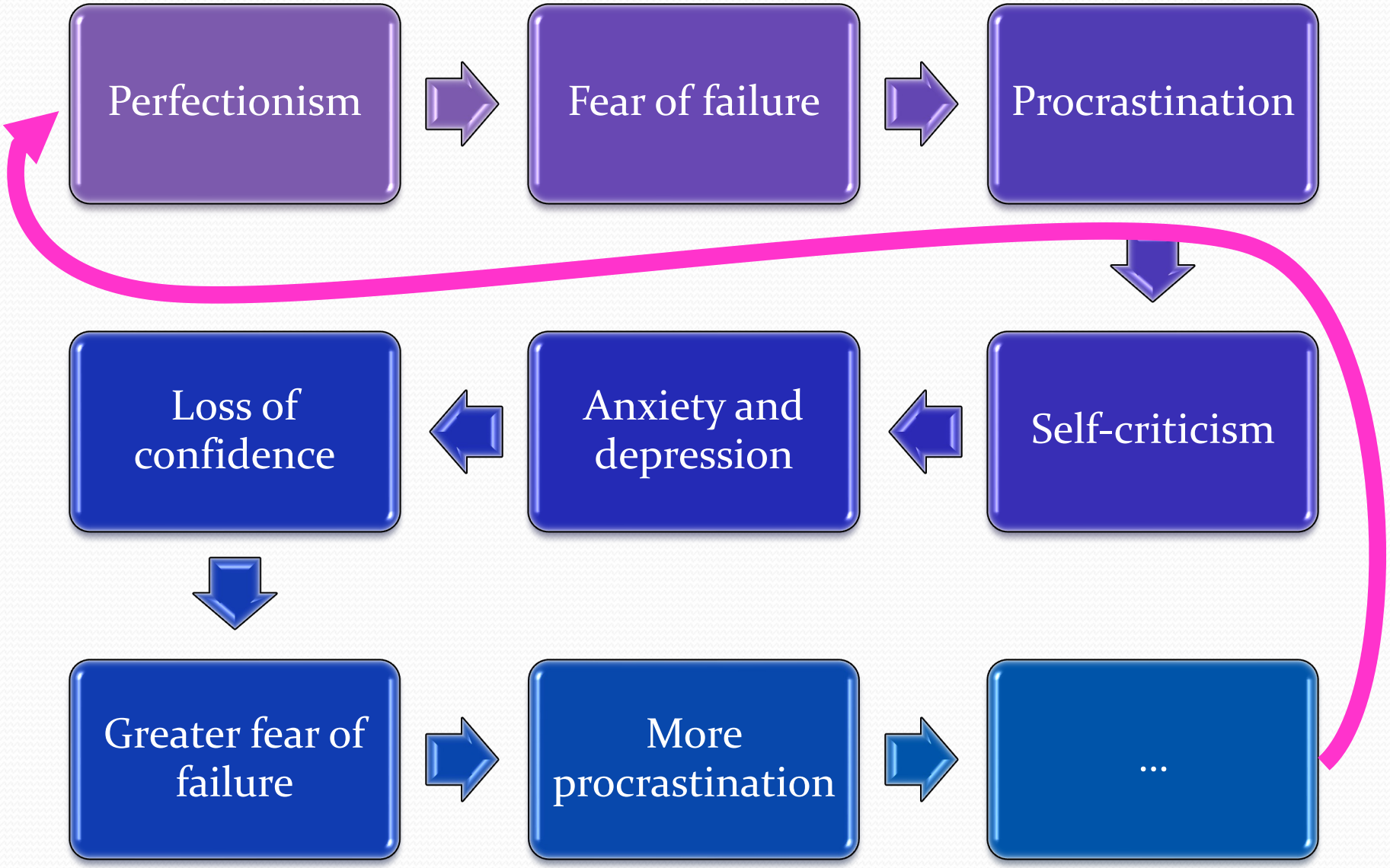


- Getting Thing Done
- David Allen

Why We Procrastinate

- Perfectionism
- Fear of …
  - Failure
  - Success
  - Conflict, and judgment
- Rewarding
  - Painful work
  - Work completed by someone else
  - Work becomes unnecessary
  - Difficult decisions will be made for you
  - Indirect way of resisting pressure from authorities

Procrastination Cycle



Walk a Board Metaphor

- Situation A
  - 30cm wide, 20m long, on the ground
  - OK to walk even run
- Situation B
  - Same as A, 100m high
  - Now it's scary! ☺
- Situation C
  - Same as B, building on fire
  - Now it's for real
    - Fear of failure goes away
    - Fear of imperfection goes away
    - Focus on solution not worry



Procrastinator's Pattern

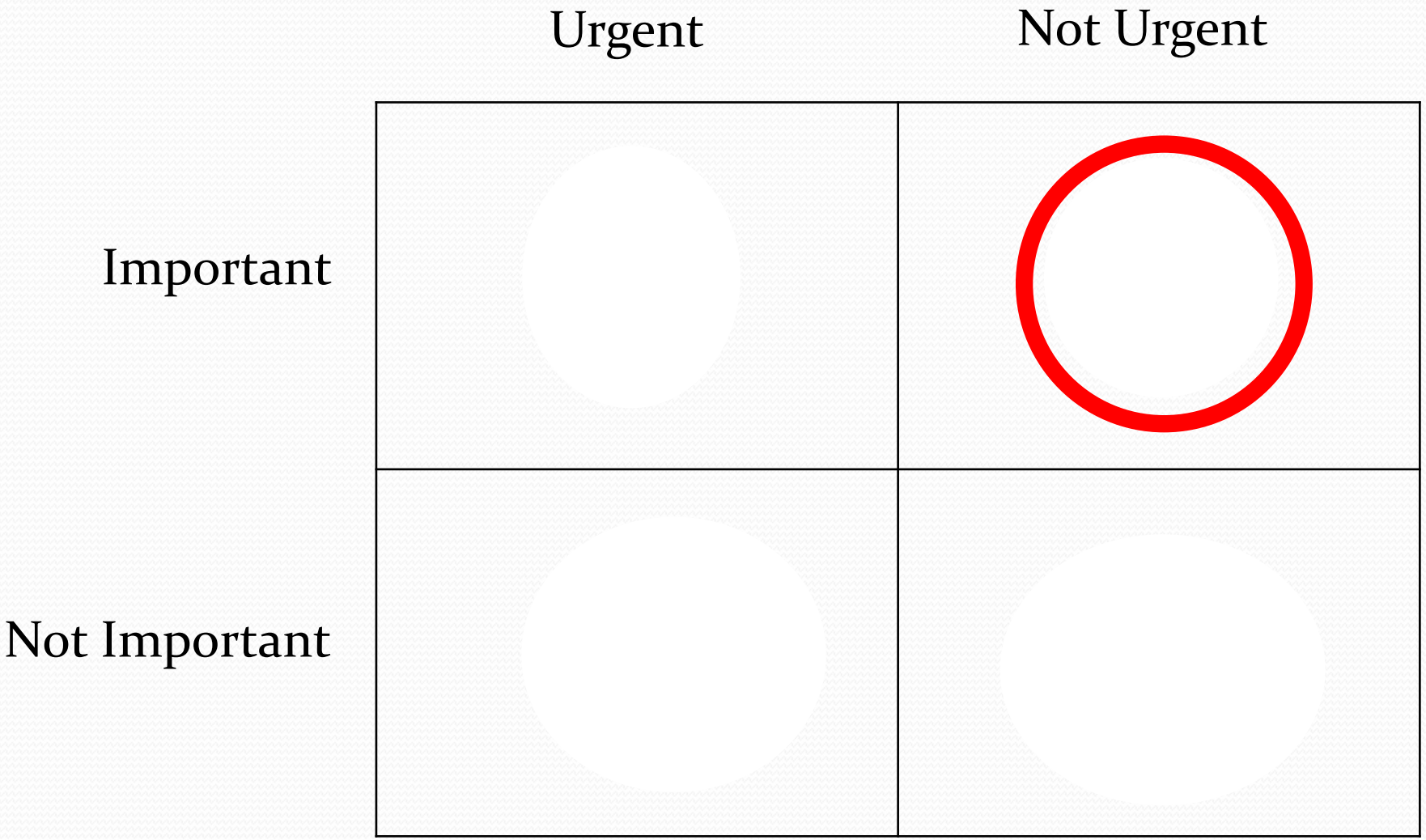
- Raise the board
  - Perfectionism
- Get frozen
  - Fear of failure, …
- Set building on fire
  - Increase urgency/threat bigger than fear of failure
- Move!

Breaking the Pattern

- Situation D
  - Same as B, no fire, *support net*
  - Can be OK with a bit of practice

- Support net
  - It's OK to be imperfect
  - It's OK to fail
    - You can always recover
  - Sense of worth

Quadrant II Time Management



Examples

	Urgent	Not Urgent

Important	I
	• Assignments, exams
	• Deadlines
	  • Paper submissions
	  • Course projects
	  • …
	• TAship
	• …
		II
		• Planning
		• Reading papers
		• Writing up your results
		• Attending talks, seminars, …
		• Physical exercise
		• Leisure
		• …

Not Important	III
	• Interruptions
	  • Phone ringing
	  • IMs, SMS
	  • Some e-mails
	• Some TV shows
	• Updating Facebook status!
	• …
		IV
		• Games
		• Web surfing
		• Browsing OSNs
		• Most TV shows
		• Some e-mails
		• …

Results

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	• Stress • Sleep problems • Health problems • Burnout • Out of control I	• Vision • Perspective • Balance • Control II
Not Important	• Out of control • Short-term focus • Feeling victimized III	• Dependence • Irresponsibility • Loss of focus • Lack of motivation IV

Top-down vs. Bottom-up Approaches

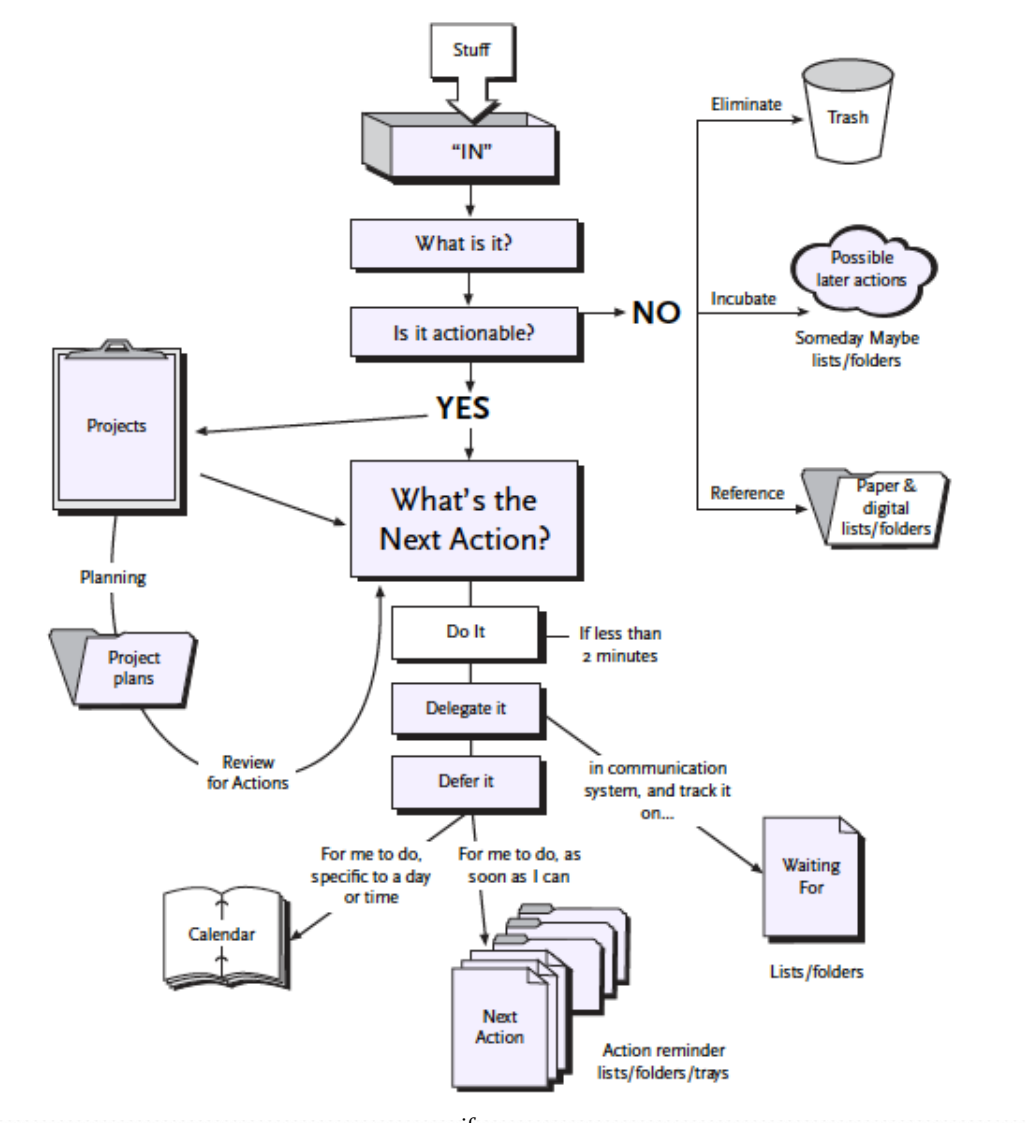
- Quadrant II time management
  - Top-down
  - Identify priorities
  - Set goals, plan according to what matters

- GTD
  - Bottom-up
  - Cope with high load by creating a workflow
  - Remove the need to remember, relieve stress
  - Planning and priorities happen during reviews

Getting Things Done – Surviving High Work Load

- Task or action item
  - Something that can be done in one step
- Project
  - A collection of action items with a specific goal
- Next action item
  - An action of a project that you can immediately start working on
- Contexts
  - What you need to work on a task
  - Example: @Work, @Home, @Phone, …

GTD Workflow



www.omnifocus.com

Time Management Tools

- ASANA
  - Web-based
  - Supports groups and teams
- ClearContext
  - Microsoft outlook plugin
  - Nice integration of calendars, to-do lists, notes, projects, …
- GTDInbox
  - Firefox addon, manage everything in Gmail
  - Not as many features as some other applications
- OmniFocus
  - Mac application accompanied by nice iPad and iPhone apps
  - Great flexibility, steep learning curve
- Things
  - Mac application with iPad and iPhone apps
  - Very simple, beautiful interface
    - Free alternative: iGTD
- Remember the Milk
  - Web-based
  - Interact using Twitter, iPhone, Google Calendar, …
- And many more ….

The Trap

- Your goal is to get things done but you may …
  - spend a lot of time finding the right tool
  - spend a lot of time learning and getting used to the new tool
  - spend a lot of time moving your existing tasks, projects, … to the new tool
- But when it comes to actually doing, you might go back to old habits.
- Remember, these are just *tools* meant to help with *getting things done*.

Thank you!

How do you manage your time?